

Three Reichs

by Jaime Hanna

The Second Reich (1871-1918) is also called the Kaiserreich. In 1871, the German Reichstag adopted a new constitution and named Prussian Wilhelm I as the German Emperor, or Kaiser. Otto von Bismarck was declared Chancellor and under his statesmanship, he created a more unified German territory and made Germany into a powerful nation-state. Bismarck had a powerful, aggressive personality and his power of speech would later draw comparisons to that of Winston Churchill. Under his guidance, Germany expanded rapidly both politically and economically. After the death of Wilhelm I and his successor, Friedrich III, Wilhelm II became the new Kaiser. Bismarck and Wilhelm II clashed on many issues - Wilhelm II disliked Bismarck's cautious policies and pushed for rapid expansion in all areas of German foreign and domestic policy, as he was eager to outshine Britain and France as the major powers in the hemisphere. After frequent fighting, Bismarck resigned at Wilhelm's insistence in 1890. Over the next several decades, Wilhelm II made several foreign policy blunders, effectively leaving Austria-Hungary as Germany's only ally. After requesting and receiving an Armistice in November 1917 ending World War I, and the abdication of Wilhelm II in 1918, the Second Reich gave way to the new Weimar Republic, which would last until Hitler seized power in 1933.

The infamous Third Reich (1933-1945) as declared by Hitler differed vastly from the First Reich, which modeled itself after the Roman Empire and encompassed many peoples. (And actually did last a thousand years.) The Third Reich pursued racial purity at the cost of an estimated 11 million people and rained destruction down on the entire globe.
