

Unit 7: 19th-Century Perspectives and Political Developments

Unit 7 covers the ideas that reshaped Europe in the 1800s and the power politics that followed. It covers nationalism and the Dual Monarchy, the unifications of Italy and Germany, Darwinism and Social Darwinism, the new science and psychology of the Age of Progress, the New Imperialism and its global effects, and the art movements of Realism and Impressionism.

AP European History

19th-Century Perspectives

About 12 minutes to read

How to use this guide

Read it in order the first time because the topics build on each other. Nationalism explains the unifications, the unifications explain the alliance system, and the new science and imperialism explain how Europeans saw themselves and the world. Exam questions often ask you to connect an idea to its political consequence, so watch for those links.

After the first read, use the trap boxes and the comparison table to review the distinctions that exam questions test most often. Finish with the practice questions, then complete the recall check on the last page out loud and note any items you cannot explain yet.

What this unit is worth. The 19th century replaced the old order with new ones built on nationality, science, and empire. Nationalism redrew the map through Italian and German unification. Darwinism challenged traditional views of human origins while Social Darwinism twisted evolution into a justification for inequality. New science and psychology questioned old certainties, and European powers seized colonies across Africa and Asia. This unit asks how these forces fit together, not just what each term means.

7.2 Nationalism

Nationalism is the belief that people who share a language, culture, or history should form their own sovereign state. A **nation-state** is the political result, a sovereign state whose citizens share a common national identity. Keep the two apart. Nationalism is the idea. The nation-state is the state it builds.

Nationalism did not always build states. In the Austrian Empire it threatened to break one apart. The empire contained Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Poles, Croats, and others, and nationalist movements among these groups pulled in different directions. The **Dual Monarchy (Austria-Hungary)** was the 1867 answer, the Ausgleich that recognized the political power of the Hungarians, the empire's largest ethnic minority, by splitting the empire into two halves under one monarch. It was an attempt to stabilize the state by reconfiguring national unity, and it left the empire's other nationalities without the same recognition.

Zionism was a form of Jewish nationalism that developed late in the 19th century as a response to growing anti-Semitism throughout Europe. It applied the nationalist logic of the age to the Jewish people, arguing that they too needed a national home of their own.

Trap. Nationalism was both a unifying and a destructive force, and the exam tests whether you can tell which one is at work. In Italy and Germany it unified peoples into new states. In Austria-Hungary it was a centrifugal force that the Dual Monarchy tried, only partly successfully, to contain. When a question asks about nationalism's effects, check which state it is describing before you answer.

7.3 National Unification and Diplomatic Tensions

Italian unification (Risorgimento) was the mid-19th-century movement that united Italy's states into a single kingdom, proclaimed in 1861. Two men drove it from different directions. **Camillo di Cavour**, the Piedmontese statesman, engineered northern Italian unification through diplomacy and limited war, building alliances and using Piedmont-Sardinia as the base for expansion. **Giuseppe Garibaldi**, the military leader, conquered southern Italy with his volunteer campaign of 1860 and handed the south to the new kingdom. Cavour was the diplomat and Garibaldi the soldier, and unification needed both.

The **Crimean War** of 1853 to 1856 helped make both unifications possible. It demonstrated Ottoman weakness and broke up the Concert of Europe, the system of great-power cooperation that had kept the map frozen since 1815. With the Concert weakened, ambitious statesmen like Cavour and Bismarck had room to redraw borders.

Trap. Cavour and Garibaldi are the most commonly swapped pair in this unit. Cavour was the Piedmontese prime minister who worked through diplomacy and statecraft in the north. Garibaldi was the military leader whose volunteers took the south. If a question describes a diplomatic maneuver, it is Cavour. If it describes a popular military campaign, it is Garibaldi.

7.3 continued: German Unification

German unification was the Bismarck-led unification of German states into the German Empire, proclaimed in 1871. **Otto von Bismarck**, the Prussian statesman, unified Germany through diplomacy and war, fighting Denmark in 1864 and Austria in 1866 to clear the field before the decisive conflict. His approach was **Realpolitik**, the pragmatic politics of power over principle, and his phrase "**blood and iron**", from an 1862 speech, stated openly that Germany would be unified through military force rather than liberal ideals.

The **Franco-Prussian War** of 1870 to 1871 completed German unification. Bismarck edited the Ems Dispatch to make it appear that France had been insulted, provoking a French declaration of war that rallied the southern German states to Prussia's side against the French. Victory brought the German Empire into being and left France humiliated, a resentment that shaped European diplomacy for decades.

Trap. The Franco-Prussian War completed German unification, it did not start it. Bismarck had already defeated Denmark and Austria before 1870. Questions that ask what unified Germany want the whole sequence of wars and diplomacy, not the final war alone.

7.3 continued: The Alliance System

The unifications changed the balance of power, and the **alliance system** was Europe's answer, the rival networks of alliances that divided the continent into armed camps before World War I. The **Triple Alliance and Triple Entente** were the two blocs, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy on one side against France, Russia, and Britain on the other. The alliances were meant to provide security, but they turned a local crisis into a continental war because each power was bound to fight for its partners.

Trap. The alliance system did not cause World War I by itself, but it is how a crisis in the Balkans became a European war. When a question asks why the alliances mattered, the answer is the mechanism: binding commitments that multiplied one conflict into many.

7.4 Darwinism and Social Darwinism

Charles Darwin was the naturalist whose **theory of evolution by natural selection**, published in 1859, argued that species change over time through the survival of best-adapted individuals. It challenged traditional views of human origins by explaining the diversity of life through natural processes rather than design.

Social Darwinism was something else entirely, the misapplication of evolutionary ideas to justify inequality, imperialism, and racism. Its promoters took the language of survival and competition and applied it to human societies, treating the success of the powerful as natural and inevitable.

Trap. Social Darwinism was not Darwin's idea. Darwin described natural selection in nature. Other thinkers applied evolutionary language to society to defend things Darwin never endorsed, including empire and racial hierarchy. If a question asks about the justification for imperialism, it wants Social Darwinism, not Darwin.

7.5 The Age of Progress and Modernity

The late 19th century produced both new confidence and new doubt about human reason. **Positivism** was the philosophy that science alone provides knowledge, emphasizing the rational and scientific analysis of nature and human affairs. It expressed the age's faith that scientific method could master every subject.

Freudian psychology pulled in the opposite direction. Freud's new account of human nature emphasized the irrational and the struggle between the conscious and subconscious, arguing that much of human behavior is driven by forces people do not understand or control.

Physics shook the foundations too. **Quantum mechanics** and the **theory of relativity** were developments that challenged Newtonian certainty and the faith in objective knowledge. Einstein's relativity and the new quantum physics showed that the universe did not work the way Newton's laws said it must, undermining the idea that science had settled the basic description of nature.

Trap. Positivism and the new physics point in opposite directions, and the exam likes that contrast. Positivism trusted that science could know everything through reason. Relativity and quantum mechanics showed that even physics, the most exact science, had limits. Do not lump them together as a single pro-science mood.

7.6 New Imperialism: Motivations and Methods

The **New Imperialism** was the late-19th-century scramble by European powers to seize colonies in Africa and Asia. Unlike earlier coastal trading posts, this was a rush for direct territorial control, driven by industrial demand for raw materials, competition for prestige, and the belief that colonies proved a nation's greatness.

The justifications were as important as the motives. The **civilizing mission** was the racist ideology that framed imperialism as uplifting colonized peoples, presenting conquest as a duty rather than a theft. Social Darwinism supplied a parallel excuse, treating European dominance as the natural outcome of competition.

The **Berlin Conference** of 1884 to 1885 regulated how European powers claimed territory in Africa, setting ground rules for the scramble so the powers would not fight each other over it. No African leaders were invited. The conference managed the competition among colonizers, not the interests of the colonized.

The **Congo Free State** showed what the scramble meant in practice. It was King Leopold II of Belgium's brutal personal colony in Africa from 1885 to 1908, run for profit through forced labor and violence on a massive scale. It remains the clearest example of New Imperialism's abuses.

Science served empire as well as industry. **Germ theory**, the discovery that microorganisms cause disease, revolutionized medicine, and **Louis Pasteur**, the scientist behind germ theory and vaccines, illustrates the Age of Progress. Advances in medicine also let Europeans survive in tropical colonies, which made the scramble for Africa practically possible.

Trap. The Berlin Conference did not divide Africa fairly or peacefully, and it did not include any African voices. It was a set of rules European powers agreed on among themselves for claiming African territory. If a question asks who benefited from the conference, the answer is the European powers.

7.7 Imperialism's Global Effects

Empire provoked resistance. **Colonial resistance movements** were the uprisings and movements through which colonized peoples opposed European imperial rule. They took many forms, from armed revolts to political organizing, and they are the essential counterpoint to the story of European expansion. The **Sepoy Rebellion** of 1857, the uprising by Indian soldiers against British East India Company rule, is the classic example: it ended Company rule and brought India under direct British crown control. Imperialism was never simply accepted by the people it conquered.

7.8 19th-Century Culture and Arts

The century's art recorded its tensions. **Realism** was the artistic and literary movement that depicted everyday life and social problems without idealization, turning art toward workers, poverty, and ordinary experience instead of heroes and myths.

Impressionism broke from academic tradition differently, as a painting movement capturing light and fleeting moments. **Claude Monet** (1840 to 1926) was its central figure, known for plein-air painting of fleeting light and atmosphere with visible brushstrokes. His *Impression, Sunrise* of 1872 gave the movement its name, and he exhibited independently of the official Salon, rejecting the art establishment's control over what counted as serious painting.

Trap. Realism in art and Realpolitik in diplomacy share a name and nothing else. Realism was an art movement depicting everyday life without idealization. Realpolitik was Bismarck's pragmatic politics of power. The exam will not confuse them, but students do.

Confusions That Cost Points

PAIR	HOW TO KEEP THEM STRAIGHT
Nationalism vs nation-state	Nationalism is the belief that a people should have their own state. The nation-state is the state that belief builds.
Cavour vs Garibaldi	Cavour was the Piedmontese statesman who worked through diplomacy in the north. Garibaldi was the military leader whose campaign took the south.
Darwin vs Social Darwinism	Darwin described natural selection in nature. Social Darwinism misapplied evolutionary ideas to justify inequality and empire.
Positivism vs the new physics	Positivism trusted science to know everything through reason. Relativity and quantum mechanics showed even physics had limits.
Berlin Conference vs a peace treaty	The conference set European ground rules for claiming Africa. No African leaders attended and nothing was settled for Africa's benefit.
Realism vs Realpolitik	Realism is an art movement showing everyday life without idealization. Realpolitik is pragmatic power politics.

Practice Questions

Original questions written for this guide in the style of the AP exam. Answers and explanations are on the next page, so complete the questions before checking them.

- 1.** The Ausgleich of 1867, which created the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, is best understood as
 - A. a grant of independence to every ethnic group in the Austrian Empire
 - B. an attempt to stabilize the empire by giving Hungarians political power while leaving other nationalities unrepresented
 - C. the abolition of the Habsburg monarchy and the creation of a republic
 - D. a military alliance between Austria and Prussia against France

- 2.** Bismarck's manipulation of the Ems Dispatch to provoke France into declaring war in 1870 is most often cited as an example of
 - A. Realpolitik, the pragmatic use of power politics over principle
 - B. liberal nationalism, the belief that nations should be built on popular consent
 - C. the Concert of Europe, the system of great-power cooperation
 - D. positivism, the belief that science alone provides knowledge

- 3.** Social Darwinism differed from Darwin's theory of evolution in that Social Darwinism
 - A. was based on fossil evidence that Darwin had never examined
 - B. rejected the idea that species change over time
 - C. applied the language of survival and competition to human societies to justify inequality and imperialism
 - D. was developed by Darwin himself late in his career

- 4.** The Berlin Conference of 1884 to 1885 is best described as
 - A. a meeting at which African leaders negotiated the borders of their own states
 - B. a treaty that ended the Crimean War and restored the Concert of Europe
 - C. an agreement among European powers setting ground rules for claiming territory in Africa
 - D. the founding charter of the League of Nations

Answer Key

1. B. The Ausgleich split the empire into Austrian and Hungarian halves under one monarch, recognizing Hungarian political power as a way to manage nationalism. It did not satisfy Czechs, Poles, Croats, or other groups. A is wrong because only the Hungarians gained this status. C describes the opposite of what happened, since the monarchy continued. D confuses the Dual Monarchy with an alliance; Austria and Prussia had fought each other in 1866, not allied.

2. A. Bismarck edited the Ems Dispatch to make it appear that France had been insulted, provoking a French declaration of war that rallied the southern German states to Prussia. That is Realpolitik in action, power politics without regard for principle. B is wrong because Bismarck openly rejected liberal ideals, as his "blood and iron" speech stated. C is wrong because the Concert of Europe had broken down after the Crimean War. D is a philosophy of science with no connection to Bismarck's diplomacy.

3. C. Social Darwinism took evolutionary language and applied it to human societies, treating the dominance of the powerful as natural and using it to defend inequality, imperialism, and racism. Darwin's own theory described natural selection in nature. A is wrong because Social Darwinism was not a scientific finding at all. B is wrong because Social Darwinists accepted that change occurs; their error was the moral and political use they made of it. D is wrong because the ideology was developed by others applying Darwin's ideas, not by Darwin.

4. C. The conference regulated how European powers could claim African territory, managing their competition so they would not fight each other over the scramble. A is wrong because no African leaders were invited or consulted. B confuses the Berlin Conference with the 1856 Treaty of Paris that ended the Crimean War. D is wrong by several decades; the League of Nations was founded after World War I.

One-Page Recall Check

- Define nationalism and explain how it differed from a nation-state.
- Explain why the Dual Monarchy was created in 1867 and which group it favored.
- Describe Zionism and the conditions that produced it late in the 19th century.
- Contrast Cavour's and Garibaldi's roles in Italian unification.
- Explain how the Crimean War created conditions for Italian and German unification.
- List Bismarck's wars in order and explain what each one achieved.
- Define Realpolitik and connect it to "blood and iron."
- Explain why the Franco-Prussian War completed, rather than began, German unification.
- Describe the Triple Alliance and Triple Entente and explain how the alliance system turned a local crisis into a continental war.
- State Darwin's theory of evolution and explain what Social Darwinism did with it.
- Contrast positivism with Freudian psychology.
- Explain how quantum mechanics and relativity challenged Newtonian certainty.
- Define the New Imperialism and name its economic and political motives.
- Explain the civilizing mission and what it concealed.
- Describe the Berlin Conference, who attended, and who benefited.
- Explain what the Congo Free State was and why it matters as an example.
- Connect germ theory and Pasteur's work to both medicine and imperialism.
- Give an example of a colonial resistance movement and explain what it shows.
- Contrast Realism and Impressionism in 19th-century art.
- Explain why Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* matters beyond being a famous painting.

Where to go next. Turn every missed item above into flashcards and drill them spaced out over several days rather than in one sitting. In Rycal, open the AP European History deck. The deck covers the terms in this guide, and its practice questions target the same traps named here. If you have a test date, add it in the Test Planner. You can also start your next review with a Brain Dump, then check what you missed against this guide.

Key terms for this unit

Dual Monarchy (Austria-Hungary), Nationalism, Zionism, Nation-state, Alliance system, Camillo di Cavour, Crimean War, German unification, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Italian unification (Risorgimento), Otto von Bismarck, Realpolitik, Blood and iron, Franco-Prussian War, Triple Alliance and Triple Entente, Charles Darwin, Social Darwinism, Theory of evolution (natural selection), Freudian psychology, Positivism, Quantum mechanics, Theory of relativity, New Imperialism, Civilizing mission, Congo Free State, Germ theory, Louis Pasteur, Colonial resistance movements, Berlin Conference, Impressionism, Realism, Claude Monet.

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