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## Biography of Paul Morphy

Paul Morphy had everything necessary for success that one could think of. He had a wealthy family, was a hard worker, had an astounding mind, and was well liked by nearly all the people he knew. Yet throughout his life he was met with failure and sadness. His near perfect circumstances and tumultuous final year of life earned him the nickname by which he will forever be remembered, "The Pride and Sorrow of Chess." If the success of the previous generation has any noticeable effect on posterity then the young Morphy was bound for great things.

Born on June 22, 1837 Paul Charles Morphy was the son of Alonzo Morphy, and a young Creole named Louise Carpentier, both of which were from prominent New Orleans families. Throughout his life Morphy's father had many high paying and prestigious jobs. He was a lawyer, Louisiana state legislator, attorney general, and even a Supreme Court justice. These circumstances came together to give Paul the many things a person needed to thrive at that time, and insure him the finest education available to maximize his potential.

Morphy was born with an amazing mind. The majority of people born under these circumstances would be content with what they had, but not young Paul. He worked hard and excelled at his early schooling, and learned how to play chess near the age of ten. In 1850, he was accepted to Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama. He graduated in 1854, but stayed an extra year to learn as much as he could there. He graduated again the following year, this time with an A.M. degree with the highest honors. Continuing his college studies, he next went to the University of Louisiana to study law. Paul graduated and received a L.L.M. degree on April 4, 1857. In preparation for receiving the degree, it is said that he memorized the entire Louisiana Book of Codes and Laws.

Aside from his academic excellence, Paul Morphy achieved a large amount of success in the chess world before he ever left for college at Spring Hill. He was the first recognized chess prodigy to become an exceptionally strong chess player as a boy. According to his uncle, Ernest Morphy, no one formally taught Morphy how to play chess; rather, Morphy learned on his own as a young child simply from watching others play. He demonstrated this feat when his father and Ernest were playing one night. When the game was over and Ernest had lost, Morphy astounded them by declaring that Ernest should've won. Then he proceeded to set the position back up and played through the game while they looked on dumbfounded.

When Morphy was ten, General Winfield Scott visited New Orleans. Scott, who was a formidable player himself, wished to be challenged by a strong player, so he sent his aids to

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search out a worthy opponent. That night when the young Morphy was brought to Scott, the general was at first offended; believing it to be an insult. However, after Paul won both games, one in a laughable six moves, Scott and his severely bruised ego retired for the night.

When he was twelve, Morphy played three games against a Professional Chess Master, Johann Lowenthal. By the twelfth move in the first game Lowenthal realized he was not playing with a boy who was merely skilled, but gifted. Each time Morphy made a good move, Lowenthal's eyebrows shot up in a manner described by Ernest Morphy as "comique." Lowenthal lost all three games he and Morphy played. The following year Morphy was considered the finest chess player in all of New Orleans.

After the young man had completed all of his academic studies he still was not of legal age to practice law, and so at the urging of his uncle, he decided to take on the best players in America at the 1857 U.S. Chess Congress. He defeated all the strong competition, including the German Master Louis Paulsen in the final round, and was hailed as the best player in the whole United States at the age of twenty. The people loved him. In the December 1857 issue of Chess Monthly it was stated that "his genial disposition, his unaffected modesty and gentlemanly courtesy have endeared him to all his acquaintances." Still unable to start a law career Paul decided to travel to Europe and challenge all of the best Masters throughout the world.

In 1858, Morphy met and defeated every great European player except Howard Staunton. He even played a match with a German Master Adolf Anderssen while severely ill with influenza, and won handily. Paul also gave multiple blindfold and simultaneous chess exhibitions while in both Britain and France. Morphy was never able however, to play a series of games against the Englishman Howard Staunton, who was at the time considered the best player in the world; though it was not for lack of effort. Staunton knew that he would be beat because he was well past his prime, so he simply avoided Morphy at all costs for the better part of a year. After these victories, Morphy was for a time believed to be the finest player in the world, and is still considered one of two unofficial World Chess Champions (Staunton and Morphy.) After his return from Europe, he infrequently played matches where the opponent received knight and rook odds; winning with very few exceptions. Morphy officially retired from chess in 1863.

He returned to the United States at the age of twenty-one to parades and banquets in his honor. One banquet in Boston was attended by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and the president of Harvard, and another was attended by the President's son, John Van Buren, who even toasted Morphy. After this triumphant return Morphy played a move no one saw coming, he abruptly abandoned chess to focus on his law career. Unfortunately, this aspect of his life never quite got off the ground. At one time he even had a girl refuse to marry him because he was "a mere chess player." Many contribute his lack of success in law to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Morphy did not agree with succession, and spent most of the war traveling to Paris, and

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Havana, Cuba. When the war ended, his law career still did not succeed and he retired.

Depression soon followed, and his family's immense wealth allowed him to spend most of the rest of his life in idleness. As Morphy aged, he started to manifest symptoms of severe paranoia. Paul told his mother that people were out to get him. He insisted that people were trying to poison him and that others wanted to set fire to his clothes. At times he could be found walking the streets of the French Quarter talking to invisible people. During these years he would only eat food prepared by his mother or sister. Morphy also became reclusive and had very little to do with anyone other than his family and a small group of friends. While Paul Morphy sounds quite crazy in these accounts, when he was visited by the first official World Chess Champion Wilhelm Steinitz in 1883, Steinitz said, "Morphy is a most interesting man to talk to. He is shrewd and practical and apparently in excellent health." This leads some to believe possibly he wasn't as crazy as first thought.

A year later, on July 10, 1884, Paul Charles Morphy was found dead in his bathtub at the age of forty-seven. The autopsy showed that he died of a stroke brought on by entering cold water after a long walk in the middle of a hot New Orleans summer day. He would later be dubbed "The Pride and Sorrow of Chess" by David Lawson, the author of the book which is the only full length biography of Paul Morphy.

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