**Building a German Nation:**

**Otto von Bismarck Unifies Germany**

In the early 1800s, German-speaking people lived in a number of small states in the territories of Prussia and Austria. Between 1807 and 1812, Napoleon made important changes in these lands. At first, some Germans welcomed the emperor as a hero with enlightened, modern policies. However, others disliked Napoleon’s control. They fought to free their lands from French rule and demanded a unified German state.

Otto von Bismarck was appointed chancellor by King William I in 1862, within a decade Bismarck would unite the German states under Prussian rule. He was able to do this with an aggressive foreign policy, helping Germany developing economically, and implementing successful domestic policies. First, he implemented Realpolitik, realistic policies based on the needs of the state. Bismarck thought power was more important than principles.

Bismarck strengthened the army of Prussia. In ten years, he would fight three aggressive wars. The first wars were with Denmark and Austria. He beat Denmark and Austria, gaining territory for Prussia.

The second war was with France. The Franco-Prussian War began in 1870. Bismarck reminded the German people of Napoleon’s invasion to gain support for the war. The superior German and Prussian troops smashed the badly organized and poorly supplied French troops.

Next, Bismarck helped Germany develop economically. Luckily, Germany possessed several of the factors that made industrialization possible. They had a large amount of iron and coal resources; a disciplined and educated workforce; and an organized banking system. Bismarck had reorganized the banking system and issued a single currency for Germany. The leaders of the new German empire were determined to maintain economic and military strength.

Finally, he focused on domestic reforms. After unification, Catholics made up about a third of the German population. The Lutheran Bismarck distrusted Catholics. He launched *Kulturkampf*, “the battle for civilization”. He wanted to make Catholics loyal to the state. Laws closed some religious orders and the state could supervise education. This will backfire and he will make peace with the Catholics.

Bismarck also reorganized the government. He drafted a constitution and set up a two-house legislature. The ruler of Germany appointed the upper house, and males who could vote elected the lower house.

Bismarck also improved workers’ conditions. He set up health and accident insurance and old-age pensions. Later, other European nations would build on Bismarck’s social policies.

In 1888, William II succeeded his grandfather as Kaiser. He wanted to control Germany on his own. He asked Bismarck to resign, shocking many. William II believed his powers came from God; resisted democratic reforms; and expanded the navy to win an overseas empire. His actions will increase tensions in WWI.