

The tragedy of maximilian and carlota assignment

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Maximilian and Carlota in Mexico History, like a good book or movie, can be vivid, romantic, and tragic all at once. And perhaps there's no greater tragedy than the one of Old Mexico about the man and his wife that came to rule a perfect world only to be left disappointed, heartbroken and put to a cruel death for one, and a life-long commitment to a mental institution for the other. The story starts in 1864 when Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian and Archduchess Maria Charlotte, both of royal blood, were appointed Emperor and Empress of Mexico by Napoleon III of France.

Ferdinand was the son of Archduke Franz Karl, the ruler of Austria, and related by blood or marriage to every ruling family in Europe. Charlotte was daughter of King Leopold of Belgium, cousin of Queen Victoria of England and grand-daughter of Napoleon Bonaparte III, the King of France. 1 The young couple had been married for seven years at the time of their appointment and were very much in love. Unwilling at the beginning, Ferdinand was finally convinced by Napoleon and a group of Mexican government conservatives-in-exile that Mexico desperately awaited a liberating ruler to take them into the " new age".

A natural linguist and talented writer, Charlotte was slender and petite, with dark eyes and dark brown hair. When she knew she and Maximilian would be going to Mexico she had immediately hired a Spanish teacher to teach her the language. Shortly after arriving in Mexico, she changed her name to Carlota, and adopted the Spanish spelling. Maximilian was described as extremely personable, handsome, idealistic and trusting. He was also naive and extremely gullible. Though not as open to learning languages as Carlota, he spoke several, including English. There is also well-documented suspicion

that Maximilian was the actually the son of Napoleon II. Those who believe this, many Europeans and the Viennese in particular noted the strange close relationship that existed between Sophie and Napoleon II. It was said that Sophie never recovered after his death and that she blamed it on Metternich for the rest of her life, and that, from birth, Maximilian's stature resembled Napoleon II's more than that of Franz Karl, his older brother, or any of his younger brothers. While the United States was busy with its Civil War, a group of conservative Mexicans and the French Emperor Napoleon III devised to put Maximilian on the Mexican throne because the Mexican government of Benito Juarez was far too liberal for some Mexicans. Napoleon wanted to collect a debt from Mexico and further his imperialist dreams in the Americas. The debt Mexico owed the French was \$15 million on which Juarez had suspended payment. To further this scheme, Maximilian was lied to and believed the Mexican people had voted him their king.

He agreed to move to Mexico as elected emperor backed by support from the French army. 4 In June of 1864, Ferdinand and Marie-Charlotte-Amelie-Augustine-Victoire-Clementine- Leopoldine (know as Carlota to her friends), daughter of Leopold I, King of the Belgians, set sail for Mexico to claim the throne. Maximilian had big plans for changing things for the good of the people that included bringing in European scholars to teach the many illiterate Mexicans to read and write their own language, and inspire them to bring Mexico into what he termed " the Golden Age of growth and enlightenment. The couple settled in Chapultepec Castle just outside Mexico City and Maximilian wasted no time in advancing some of his policies for change. He started restoration of the beautiful castle that had been allowed

to fall into ruin, and began touring the country in an effort to meet the people and explain that he had arrived to restore their independence. He ordered the end of the mistreatment of workers and limited the hours they could be forced to work. His orders were never carried out. Things came to a head when Maximilian received word from Napoleon that he must withdraw the Reform Law that Juarez had passed, and return the land and power over the Mexicans back to the Catholic Church. Maximilian refused, who then alienated Napoleon, the only man, some say, who may have been able to intervene and save his life. Meanwhile, Carlota had traveled back to Europe to enlist the aid of Royal family members. She then suffered a complete mental and emotional collapse and never returned to Mexico.

She spent the rest of her life in seclusion in Laeken, Belgium in a mental institution where she died in 1927. Ferdinand never found out what had happened to her. Napoleon ordered the French troops that had been placed in Mexico to protect Maximilian, to return to France. Bravely, Maximilian and his decreasing army fought on, but all chances of escape were cut off as the army of Juarez closed in. The reign of Maximilian, Emperor of Mexico ended when he and two of his generals stepped out of their headquarters carrying white flags.

Accepting their swords in surrender, the receiving officer said: " Your Majesty is my prisoner. " The liberal general of Juarez's army offered free passage of escape to Maximilian, but he refused because his loyal generals were not included in the offer. Maximilian remained brave and noble throughout his ordeal. 6 Maximilian died by firing squad, June 19, 1867, at the Hill of the

Bells in the state of Queretero. Asked if he wished to say anything, he replied: “ Pardon everyone and pray that all pardon me.

I hope that my blood flows for the good of this earth. Viva Mexico! “ 7

Footnotes: 1. Richard O’Connor, Cactus Throne: the Tragedy of Maximilian and Carlota (New York: Putnam, 1971). 2. Ibid. 3. Niall Kilkenney, Maximilain and Carlota, 2007, [http://www. reformation. org/ maximilian-and-carlota. html](http://www.reformation.org/maximilian-and-carlota.html). 4. Jasper Ridler, Maximilian and Juarez (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992). 5. Ibid. 6. Gene Smith, Maximilian and Carlota: The Habsburg tragedy in Mexico (London: Harrap, 1974). 7. Ibid.