

Analyzing Documents of German Unification, 1848–1871

Source: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/germanunification.html>

Directions: This collection of documents tells the story of the transition in Germany from revolutionary upheavals (1848) to political unification (1871). Read the following primary source documents and then answer the questions that follow:

Modern History Sourcebook: Documents of German Unification, 1848-1871

- Johann Gustav Droysen: [Speech to the Frankfurt Assembly](#), 1848
 - Friedrich Wilhelm IV, King of Prussia: [Proclamation of 1849](#)
 - Otto von Bismarck: [Letter to Minister von Manteuffel](#), 1856
 - Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke: [1866](#)
 - Otto von Bismarck: [1866](#)
 - [The Imperial Proclamation](#), January 18, 1871
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Johann Gustav Droysen: *Speech to the Frankfurt Assembly, 1848*

We cannot conceal the fact that the whole German question is a simple alternative between Prussia and Austria. In these states German life has its positive and negative poles--in the former, all the interests which are national and reformative, in the latter, all that are dynastic and destructive. The German question is not a constitutional question, but a question of power; and the Prussian monarchy is now wholly German, while that of Austria cannot be. . . . We need a powerful ruling house. Austria's power meant lack of power for us, whereas Prussia desired German unity in order to supply the deficiencies of her own power. Already Prussia is Germany in embryo. She will "merge" with Germany. . .

Friedrich Wilhelm IV, King of Prussia: Proclamation of 1849

I am not able to return a favorable reply to the offer of a crown on the part of the German National Assembly [meeting in Frankfurt], because the Assembly has not the right, without the consent of the German governments, to bestow the crown which they tendered me, and moreover because they offered the crown upon condition that I would accept a constitution which could not be reconciled with the rights of the German states.

Otto von Bismarck: *Letter to Minister von Manteuffel, 1856*

Because of the policy of Vienna [the Congress of Vienna, 1815], Germany is clearly too small for us both [Prussia and Austria]; as long as an honorable arrangement concerning the influence of each in Germany cannot be concluded and carried out, we will both plough the same disputed acre, and Austria will remain the only state to whom we can permanently lose or from whom we can permanently gain. . . . I wish only

to express my conviction that, in the not too distant future, we shall have to fight for our existence against Austria and that it is not within our power to avoid that, since the course of events in Germany has no other solution.

Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke: 1866

The war of 1866 [between Prussia and Austria] was entered on not because the existence of Prussia was threatened, nor was it caused by public opinion and the voice of the people; it was a struggle, long foreseen and calmly prepared for, recognized as a necessity by the Cabinet, not for territorial aggrandizement, for an extension of our domain, or for material advantage, but for an ideal end--the establishment of power. Not a foot of land was exacted from Austria, but she had to renounce all part in the hegemony of Germany. . . Austria had exhausted her strength in conquests south of the Alps, and left the western German provinces unprotected, instead of following the road pointed out by the Danube. Its center of gravity lay out of Germany; Prussia's lay within it. Prussia felt itself called upon and strong enough to assume the leadership of the German races.

Otto von Bismarck: 1866

We had to avoid wounding Austria too severely; we had to avoid leaving behind in her any unnecessary bitterness of feeling or desire for revenge; we ought rather to reserve the possibility of becoming friends again with our adversary of the moment, and in any case to regard the Austrian state as a piece on the European chessboard. If Austria were severely injured, she would become the ally of France and of every other opponent of ours; she would even sacrifice her anti-Russian interests for the sake of revenge on Prussia. . . .The acquisition of provinces like Austria Silesia and portions of Bohemia could not strengthen the Prussian state; it would not lead to an amalgamation of German Austria with Prussia, and Vienna could not be governed from Berlin as a mere dependency. . . .Austria's conflict and rivalry with us was no more culpable than ours with her; our task was the establishment or foundation of German national unity under the leadership of the King of Prussia.

The Imperial Proclamation, January 18, 1871

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.

Source:

From: James Harvey Robinson, ed., *Readings in European History*, 2 Vols., (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1904-1905), II:571-575; Otto von Bismarck, *The Man and Statesman*, (New York, 1899), II:48-51

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Answer the following Questions:

1. Read the first document, "Speech to the Frankfurt Assembly," in which Johann Gustav Droysen contrasts Prussia and Austria. What positive remarks does the author make about Prussia?

2. What negative remarks does the author make about Austria?

3. Read the next document, the proclamation of Friedrich Wilhelm IV, King of Prussia. What two reasons did Friedrich Wilhelm give for rejecting the crown of the national assembly in Frankfurt?

4. Read the next document, Bismarck's "Letter to Minister von Manteuffel." What developments did Bismarck anticipate in the relationship between Austria and Germany?

5. Read the next document from Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke. "Hegemony" means dominance. What happened in 1866? What did Germany win?

6. Read the next document from Otto von Bismarck. Why did Germany avoid "wounding Austria too severely"?

7. Read "The Imperial Proclamation, January 18, 1871." Who called for King Wilhelm to assume the crown of Emperor? What "adequate arrangements" were made that enabled King Wilhelm to accept the title?

8. What were two "duties" King Wilhelm accepted in this proclamation? What hope did he express?