

**IMPERIAL GERMANY
(1871-1918): OTTO
VON BISMARCK'S
REALPOLITIK: FORCING
GERMAN UNIFICATION**



IMPERIAL GERMANY (1871-1918): OTTO VON BISMARCK'S REALPOLITIK: FORCING GERMAN UNIFICATION

Description

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain Otto von Bismarck's ideas behind "Realpolitik" as they related to unifying the German lands and how Prussia used wars with Denmark, Austria and France to finally achieve unification.

Subjects

World History, European History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Bismarck Memorial, Berlin
- Bismarck statues around Germany

Essential Questions

- Who was Otto von Bismarck?
- What was Bismarck's ideas behind "Realpolitik"?
- How did Bismarck and Prussia forge German unification through a series of 3 wars between 1864 and 1871?
- How did Bismarck deal with the Austrian Question in uniting Germany?
- How did Bismarck use France as a common enemy to finally unite the Germanic states into an empire?

Academic Summary

Whereas the German princes and the free cities have unanimously called upon us to renew and to assume, with the restoration of the German Empire, the German imperial office, which has been empty for more than sixty years; and Whereas adequate arrangements have been provided for this in the constitution of the German Confederation;

We, Wilhelm, by the grace of God King of Prussia, do herewith declare that we have considered it a duty to our common fatherland to answer the summons of the united German princes and cities and to accept the German imperial title. In consequence, we and our successors on the throne of Prussia will henceforth bear the imperial title in all our relations and in all the business of the German Empire, and we hope to God that the German nation will be granted the ability to fashion a propitious future for the fatherland under the symbol of its ancient glory. We assume the imperial title, conscious of the duty of protecting, with German loyalty, the rights of the Empire and of its members, of keeping the peace, and of protecting the independence of Germany, which depends in its turn upon the united strength of the people. We assume the title in the hope that the German people will be granted the ability to enjoy the reward of its ardent and self-sacrificing wars in lasting peace, within boundaries which afford the fatherland a security against renewed French aggression which has been lost for centuries. And may God grant that We and our successors on the imperial throne may at all times increase the wealth of the German Empire, not by military conquests, but by the blessings and the gifts of peace, in the realm of national prosperity, liberty, and morality. Wilhelm I, Kaiser und König.

The Imperial Proclamation from the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles, January 18, 1871

Not by speeches and votes of the majority, are the great questions of the time decided — that was the error of 1848 and 1849 — but by iron and blood.

Otto von Bismarck, Speech before the Prussian Diet, 30 Sep 1862

On 18 Jan 1871, after over one thousand years of political bickering and jostling, the Germanic states finally unified behind one flag. Led by the will of Prussia's "Iron Chancellor", Otto Von Bismarck, the German Reich accomplished in a less than a decade what had taken the rest of the major European powers hundreds of years: world notice. It was the fastest rise of a true world power in modern history. Bismarck today is probably best known around the world for the system of alliances he forged over the years trying desperately to isolate France after the Franco-Prussian War and thus giving Germany the security of not having to face a two-front war (a strategy that would eventually backfire after Bismarck's dismissal in 1890 and the subsequent alliance between France and Russia in 1894). The chancellor is also known for his domestic policies, particularly in expanding medical insurance and developing an old-age pension for the working proletariat of Germany, both very radical decisions in the late 19th century. Others know Bismarck for his "Blood and Iron" style of governing. Some opinions on Bismarck are based on subsequent events that happened long after

Bismarck was gone (namely, two world wars in the 20th century), but many people today fail to appreciate the chancellor's skill in maneuvering Prussia into a position of leadership in central Europe.

Rather than looking to justify the creation of a united Germany based on an ideological set of principles and grounded in emotional romantic nationalism as liberal bourgeois representatives had tried to do at the Frankfurt Parliament in 1848, Bismarck looked instead to realism and to the forces outside central Europe that could threaten Prussia. What he saw was nations on both sides, particularly Russia and France, which had in one way or another exerted pressure on the Germanic lands for hundreds of years, a pressure that would only get worse in light of industrialization and the invention of new weapons. The oldest empire in Europe, the Hapsburg lands in Austria, was by the middle of the 19th century a land seething with internal issues and was teetering on the verge of collapse. The kingdom of Italy in Southern Europe had recently united for the first time since the Roman Empire's collapse (with the exception of Rome which was still in the hands of the Pope) and thus could potentially begin to exert pressure on Germania from across the Alps. These assessments led him to believe that in order to survive, a newly united Germany under Prussian leadership would have to become strong enough to meet these forces head on. Using Prussian militarism, Bismarck was determined to achieve a new balance of power on the continent with Germany as the power player. Perhaps ironically, the Iron Chancellor needed a series of three wars to achieve his goals, but in the end, unification in Germany ultimately led to a period of unparalleled peace across the continent that would last forty years. Understanding this process of unification is critical to understanding the last few decades of the 19th century.

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain Otto von Bismarck's ideas behind "Realpolitik" as they related to unifying the German lands and how Prussia used wars with Denmark, Austria and France to finally achieve unification.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how Otto von Bismarck used the concept of "Realpolitik" to achieve German unification.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the details of how Bismarck achieved German unification through a series of three wars with Denmark, Austria and France.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how Bismarck ultimately achieved peace in Europe by 1871, and why that peace would ultimately last over four decades.
4. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how achieving unification at the expense of France ultimately led to the Great War.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: How do we define nationalism? Should every nation of people be able to establish its own nation-state? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Brief overview of German Unification under Bismarck. (20 min)
- Video – German Unification (30 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the primary sources and articles on German Unification under Otto von Bismarck, taking notes as appropriate. (15 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles for homework to prepare for class discussion.
- Group Activity – Discussion – How did Otto von Bismarck use his ideas behind “Realpolitik” in unifying the German lands behind Prussian leadership through a series of wars with Denmark, Austria and France? (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail how Otto von Bismarck used his ideas behind “Realpolitik” in unifying the German lands behind Prussian leadership through a series of wars with Denmark, Austria and France.

Extension

On tour: Bismarck monument in Berlin

While on tour, students in Berlin can visit the Tiergarten, where they can see sights such as the Brandenburg Gate and Potsdamer Platz. The park also contains the Bismarck Memorial, a prominent statue to the Iron Chancellor and architect of modern Germany. The statue was originally located in front of the Reichstag before the Second World War, but was moved in 1938 under Hitler’s project to recast Berlin as “Welthauptstadt Germania” (World Capital Germany). Ironically, moving the memorial to its present location probably saved it, as its former home was completely destroyed during the war. Students looking closely, however, can see some damage from shrapnel caused by Allied bombing and Soviet Red Army shelling of the city.

On tour: Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles

While on tour, students at the Palace of Versailles will visit the Hall of Mirrors, where they can see for themselves the room where, on 18 Jan 1871, the German Empire was officially declared into existence by Kaiser William I at the end of the Franco-Prussian War. The French, who had just lost the war to the newly united Germany, saw the declaration at Versailles as a symbolic insult, one they would not forget. Decades later, after Germany lost the Great War, French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau specifically chose the Hall of Mirrors for the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 Jun 1919.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/kla/pshe/references-and-resources/history/making_of_modern_world_source10_eng.pdf
Blood and Iron Speech (primary source) – PDF file of Bismarck’s famous speech on German Unification. Also has student questions for in-class writing / discussion.
- www.age-of-the-sage.org/history/german_unification.html
The Wars of German Unification (website)
- www.colby.edu/personal/r/rmscheck/GermanyA3.html
The Road to National Unification (website) – from Raffael Scheck, Professor of History at Colby College (ME)
- services.online.missouri.edu/exec/data/courses/2309/public/lesson01/lesson01.aspx
Lesson 1: the 1848 Revolution, the Second Reich and the First World War (website) – from the University of Missouri
- www.armoredpenguin.com/crossword/Data/best/german/unification.01.html
German Unification (worksheet) – Crossword puzzle on German Unification. Especially helpful for younger kids, but good for all students – highly recommended.
- ibatpv.org/projects/germany/2ndreich/unification.germany.htm
Describe how Germany was united from 1862 to 1871 (web article) – from Brent Silva, IB history teacher at Pleasant Valley High School in Chico, CA
- www.whsad.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/unification-of-germany-worksheet.pdf
Unification of Germany Worksheet – outstanding worksheet on German unification from Williamsburg High School for Architecture and Design in Brooklyn, NY. Highly recommended for all teachers and students.
- apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/courses/teachers_corner/29356.html#name4
German Unification (website) – from AP Central at the College Board. Great site for AP European History teachers and students – designed specifically for teachers in a classroom setting.
- teacherweb.ftl.pinecrest.edu/snyderd/mwh/Webquests/7-PreWWI/7-GrUn.htm
German Unification: The Age of Bismarck (website) – from Daniel Snyder, History / Geography teacher at Pine Crest School (FL)
- www.historyhome.co.uk/europe/unific.htm
The Unification of Germany 1864-1871 (website)
- www.historyteacher.net/APEuroCourse/DocPackets/Doc_Pkt-Ger_Unification.pdf
German Nationalism and Unification – Document Packet. DBQ packet from Susan Pojer, AP history teacher at Horace Greeley High School in Chappaqua, NY.
- www.uncp.edu/home/rwb/Ems%20Telegram.htm
The Ems Telegram (website) – from the Department of History at the University

of North Carolina at Pembroke

- history.state.gov/countries/issues/german-unification
Unification of German States (website) – from the US Department of State Office of the Historian
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video) – great 2 minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.
- www.pptpalooza.net/PPTs/EHAP/Mid-19cEuropeanNationalism.ppt
Mid-19th century Nationalism (PowerPoint) – from Susan Pojer, AP history teacher at Horace Greeley High School in Chappaqua, NY. Outstanding PowerPoint that covers many subjects, including German and Italian unification. Great images and maps – highly recommended for teachers and students.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXT6q9K0m_I
German Unification (video) – lecture (30 min) using maps and images by Dr. Michael Brooks, Department of History graduate coordinator at Bowling Green State University (OH)
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtrLAflXwsc&list=PLFE3E669E58EEDC9D
German Unification (video)

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_von_Bismarck
Otto von Bismarck – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unification_of_Germany
Unification of Germany – Wikipedia article
- passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/germany/country_profile
On the Road: Germany (country profile) – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/frankfurt-parliament-of-1848
Frankfurt Parliament of 1848-49
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/german-unification-under-bismarck
German Unification in 1871
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/bismarck-berlin-conference-1884
Imperial Germany (1871-1918) – Otto von Bismarck: Berlin Conference of 1884
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/bismarck-paternalistic-state-socialism
Imperial Germany (1871-1918) – Otto von Bismarck: Paternalistic State Socialism

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/bismarck-triple-alliance
Imperial Germany (1871-1918) – Otto von Bismarck: Triple Alliance
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/great-war-schlieffen-plan
Great War (1914-1918) – Germany: Schlieffen Plan
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/prisoner-of-the-vatican-pius-xi-and-the-roman-question
Prisoner of the Vatican: Pius XI and the Roman Question 1870

Key Terms

- German Unification
- Nationalism
- Otto von Bismarck
- Realpolitik
- William I

