

The Unification of Italy

After the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Austria ruled the Italian provinces of Venetia (city of Venice) and Lombardy (the city of Milan), as well as several smaller states in the north. The Spanish Bourbon family ruled the southern Kingdoms of the Two Sicilies. Between 1815 and 1848, increasing numbers of Italians were no longer willing to live under the control of foreign rulers.



In 1832, the first organized nationalist group within the peninsula of Italy was formed. Their leader was **Giuseppe Mazzini** and his party was called **Young Italy**. No person over the age of 40 was allowed to join.



In 1848 several revolts, mostly led by Mazzini, broke out in eight states within the Italian peninsula. For a short while Mazzini led a republican government that was based in the city of Rome. He believed that nation-states were the best hope for social justice, democracy, and peace within Europe. However, the rebellions of 1848 failed and Mazzini and other nationalist leaders went into exile while the former rulers again ruled Italy.

After 1848, the leaders of the Italian nationalists began to ally themselves with the **Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia**. [Piedmont was in northwest Italy and contained the cities of Turin and Genoa, Sardinia being a large island off the west coast of the peninsula – see above map]. Piedmont-Sardinia was the most powerful of the Italian states. The kingdom adopted a liberal constitution in 1848 and became a sensible alternative to Mazzini's democratic idealism.

In 1852, Sardinia's **King Victor Emanuel II** named **Count Camillo di Cavour** as his prime minister. Cavour was a wealthy, middle-aged aristocrat, who worked very hard to expand Piedmont-Sardinia's power. **Mazzini mistrusted Cavour**, he correctly saw that all Cavour wanted to do was to strengthen Sardinia's power, and not to unite Italy.



Cavour's plan was to first take control of northern Italy and rule it from Sardinia. He began to achieve this territorial goal through diplomacy and trickery. Cavour knew that the only way for him to take full control over Northern Italy was to remove the Austrians who, at the time, ruled a considerable area in the north of the peninsula. **Cavour found an ally in France.**

In 1858, the **French Emperor Napoleon III** agreed to help drive any Austrians out of the provinces of Lombardy and Venetia. This action provoked a war. A combined French and Sardinian army won two quick victories over Austria. Sardinia then controlled all of northern Italy except for the province of Venetia. Cavour then looked at controlling the south of Italy. He secretly began to help a band of nationalist rebels in the south.

In May 1860, a small army of Italian nationalists led by Giuseppe Garibaldi, captured the island of Sicily. In battle, Garibaldi and his followers always wore bright red shirts. Because of this, they became known as the Red Shirts.



Giuseppe Garibaldi

Once he controlled Sicily, Garibaldi crossed over to the mainland and began to spread his movement northward. Garibaldi called for an election and the result was that the voters decided in favor of Garibaldi (The Red One) stepping aside and allowing the region to be ruled by King Victor Emanuel II. The king and Garibaldi met in Naples to finalize the arrangement.



Garibaldi leading his Red Shirts to victory

In 1866, the Austrian province of Venetia became part of Italy. In 1870 Italian forces took over the last part of the territory known as the Papal States. The Roman Catholic popes had ruled this territory for centuries and as most of the rebels were Roman Catholics they created a special section for the church which was named the Vatican City. The city of Rome became the capital of the united Kingdom of Italy.

Italy was now its own nation.

Despite unification, Italy still struggled. The greatest tension still existed between the people of industrial north and the agricultural south. These people had two totally different ways of life and their dialects were so strong that they barely understood each other when they spoke, despite the fact that they both spoke the same language, Italian.

The Italian parliament was highly disorganized and as a result, prime ministers and cabinets changed frequently. Peasant revolts broke out in the south and strikes and riots took place in the northern cities. The Italian government could not deal with the country's economic problems. The leaders turned to the imperialism of African territories but Italy's failed attack on Ethiopia and other poorly managed interests in the region, led them to be the one nation that lost money from imperialism in Africa!
