

European history of the 19th century: napoleon iii and bismarck essay sample



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“ Napoleon’s tragedy was that his ambitions surpassed his capacities; Bismarck’s tragedy was that his capacities exceeded his society’s ability to absorb them. The legacy Napoleon left for France was strategic paralysis; the legacy the Bismarck left for Germany was unassimilable greatness”(statement made by Henry Kissinger) is in my opinion a correct statement. This statement can actually be separated into two parts. The first parts relates with the capacities, ambitions and successes of Bismarck and Napoleon. The second part is about the final result of their reign and how their reigns could be taken over after such changing of Europe.

Bismarck main objective was to bring together the German states and to form a powerful great German State; this is why he became the main architect in the German unification. To succeed in this difficult task he used Realpolitik. He was as incredible in dealing with foreign affaires as with domestic affaires. The success of the unification was tremendous but it resulted in a very complex state that future generation had difficulties to deal with. Napoleon was brilliant in domestic affaires, but he preferred to deal with foreign affaires, which he actually wasn’t able to arrange well. “ The irony in Napoleon’s life was that he was much better suited for domestic policy, which basically bored him, than he was for foreign adventures, for which he lacked both the daring and the insight”(P. 106 Kissinger). The way he handled foreign affairs brought France into a deep crisis. He finally stopped to reign and France couldn’t cope with such problems he had established.

Napoleon was an excellent leader for domestic affaires in France. He, as the nephew of the Great Napoleon, was persuaded that France should be ruled

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by an authoritarian ruler with most of the power in his hand and supported by the population with a strong national devotion. He believed that the ruler should rule in favour of the people equally without any relation to their economic status. He developed the efficiency and income of France's economy by encouraging new investment banks and focusing on the expansion of the railroad. He rebuilds the old Paris by replacing little narrow streets with large avenues and building parks and public and social buildings. This had two main purposes, first to make Paris a more modern city that could satisfy his people to life and to get social cares.

These replacements of the old little narrow streets by large avenues made revolts and rebellions more difficult. Before that blocking a street or a block of houses was very easy, large avenues are more difficult to block and easier to clear. Napoleon restored universal male suffrage, and illegally dismissed the National Assembly. With all those positive changes Napoleon gained astonishing support from the French population that were expressed on several occasions: " 92 percent voted for to make him president for ten years. A year later, 97 percent in a plebiscite made him hereditary emperor; for the third time and by the greatest margin yet, authoritarian Louis Napoleon was overwhelmingly elected to lead the French nation."(P. 824 McKay).

Napoleon preferred to deal with foreign affaires than with domestic affaires. Foreign affaires weren't his cup of tea. He was obsessed by details, for example " Napoleon's next big worry [after being recognized Emperor] was whether the other monarchs would address him the appellation ' brother'" (P106 Kissinger). This really shows the level of worries Napoleon had.
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Napoleon had a very mercurial nature and didn't know or prepare concretely what he wanted: "What most suited Napoleon's style was a European Congress to redraw the map of Europe, for there he might shine at minimum risk. Nor did Napoleon have any clear idea of just how he wanted the borders altered." (P. 108 Kissinger). "He possessed his uncle's ambition but not his nerve, genius..., raw power." (P. 107 Kissinger).

This really expresses the position in which Napoleon had settled himself, he wanted to do too much things at the same time and wasn't capable of doing it. Napoleon couldn't foresee events correctly. He wanted to create division in Europe, therefore he created crisis here and there, but couldn't control the outcomes afterwards! "Time and again, he would encourage a crisis - now in Italy, now in Poland, later in Germany - only to recoil before its ultimate consequence" (P. 107 Kissinger) or "Napoleon made himself the prisoner of crisis he had himself engineered" (P. 107 Kissinger). Those crises would finally result in Italy and Germany as Unification and new difficulties for Napoleon to cope with. His foreign affairs always came out to be failures and to finally work against him.

Napoleon destroyed by many ways all the other alliances that were made between France and other great powers, by supporting conflicts that wouldn't even benefit France. He supported the Italians in the war against Austria, this laid to Italian Unification which made one more power to deal with afterwards. He finally "concluded an armistice with Austria ... without informing his Piedmontese allies" (P. 111 Kissinger), creating hatred among the Italians towards his country. Austria was considered by Napoleon as "repugnant", therefore he wouldn't try to collaborate with them: "As a <https://assignbuster.com/european-history-of-the-19th-century-napoleon-iii-and-bismarck-essay-sample/>

Bonaparte, [Napoleon 3] never felt comfortable cooperating with Austria, whatever *raison d'état* might dictate" (P. 110 Kissinger). Napoleon lost the sympathy of Great Britain by annexing territory and by being repeatedly annoying. " Napoleon alienated Great Britain by annexing Savoy and Nice... as well as by his repeated proposals for a European Congress" (P. 110 Kissinger). He promoted the Polish revolutions, what made him lose the support of Russia.

" Napoleon sacrificed his option of allying France with Russia by supporting the Polish Revolution in 1863" (P. 110 Kissinger). Napoleon tried to weaken Germany and promote France, but the result was contrary: Germany was strengthened; France was weakened and had no more allies to count on. This finally led to the Franco-Prussian War. This war will make the French people realise the severe isolation in which Napoleon III placed them, the change in major powers in Europe. This war also symbolises the downfall of Napoleon III and the beginning of a new constitution, the 3rd Republic!

Napoleon III was maybe a great leader for France until he started to deal with foreign affairs. He ruined France with his lack of capability of dealing with foreign affairs. His actions completely isolated France politically. He tried to enlarge France, to support Nationalist revolts, to promote France in some states, to help other in wars that were unrelated to France, to divide Europe and to be the most powerful state in Europe. Napoleon was clearly too ambitious and because he tried to do all of those things at the same time, none of them resulted in successes. In contrary, He weakened France, Unified Germany and Italy, made Germany the most powerful state in Europe and lost his allies. These made the isolation of France especially after the <https://assignbuster.com/european-history-of-the-19th-century-napoleon-iii-and-bismarck-essay-sample/>

Franco-Prussian war become an extremely difficult task for Napoleon III's successors on both, foreign and domestic affairs.

Bismarck was an excellent visionary. He was very successful in domestic as in foreign affairs. He was feeling strongly that Germany led by Prussia would become a great country. To be able to create a German State, he had to promote Prussia in Europe. Prussia had to become one of the most powerful powers in Europe. To achieve this he applied his principles of Realpolitik. Realpolitik is "the ability to exploit every available option without the constraint of ideology". Bismarck was strong and wise enough to lead Prussia through three wars with success. Those wars were very important in Bismarck strategy of building this German State, alliances were created, modified and destroyed in a way that would promote Bismarck's objectives. On the other hand Bismarck did a lot of positive changes in domestic policies, which made him really popular in his state.

Bismarck took office in 1862 as chief minister. "His speeches were a sensation of scandal" (P. 831 McKay). He wanted to make Prussia a great state by "blood and iron". Therefore he started on collecting without approval of the parliament from 1862 to 1866. He reorganized the army. In 1864 Bismarck formed an alliance with Austria and went on war with the Danes to conquest over Schleswig-Holstein. "Bismarck was convinced that Prussia had to control completely the northern, predominant Protestant part of the German Confederation, which meant expelling Austria from German Affairs" (P. 831 McKay). To take control over northern Germany and eject Austria from the German affairs he had to go on war with Austria. However, Bismarck thought that a war with Austria would first have to be accepted by <https://assignbuster.com/european-history-of-the-19th-century-napoleon-iii-and-bismarck-essay-sample/>

the other powers of Europe; Bismarck had to create some alliance to assure that those countries wouldn't go on war against him.

Russia was not a problem because they had already gained Alexander II's sympathy by supporting Russian repression on the Polish uprising in 1863. Gain Napoleon II gratitude was an easy task for Bismarck. Bismarck vaguely promised Napoleon II some territories along the Rhine like Belgium and Luxemburg. Having gained the European powers appreciation Bismarck seized the first occasion to go on war with Austria. When Austria refused to give up its historic role in German affairs, Bismarck declared war. Utilizing his well organized army and the new equipments they had, like machine guns and railroads, Bismarck had no difficulty of gaining land and the Austro-Prussian war of 1866 finished after seven weeks in Prussian overwhelming victory. In 1867 the alliance that Bismarck had formed with southern German states wouldn't go further in unification, because those states were, in the leaders views, too different in " religious and political traditions"(P. 832 McKay). Bismarck thought that bringing all the German states together in a war would unify them.

Bismarck declared war on France in 1870 and as he had foreseen he had the " wholehearted support of the south German states". With the other governments standing still Bismarck defeated the main French army at Sedan on September 1, 1870. " Louis Napoleon himself was captured and humiliate" and " Three days later, French patriots in Paris proclaimed yet another Republic" (P. 834 McKay). The result of those three wars was that the weakest of the Great Powers of 1862, Prussia with the other German states, had become the most powerful and respected state in Europe in less
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than a decade. This was the work of Bismarck, therefore he was admired by all the other German states and it was easy for him now to convince them to Unify.

Bismarck was also a master in domestic affairs and he managed to rise up the quality of living of his citizens. " He was also the first leader to introduce universal male suffrage to Europe along with the most comprehensive system of social welfare the world would see for sixty years"(P. 121 Kissinger). As said above Bismarck introduced universal male suffrage, but he also created common currency, a central bank and a single code of commercial and civil law for Germany. Bismarck also developed a worker insurance that would protect them against sickness, old age and accidents.

Bismarck was a fantastic ruler for Prussia and Germany on foreign policies as well as on domestic policies. He succeeded to unify the German states, to make Germany become the strongest power in Europe in 10 years time. His skills in foreign affairs created an atmosphere of peace in Europe for 20 years. Bismarck also made a lot of social changes in his country, especially on the status of workers. On the other hand he created a very complex form of relation between the countries that no successors were able to deal with. His successors could not catch with his brilliance and genius. They emphasised on the need to strengthen the army with no valid reason. His successors forgot that every action Bismarck undertook was first deeply analysed, later the field had to be prepared before coming into action (like getting the gratitude of the European powers before attacking Austria).

Both Napoleon III and Bismarck did not agree with the Vienna settlement in their ways. Both of them were aspiring to be the overwhelming power in Europe. The characteristics that differ into those two characters are their sense of foreseeing the future and preparing tactics of progressing in their goals. Because Napoleon didn't succeed in foreseeing his country didn't progress but moved back. Bismarck could foresee very well, but the result of the progress of his country, mainly because of his way of dealing with Realpolitik, was so ambiguous that no-one but himself could carry on his job.

Therefore I think that the statement made by Henry Kissinger is right and accurate.

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