

The Unification of Italy

While nationalism destroyed empires, it also built nations. Italy was one of the countries to form from the territories of the crumbling empires. After the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Austria ruled the Italian provinces of Venetia and Lombardy in the north, and several small states. In the south, the Spanish Bourbon family ruled the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

Nevertheless, between 1815 and 1848, increasing numbers of Italians were no longer content to live under foreign rulers. Amid growing discontent, two leaders appeared—one was idealistic, the other practical. They had different personalities and pursued different goals. But each contributed to the Unification of Italy.

The Movement for Unity Begins

In 1832, an idealistic 26-year-old Italian named Giuseppe Mazzini organized a nationalist group called, Young Italy. Similarly, youth were the leaders and custodians of the nineteenth century nationalist movements. The Napoleonic Wars were led principally by younger men. Napoleon was 35 years of age when crowned Emperor. As nationalism spread across Europe the pattern continued. People over 40 were excluded from Mazzini's organization.

During the violent year of 1848, revolts broke out in eight states on the Italian Peninsula. Mazzini briefly headed a republican government in Rome. He believed that nation-states were the best hope for social justice, democracy, and peace in Europe. However, the 1848 rebellions failed in Italy as they did elsewhere in Europe. The foreign rulers of the Italian states drove Mazzini and other nationalist leaders into exile.

Sardinia Leads Italian Unification

After 1848, Italian nationalists looked to the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia for leadership. Piedmont-Sardinia was the largest and most powerful of the Italian states. The kingdom had also adopted a liberal constitution in 1848. So, to the Italian middle classes, unification under Piedmont-Sardinia seemed a sensible alternative to Mazzini's democratic idealism.

In 1852, Sardinia's King Victor Emanuel II named Camillo di Cavour as prime minister. Cavour was a wealthy, middle-aged aristocrat, who worked tirelessly to expand Piedmont-Sardinia's power. With careful diplomacy and well-chosen alliances, he achieved that expansion. Almost as a coincidence, he also achieved the unification of Italy. Mazzini distrusted Cavour. He believed correctly that Cavour wanted to strengthen Sardinia's power, not unite Italy.

At first, Cavour's major goal was to get control of northern Italy for Sardinia. He carefully went about achieving this territorial goal through diplomacy and cunning. Cavour realized that the greatest roadblock to annexing northern Italy was Austria. To help him expel the Austrians from the north, Cavour found an ally in France. In 1858, the French emperor Napoleon III agreed to help drive Austria out of Northern provinces of Lombardy and Venetia. Cavour soon after provoked a war with Austria. A combined French-Sardinian army won two quick victories against Austria. Sardinia succeeded in taking over all of northern Italy from Austria except for Venetia. In 1860 Cavour and Sardinia also annexed other parts of Italy namely, Parma, Modena, Tuscany, and Romagna.

As Cavour was uniting the north of Italy, he began to consider the possibility of controlling the south. He secretly started helping nationalist rebels in southern Italy. In May 1860, a small army of Italian nationalists led by a bold and romantic soldier, Giuseppe Garibaldi. Garibaldi and 1,000 soldiers captured Sicily and the city of Naples. In battle, Garibaldi always wore a bright red shirt, as did his followers. As a result, they became known as the Red Shirts.

After a big battle on the Volturno River, he held plebiscites in Sicily and Naples, and then gave the whole of southern Italy to Cavour, proclaiming Victor Emmanuel II as king of a united nation. He returned to the island of Capraera, which then remained his permanent home.

Challenges After Unification

In 1866, the Austrian province of Venetia, which included the city of Venice, was taken in the Seven Weeks War making Venetia part of Italy. In 1870, Italian forces took over the last part of territory known as the Papal States. The Roman Catholic popes had governed the territory as both its spiritual and earthly rulers. With this victory, the City of Rome came under Italian control. Soon after, Rome became the capital of the United Kingdom of Italy. The pope, however, would continue to govern a section of Rome known as Vatican City.

Despite unification, Italy suffered from many unsolved problems. Centuries of separation had bred fierce rivalries among the different Italian provinces. The greatest tension arose between the industrialized north and the agricultural south. The people of these two regions had very different ways of life, and they scarcely understood each other's versions of the Italian language. In the Italian parliament, disorganized parties with vague policies constantly squabbled. As a result, prime ministers and cabinets changed frequently.

In addition to its political instability, Italy also faced economic problems. Bloody peasant revolts broke out in the south. At the same time, strikes and riots troubled the northern cities. Meanwhile the Italian government could not deal with the country's economic problems. As a result, Italy entered the twentieth century as a poor country.

Directions: Fill in the graphic organizer discussing the facts about the unification of Italy.

Leader or Event	Achievements or Significance
Giuseppe Mazzini	
Count Camillo Cavour	
Giuseppe Garibaldi	
Victor Emanuel II	
Further Expansion	
List the problems Italy faced after unification	

Documents of Italian Unification, 1846-61

The Program of Count Cavour, 1846:

The history of every age proves that no people can attain a high degree of intelligence and morality unless its feeling of nationality is strongly developed. This noteworthy fact is an inevitable consequence of the laws that rule human nature. . . . Therefore, if we so ardently desire the emancipation of Italy--if we declare that in the face of this great question all the petty questions that divide us must be silenced--it is not only that we may see our country glorious and powerful but that above all we may elevate her in intelligence and moral development up to the plane of the most civilized nations. . . . This union we preach with such ardor is not so difficult to obtain as one might suppose if one judged only by exterior appearances or if one were preoccupied with our unhappy divisions. Nationalism has become general; it grows daily; and it has already grown strong enough to keep all parts of Italy united despite the differences that distinguish them.

Report of the meeting of Count Cavour with Emperor Napoleon III of France, 1858:

The Emperor started by saying that he had decided to support Sardinia with all his forces in a war against Austria, provided that the war was undertaken for a non-revolutionary cause, which could be justified in the eyes of diplomacy and still more of public opinion in France and Europe.

Speech of Victor Emmanuel I, King of Italy, 1861:

Free, and nearly entirely united, the opinion of civilized nations is favorable to us; the just and liberal principles, now prevailing in the councils of Europe, are favorable to us. Italy herself, too, will become a guarantee of order and peace, and will once more be an efficacious instrument of universal civilization. . . . These facts have inspired the nation with great confidence in its own destinies. I take pleasure in manifesting to the first Parliament of Italy the joy I feel in my heart as king and soldier.

From: D. Zanichelli, ed., *The Writings of Count Cavour* (Bologna, 1892), II:4-50; *The Annual Register or a View of the History and Politics of the Year 1858* (London, 1859), pp. 186-188; Count C. Arrivabene, *Italy under Victor Emmanuel* (London, 1862), I:349-353.

1. In the Program of Cavour, find TWO statements that are nationalistic?
2. What would it take for France to support Sardinia?
3. What does Victor Emmanuel guarantee for Italy in the future?