

**Chapter 23 Viewpoint Activity**

While history credits German chancellor Otto von Bismarck with making Germany a united country (textbook pages 584–587), historians differ about his accomplishments. Below, two contemporary historians comment on Bismarck and his techniques. ♦ *As you read, think about the picture each writer presents. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

**Bismarck and His Strategies**

**L.C.B. Seaman:**

The first of these [mistakes] is the interpretation “Bismarck unified Germany.” He did not. He did not even want to. He annexed, conquered or absorbed into Prussian control all the states of the old German Confederation except Austria, added thereto Slesvig, Alsace and Lorraine and called the result “The German Empire.” It was a German Empire, certainly, but it was not, and Bismarck never intended it to be, the German Empire. It excluded, deliberately, all the Germans living within the Habsburg territories of Austria and Bohemia. Thus Bismarck’s German Empire was based on the division of Germany, not its unification. . . .

The second interpretation which should be abandoned is that Bismarck planned the events of the sixties in advance, and that when he planned them the results were always what he had intended.

. . . This view of Bismarck as the dynamic ruthless realist planning the whole of this campaign brilliantly and wickedly in advance is based not on the facts but on a legend; a legend created by Bismarck to minister to his own vanity as an individual and to the cause of his indispensability as a politician.

**Norman Rich:**

Bismarck was an artist in statecraft as Napoleon had been an artist in war. Like Napoleon’s campaign strategy, Bismarck’s policy was never bound by fixed rules or preconceptions. While remaining aware of long-term goals and broad perspectives, he concentrated on the exigencies [needs] of the moment. . . . He did not only take into account the most obvious moves of his opponents; he was prepared to deal with every conceivable move, even the most stupid, which if unanticipated might upset the cleverest calculations. Much of his success depended on patience and timing. He once compared himself to a hunter inching forward through a swamp to shoot a grouse while one false step might cause him to sink into a bog.

Bismarck’s outstanding quality, and the one he himself valued most highly in a statesman, was the ability to choose the most opportune and least dangerous political course.



Sources: (1) *Vienna to Versailles*, by L.C.B. Seaman (Methuen, 1955; Harper & Row, 1963); (2) *The Age of Nationalism and Reform, 1850–1890*, by Norman Rich (W.W. Norton, 1977).

**Questions to Discuss**

1. Why does Seaman, the first historian quoted, say that the empire Bismarck created was not really a unified German empire?
2. What do the two writers say about Bismarck’s methods of planning and carrying out strategy?
3. **Checking Consistency** If Bismarck could have read these two historians’ interpretations, which one do you think would have pleased him more? Why?