

# **“The End of the Natchez”? A Genealogy of Historical, Literary and Anthropological Thought about the Natchez Indians since the Eighteenth Century**

Noel Edward Smyth  
University of California, Santa Cruz

Adams County Mississippi, the location of modern-day Natchez, MS and the historical home of the Natchez people, has a webpage that describes itself as an “independent, not-for-profit site brought to you as a public service in the interest of \*free\* genealogy.” This website offers all sorts of historical and genealogical material, including historical information about the Natchez. Under the link to “The Extermination of the Natchez Indians,” the webpage presents passages from *The Making of America* (1876). Under the subheading “Description of the Natchez Indians” is written:

This remarkable tribe, the most civilized of all the original inhabitants of the States, dwelt in the vicinity of the present city of Natchez. In refinement and intelligence, they were equal, if not superior, to any other tribe north of Mexico. In courage and stratagem they were inferior to none. Their form was noble and commanding; their stature was seldom under 6 feet, and their persons were straight and athletic. Their countenance indicated more intelligence than is commonly found in savages.

The language is jarring and reflects its nineteenth century context. Scholars no longer think of Native Americans from any period as low on the rungs of “civilization.” Referring to the Natchez as “savages” whom the French “exterminated,” the webpage misrepresents Natchez history and offers a version of the past that illustrates the lasting impact of earlier European and American ideas about the Natchez and their history.<sup>1</sup>

For over the past 250 years, European and American writers, anthropologists and historians have misconstrued and misrepresented the history of the Natchez people. While Natchez history did not end in 1731, most non-Natchez observers and scholars of Natchez history have focused almost exclusively on Natchez history from European contact to the early 1730s. <sup>2</sup>Even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some historians write as if the

---

<sup>1</sup> “Adams Co, MS Genealogical and Historical Research”, accessed March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014, <http://www.natchezbelle.org/adams-ind/indians.htm>; James Dabney McCabe, *Making of America* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers, 1876).

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent survey of the enormous amount of scholarship on Natchez history to the 1730s, see James F. Barnett, Jr., *The Natchez Indians: A History to 1735* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007). For a review of scholarship on the Natchez post-1730s, see Patricia Galloway and Jason Baird Jackson, “Natchez and Neighboring Groups,” in *Southeast*, ed. Raymond D. Fogelson, vol. 14 of *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2004),

Natchez no longer exist. For example, one historian wrote that when the French attacked the Natchez in 1731, they chased the “survivors into the woods, where they disappeared forever.”<sup>3</sup> The centuries of inaccurate and sometimes romanticized narratives act as an effective erasure of Natchez history after the 1730s. While Natchez people survived adversity and multiple displacements for over two hundred years, most European and American thinkers have clung to a narrative of Natchez disappearance that continues to impact Natchez people in negative ways. Contemporary Natchez struggles for state and federal recognition face an uphill battle in arguing against centuries of misinformation that continue to shape the discourse around Natchez history.

Whether in literature, anthropology, or history, European and American thinkers have mobilized the Natchez in curious and diverse ways over time. This paper identifies three major themes in European and American thought on Natchez history. The first theme, found in French and English literature from the nineteenth century to the present, is a tendency to romanticize the Natchez past, to downplay the violence between the French and Natchez, and to focus narratives on love and self-discovery. The second theme is an ongoing fascination with the rigid hierarchy of the Natchez and their strict forms of social control, but was particularly prevalent in the writing of eighteenth and nineteenth century historians and anthropologists who grappled with how to understand Natchez social, political, and religious customs. Anthropologists during this early era distinguished the Natchez as more civilized than other Native Americans in North America, but still only “partially civilized.” The third theme of the “vanishing Indian” began to dominate anthropological and historical writing on the Natchez from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. Early twentieth century scholars obsessed with the “disappearance” of the Natchez directed their efforts towards collecting information in order to preserve “original” or “authentic” Natchez culture. Tracking these three themes over time reveals the lasting impact of earlier, and often inaccurate, ideas on contemporary notions of Natchez history and culture and how these ideas continue to influence the construction of knowledge concerning Natchez history. Traces of all three

---

609-614; and Brad Raymond Lieb, “The Natchez Indian Diaspora: Ethnohistoric Archaeology of the Eighteenth-Century Refuge among the Chickasaws” (PhD diss., University of Alabama, 2008). My dissertation (forthcoming) explores Natchez history after the 1730s. For now a brief summary should suffice: In 1729, the Natchez attacked the French near modern day Natchez, Mississippi and killed most of the colonists in the area. The French retaliated and attacked the Natchez in early 1731 and uprooted them from their ancestral homelands. The army captured and enslaved over two hundred Natchez and, fearing prolonged resistance, sold them to planters in Saint Domingue (modern-day Haiti). Some Natchez evaded capture and fled northwest to live with the Chickasaws. Others stayed in the area, appearing sporadically in French records when they attacked remote French communities. The refugees among the Chickasaws moved again in the early 1740s to establish distinct communities among the Creeks, the Cherokees, and the British in colonial South Carolina. Almost 100 years later, the U.S. government again displaced most of the Natchez to “Indian Territory” (Oklahoma) during the tragic decade of the “Trail of Tears.” Today, the Natchez exist as part of the Creek Nation of Oklahoma and are working towards Federal recognition. Some Natchez remained in the south, evading removal, and are the Natchez-Kusso of South Carolina. The Natchez Nations in Oklahoma and South Carolina have their own websites: <http://www.natcheznation.com> and <http://www.edistonatchez-kussotribe.com>.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Morris, *Becoming Southern: the Evolution of a Way Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3. While Morris acknowledges the original Natchez occupation of the land, however, his assertion that the Natchez disappeared “forever” is inaccurate.

themes still can be seen in contemporary ideas about the Natchez, such as the website from Adams Co., MS., or in the writing of some present-day historians.

### Le Page du Pratz

The most important written primary source for the period of French and Natchez contact comes from the writing of Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz who lived near the Natchez from 1720-1728. He left the area right before the Natchez attacked the French in 1729, but did not publish his account for another twenty years. He first published his *Mémoire sur la Louisiane* in installments between September 1751 and February 1752 in the *Journal Oeconomique* in Paris. Later in 1758 he published the installments together in the three-volume *Histoire de la Louisiane*. Le Page du Pratz was openly fond of the Natchez, and he spends a great deal of his *History of Louisiana* discussing the Natchez. Historians, anthropologists, and novelists continue to use the writing of Le Page du Pratz because of its ethnographic detail, such as his provocative descriptions of sanguinary mortuary rites, spiritual ceremonies, kinship patterns, and marriage rituals.<sup>4</sup>

The abundant ethnographic detail concerning the Natchez was a result of Le Page du Pratz's desire to collect practical information about the people, plants, and animal life in Louisiana. He writes, "ever since my arrival in Louisiana, I had tried to use my time to instruct myself in all that was new to me, and *apply myself toward seeking out objects*, the discovery of which might be useful to society" (emphasis mine).<sup>5</sup> The Natchez were one of the "objects" he sought to better understand. However, by identifying the Natchez as objects of practical curiosity, Le Page du Pratz establishes a subject/object relationship that consolidates the French as subject and Natchez as object. An effect of this subject/object dichotomy is that Le Page du Pratz denied "coevalness" to the Natchez

---

<sup>4</sup>Antoine-Simon Le Page Du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*. 3 Vols. (Paris: De Bure, Belaguette, Lambert, 1758). There are two other significant primary source accounts concerning Natchez history; however, neither have the level of ethnographic detail of Le Page du Pratz. For this essay, I focus on the writing of Le Page du Pratz in order to understand how later scholars and novelists built upon his specific ethnographic writing and how this writing profoundly shapes intellectual discourse concerning the Natchez since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The two other major primary sources for Natchez history during this period have been published: Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher, eds. *The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont, 1715-1747: A Sojourner in the French Atlantic*. By Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny. Translated by Gordon M. Sayre (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Erin M. Greenwald, ed., *A Company Man: The Remarkable French-Atlantic Voyage of a Clerk for the Company of the Indies: A Memoir by Marc-Antoine Caillot*, trans. Teri F. Chalmers (New Orleans: The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2013). For brief contextualization of Le Page du Pratz, Lieutenant Dumont, and Marc-Antoine Caillot within a larger French Atlantic Enlightenment, see: Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 49-54. For a critical reading of the narrative sources from Le Page du Pratz and Dumont, see Gordon M. Sayre, "Plotting the Natchez Massacre: Le Page du Pratz, Dumont de Montigny, Chateaubriand." *Early American Literature* 37 (2002): 281-413; and Gordon M. Sayre, "Natchez Ethnohistory Revisited: New Manuscript Sources from Le Page du Pratz and Dumont de Montigny," *Louisiana History* 50 (2009): 407-436.

<sup>5</sup> This quote is taken from Gordon Sayre, "Le Page du Pratz's fabulous Journey of Discovery: Learning about Nature Writing from a Colonial Promotional Narrative," in *The Greening of Literary Scholarship: Literature, Theory, and the Environment*, ed. Steven Rosendale (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 30.

whom he lived with.<sup>6</sup> In other words, rather than representing the Natchez as contemporary actors unique in the current moment, Le Page du Pratz locates the Natchez as both timeless and of the past. For example, his description of “paternal authority” as “still the same among the Natchez, such as it was in the first age of the world” reveals the timeless nature of Natchez cultural traits, unchanged since the “first age of the world.”<sup>7</sup> He also describes the Natchez as being remnants from the past, something not quite modern or contemporary, when he compares them to the Scythians in Herodotus.<sup>8</sup> The positioning of the Natchez as particularly unique shaped the way that many later writers thought about the Natchez.<sup>9</sup> However, while Le Page du Pratz wrote of the Natchez as if they were both timeless and of the past, he also felt sympathy towards the Natchez. This admiration towards the Natchez mixed with a denial of Natchez coevalness produced an image of the Natchez that is both romantic and savage.

Le Page du Pratz’s representations of the Natchez resemble traits of the noble savage trope. He calls the Natchez “naturels” (naturals) rather than “sauvages” (savages)—the predominant word used by most French speakers to talk about Native Americans. “Naturel” implied closeness to nature, emphasizing the positive influence of being unfettered by human civilization whereas “sauvage,” which also implied the same closeness to nature, but emphasized the wild, bestial, and backwards nature of Native Americans. Le Page du Pratz’s “naturel” prefigured the trope of the noble savage that became popular in France by the time he published in the 1750s.<sup>10</sup> French intellectuals

---

<sup>6</sup> My thoughts on “coevalness” are shaped by Johannes Fabian’s examination of nineteenth and twentieth century anthropology. See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983 (2002)). Johannes Fabian argues that “as long as anthropology presents its object primarily as seen, as long as ethnographic knowledge is conceived primarily as observation and/or representation (in terms of models, symbols systems, and so forth) it is likely to persist in denying coevalness to its other” (151-152). Whether in the pseudo-anthropological writings of Le Page du Pratz from the eighteenth century or in the writings of later anthropologists, the Natchez are consistently denied coevalness due to the subject/object model that constitutes much of modern anthropology.

<sup>7</sup> “Elle (paternal authority) est encore chez les Naturels de la Louisiane telle qu’elle étoit dans le premier âge du Monde.” In Antoine Simon Le Page Du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*. 3 Vols. (Paris: De Bure, Belaguette, Lambert, 1758), 386.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>9</sup>The fierce 20<sup>th</sup> century debates between anthropologists over Natchez kinship structures provide a clear example of the impact of Le Page du Pratz on Natchez scholarship. Le Page du Pratz wrote about four “classes” of Natchez, from nobles to “stinkards” in Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*. Vol II. (Paris: De Bure, Belaguette, Lambert, 1758) 395-7. For an excellent summary of the modern debate between anthropologists, see: Karl G. Lorenz, “The Natchez of Southwest Mississippi” in *Indians of the Greater Southeast: Historical Archeology and Ethnohistory*, ed. Bonnie G. McEwan, 142-177 (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 152-157.

<sup>10</sup> Ter Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). When Le Page du Pratz lived with the Natchez in the 1720s, the image of the noble savage was not yet prevalent. However, since he published his work over twenty years after his time in North America, it seems likely that his domestic French audience would have influenced his portrayal of the Natchez, although, conversely, it is quite possible that the writing of Le Page du Pratz contributed to the image of the North American noble savage so popular during the French Enlightenment and beyond. Indeed, Shannon Lee Dawdy argues that early colonial writers like Le Page du Pratz were “minor *philosophes* who presented their knowledge and experience in the literary fashions of the day, and also contributed to important debates.” I agree with her assertion that colonial writers like Le Page du Pratz helped shape the

used the idea of the Noble Savage to propose reform and to critique existing social institutions. Critics of the old Regime used the idea of the Native American in polemical arguments to critique different issues in society with a belief that “what was natural was good, [and] what was civilized was artificial, hence decadent and certainly bad.” The *philosophes* critiqued European civilization by conflating ideas about nature with Native Americans, but did not represent Native American societies as alternatives to European civilization. This tension between the idea that the Native was one who “apprehended the laws of nature more clearly than civilized man, and the “reality” that they were still thought of as uncivilized, or less than the French, is a tension that runs throughout Le Page du Pratz’s narrative and in the writing of many subsequent European and American thinkers.<sup>11</sup>

## Literature

In the early nineteenth century, the French writer François-René de Chateaubriand published three novels about the Natchez. Inspired by his travels in North America and his reading of French histories of Louisiana written by people like Le Page du Pratz, Chateaubriand published *Atala*. The novella follows the story of a Natchez man named Chactas who falls in love with a Christian woman, the daughter of a Native American mother and a Spanish father. The novella has little historical veracity, and is more an exploration of human emotion, spirituality, and an argument for the greatness of Christianity. In 1802 Chateaubriand wrote *René*, another novel featuring the Natchez. This highly influential book in the French Romantic tradition features a young unhappy Frenchman, who after traveling the European classical world eventually finds solace among the Natchez during the 1720s. The third novel *The Natchez* is a longer piece about the Natchez and includes many references to *Atala* and *René*. Chateaubriand wrote all three books sometime between 1793-1799, but did not publish *The Natchez* until 1826. While *The Natchez* was less influential to French literature than *René* or *Atala*, Chateaubriand was one of the most important founders of French Romanticism in which French authors, artists, and intellectuals looked to nature, imagination, intuition, and emotion as places of truth and as a critique of the status quo. Less interested in learning of surviving Natchez people, Chateaubriand and his readers were content to imagine a Natchez people of their own making. Chateaubriand’s representations of Natchez people and history reveal more about French beliefs and ideas than anything about the Natchez themselves.<sup>12</sup>

---

Enlightenment in France and played an important role “in the uneven evolution of modernity,” Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire*, 50, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 76-77.

<sup>12</sup> François-René de Chateaubriand, *Atala*, ed. J. M. Gautier (Geneva: Droz, 1973); Chateaubriand, *René*, ed. Armand Weil (Geneva: Droz, 1961); Chateaubriand, *Les Natchez*, ed. Gilbert Chinard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1932). While most French readers would not have known much about actual Natchez people, the Natchez were certainly known, at least in name, to French literary circles in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The French encounter with the Natchez had a lingering effect on French culture long after the war with the Natchez was over. For more on the resonance of the Natchez war in French literature, see Sayre, *The Indian Chief as Tragic Hero*, 203-248; and Arnaud Balvey, *La Révolte des Natchez* (Paris: Félin, 2008), 182-183.

American writers also used representations of the Natchez as context for romantic portrayals of early contact between French and Natchez. In 1892 Lucy Irwin Huntington published an epic poem *The Wife of the Sun: A Legend of the Natchez*. The protagonist is a Natchez woman betrothed to the Great Sun, but she is in love with another young “brave.” The final stanzas tell of the wife of the Sun and her lover leaping from the cliffs above the Mississippi River at Natchez. Huntington’s poem emphasizes the tragic loss of romantic love due to the cultural rules that organized Natchez life. The poem certainly could be read as an early feminist critique of patriarchy overlaid with romantic descriptions of nature and love. However, like Chateaubriand, real Natchez are less important than Huntington’s critique of her own society and its customs against women’s choice in marriage. This theme of using the Natchez to represent a critique of Euro-American societies repeats itself in most fictionalized accounts of the Natchez.<sup>13</sup>

### History and Anthropology (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries)

Le Page du Pratz’s two characterizations of the Natchez as more “civilized” than other Native Americans in the southeast and originating from civilizations in Mexico shaped arguments in history and anthropology for over a century.<sup>14</sup> While most scholars agreed on the special status of Natchez civilization, some disagreed over which native groups could properly be compared to the Natchez. For example, Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix published the first history of Louisiana in 1744 and relied on Le Page du Pratz’s account for much of the ethnographic information concerning the Natchez, including the notion that the Natchez were more civilized than other Native Americans. However, Charlevoix compared the Natchez to the Hurons of Canada, rather than to Mexican civilizations.<sup>15</sup> While the comparison of the Natchez to other groups in the

---

<sup>13</sup> Lucy Irwin Huntington, *The Wife of the Sun: A Legend of the Natchez* (Mobile, AL: The Gossip Printing Co., 1892). The tradition of using Natchez history loosely as context for historical novels continues to the 21<sup>st</sup> century: James Register, *Fort Rosalie: The French at Old Natchez, 1682-1762* (Shreveport, LA: Mid-South Press, 1969); Mary-Louise Christovich and Roulhac Toledano, *Nankowetco: The Natchez Odyssey, 1716-1734* (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Le Page du Pratz wrote that Natchez “manners were more civilized, their manner of thinking more just and fuller of sentiment, their customs more reasonable, and their ceremonies more natural and serious; on all which accounts they were eminently distinguished above all other nations.” Since he thought the Natchez were so different from their “neighbouring nations”, he “was inclined to believe that they were not originally of the country which they then inhabited.” When he asked the Natchez about their origins, they told him that, “‘Before we came into this land we lived yonder under the sun,’ (pointing with his finger nearly south west, by which I understood that he meant *Mexico*.)” Le Page du Pratz, *The history of Louisiana, or of the western parts of Virginia and Carolina: containing a description of the countries that lye on both sides of the river Missisipi: [sic] with an account of the settlements, ... Translated from the French, ... by M. Le Page du Pratz; with some notes and observations ... In two volumes. ...* (London, 1763), 109-110, 144, 161.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre-François-Xavier Charlevoix, *Charlevoix’s Louisiana: Selections from the History and the Journal*, ed. Charles E. O’Neill (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 141-151, 154. For an analysis of how Charlevoix used Le Page du Pratz and Dumont as sources see Gordon M. Sayre, *The Indian Chief as Tragic Hero: Native Resistance and the Literatures of America, from Moctezuma to Tecumseh* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 206-207. After the publication of Charlevoix’s *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France avec le Journal Historique d’un Voyage fait par ordre du Roi dans l’Amérique Septentrionale* (1744), Charlevoix became a major source for those who did not have access to the original sources.

Americas changed over time, the desire to compare them remained strong until the twentieth century.

The earliest reference to the Natchez in European intellectual discourse, outside of specific histories of Louisiana, comes from a history of the Americas written by a historian of the Scottish Enlightenment. In 1777 William Robertson published his two-volume *History of America* in which, among other things, he compares the Natchez to the indigenous peoples of Bogota. His comparison reflects the influences of Le Page du Pratz, as well as an older genealogy of European thought concerning Native American origins, and the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>16</sup>

From the earliest attempts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to unravel human origins in the Americas, Europeans relied on Biblical information for clues about ancient history. Different theories attempted to establish links between Native Americans to the Lost Tribes of Israel, the Tower of Babel, the Devil, and to classic civilizations of antiquity.<sup>17</sup> In the eighteenth century, origin theories changed as religious arguments came under question by many in the Enlightenment. However, while most *philosophes* critiqued aspects of Christianity, most all continued to base theories of Native American origins on the idea of a “monogenetic origin of humanity,” or the idea that all humans came from Adam and Eve. Robertson accepted the fundamental assumption of monogenetic human origins in his *History of America*, writing that “We know, with infallible certainty, that all the human race spring from the same source, and that the descendants of one man, under the protection, as well as in obedience to the command of Heaven, multiplied and replenished the earth.”<sup>18</sup> However, to explain global human diversity, Robertson reasoned that the environment must be responsible for human change over time and could explain Native American origins.<sup>19</sup> *Philosophes* like Robertson explained Native American diversity as a result of and a response to physical geography, implying that all “men were created equal by their Creator.”<sup>20</sup> Most European intellectuals in the eighteenth century agreed on the original equality of humans under God, but they also saw themselves as superior to other people in the world, which required a new rationale to justify racial hierarchy.

---

<sup>16</sup> William Robertson, *The History of the Discovery and Settlement of America* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1856); Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, trans. Jeremy Carden (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 90-96; David Armitage, “The New World in British Historical Thought: From Richard Hakluyt to William Robertson”, in *America in European Consciousness, 1493-1750*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 52-75.

<sup>17</sup> Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian*, 34-38; Lee E. Huddleston, *Origins of the American Indians: European Concepts, 1492-1729* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967).

<sup>18</sup> Robertson, *The History of the Discovery*, 129-130. On monogenism see Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 9-11.

<sup>19</sup> While the use of the physical environment as an explanation of human diversity dates back as far as the ancient Greeks, “as a way of analyzing the place of the American Indians among the races of man it was particularly characteristic of Enlightenment thought.” Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian*, 38.

<sup>20</sup> Robertson was a strong advocate of the environment as the causal factor in human diversity, he writes that “we should only conclude that the disposition and manners of men are formed by their situation, and arise from their situation.” “Situation” can be read as “environment.” Robertson, *The History of the Discovery*, 131. The idea of equality under the Creator particularly appealed to Americans like Thomas Jefferson: Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian*, 42.

The conquest of the Americas and the Renaissance in Europe fueled ethnocentrism and the belief that European culture and history was superior to other cultures past and present. Western European thinkers began to see their own history as one of rational progression from the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome to the great scientific achievements of Galileo and Newton. Since the Renaissance, Europeans sought to understand classical societies to better understand their ancient roots and their own progress. During the seventeenth century, scholars made direct comparisons between classical societies and their own to construct arguments supporting the triumph of modern Europeans. Colonists in the Americas continued the tradition of comparison in the eighteenth century, but instead of comparing Europeans to the ancients, they compared the ancients to Native Americans.<sup>21</sup> However, Robertson was critical of drawing connections between indigenous Americans and people from the “old” world to solve the question of American origins and instead sought to draw links between different groups in the Americas.<sup>22</sup> Regardless of the type of comparison, the logic of comparison promoted a sense of human history in which, like the human body, all human societies grew from “savagery” or “barbarism” to (European) “civilization.”<sup>23</sup>

Robertson’s *The History of America* helped to codify, naturalize, and popularize a sense of human history as progress and of European societies as the penultimate

---

<sup>21</sup> Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian*, 45-47. For examples of French colonists who compared Native Americans encountered in Canada to ancient civilizations see Marc Lescarbot, *Histoire de La Nouvelle France* (London: Eliot’s Court Press, 1609); Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, 21-34; Joseph Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages Amériquains comparée aux mœurs des premiers temps* (Paris: Chez Saugrain l’aîné et Chez C.-E. Hochereau, 1724). Indeed, Robertson cites Lafitau (and Charlevoix) frequently throughout his text. For more on the French influence on Robertson and the Scottish Enlightenment see Bruce P. Lenman, “‘From savage to Scot’ via the French and the Spaniards: Principal Robertson’s Spanish sources” in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, ed. Stewart J. Brown (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1997). For a broader look at the cross currents of thought between France and Scotland during the Enlightenment, see Deidre Dawson and Pierre Morère, eds., *Scotland and France in the Enlightenment* (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp., 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Robertson writes that, “Nothing can be more frivolous or uncertain than the attempts to discover the original of the Americans merely by tracing the resemblance between their manners and those of any particular people in the ancient continent.” He argues that if “A tribe of savages on the banks of the Danube” resembles people “upon the plains washed by the Mississippi” it is because they share similar environments or “situations,” not a similar biological, cultural, social or political heritage. He writes, “we should only conclude that the disposition and manners of men are formed by their situation, and arise from the state of society in which they live,” Robertson, *The History of the Discovery*, 131. Later, Thomas Jefferson thought about Native American origins in way similar to Robertson: Sheehan, “The Quest for Indian Origins,” 35.

<sup>23</sup> The idea of human progress from barbarism to civilization was not a new idea in the eighteenth century. Spanish writers like Las Casas, Torquemada and Acosta wrote in a similar vein. However, I agree with Berkhofer that the “intellectual context that gave real meaning to such a sequenced did not develop until the latter half of the eighteenth century. Only under assumptions of a common and constant human nature, the uniform workings of immutable laws in human affairs, and the abstraction of the natural from the accidental in history could thinkers of the time compare customs among widely divergent lifestyles, range them into a series of gradations, and present them as the history of all human development and achievement,” Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian*, 47-48; Anthony Pagden, *The fall of natural man: The American Indian and the origins of comparative ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

fulfillment of this progress.<sup>24</sup> Adam Smith's structures of "stadial history" or "conjectural history" in which Smith organized all human history into developmental stages based on the nature and ownership of property directly influenced Robertson. Smith distinguished "barbarous" societies where private property did not exist from nomadic, agricultural, and commercial societies where it did. He examined the causes and consequences of changes in notions of private property to create a line of human progress from its "rude" or "barbaric" state to its "civilized" commercial state.<sup>25</sup> Robertson applied Smith's "stadial" notion of human history progressing through stages of private property development to his analysis of the Spanish colonization of the Americas and the Native peoples found there.<sup>26</sup> In Robertson's assessment, Native Americans were at the very bottom of the stadial progression of human history primarily because of their undeveloped notions of private property. Even when Robertson encountered contrary evidence, he consistently positioned Native Americans at the bottom rungs of his stadial hierarchy.<sup>27</sup> However, like most accounts about Native Americans during the eighteenth century, Robertson grappled with where to place the Aztecs and the Incas along the line of savagery to civilization. The Mexican and Peruvian empires resisted easy categorization as "savage," since they exhibited many characteristics similar to European or "civilized" societies.<sup>28</sup> Most resolved this tension by placing the Aztecs and Incas slightly higher along the line of progress than other Native Americans. Robertson did the same but went further because he also connected the Natchez to the Mexican and Peruvian empires.

Robertson placed the Natchez somewhere below the level of the Aztecs but above the majority of all other "rude" people in North America. In accordance with his belief in the environment as a causal factor in human diversity, Robertson observed that Native cultures became more "civilized" in warmer climates, writing that "if we proceed from north to south along the continent of America, we shall find the power of those vested

---

<sup>24</sup> Karen O'Brien notes that while Robertson was not the first to think of human history along a single line of progress, his very "plausibility and eloquence," in *History of America* is what made his work so popular and enduring. Karen O'Brien, "Robertson's place in the development of eighteenth-century narrative history," in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, ed. Stewart J. Brown (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1997), 89; Murray G. H. Pittock, "Historiography," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 258-279.

<sup>25</sup> Nicholas Phillipson, "Providence and progress: an introduction to the historical thought of William Robertson," in *William Robertson*, 59; Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 6-9, 45-71; Lenman, "'From savage to Scot,'" 199-200.

<sup>26</sup> For a more nuanced review of when Robertson employs the "conjectural history" model and when he relies on "empirical history," see H. M. Höpfl, "From Savage to Scotsman: Conjectural History in the Scottish Enlightenment," *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1978), 19-40. While this paper focuses on the Native American parts of *History of America*, for more of Robertson's critiques of the Spanish empire see Phillipson, "Providence and progress", 62-63; O'Brien, "Robertson's place", 89-90; J. R. Smitten, "Impartiality in Robertson's *History of America*", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 19 (1985-6), 56-77. Bruce Lenman offers a fresh argument that, indeed, Robertson wrote against the Spanish Black Legend, even though he also concerned himself with pointing out flaws of Spanish colonization in regards to private property, Lenman, "'From savage to Scot,'" 207.

<sup>27</sup> Lenman, "'From savage to Scot,'" 207-208.

<sup>28</sup> Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 96-101; Phillipson, "Providence and progress, 67-68; Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 48-49.

with authority gradually increasing, and the spirit of the people becoming more tame and passive.” Since the Natchez lived in the warmer southern climate of North America, it made sense to Robertson that the Natchez would be similar to the civilizations in Mesoamerica.<sup>29</sup>

The specific characteristics that distinguished the Natchez from other indigenous North Americans and what made the Natchez appear to Robertson more like the empires of the Americas were their political institutions and religious practices. The power of hereditary chiefs with absolute monarchical power appealed to Robertson’s sensibilities, writing that “Among the Natchez, a powerful tribe now extinct ... a difference of rank took place, with which the northern tribes were altogether unacquainted. Some families were reputed noble, and enjoyed hereditary dignity.”<sup>30</sup> Robertson compares the “perfect despotism” of the Natchez to other Native governments in Hispaniola and Bogota, highlighting especially the connections between the people of Bogota and the Natchez. He writes:

The subjection of the Natchez, and of the people of Bogota, seems to have been the consequence of a difference in their state from that of the other Americans. They were settled nations, residing constantly in one place. Hunting was not the chief occupation of the former, and the latter seem hardly to have trusted to it for any part of their subsistence. Both had made such progress in agriculture and arts that the idea of property was introduced in some degree in the one community, and fully established in the other.

Robertson reveals the primary reasons why he views the Natchez and the people of Bogota as more advanced than other Native Americans. Robertson favored them because both were “settled nations,” both relied on agriculture and not hunting, and most importantly, both developed notions of private property, all of which provided the basis for the “unbounded” power of their rulers—the backbone of an orderly society. But political power alone was not enough for Robertson. The power of Natchez leaders in spiritual matters also impressed him, noting that

power and prerogative was exercised by the great chief of the Natchez, as the principal minister as well as the representative of the Sun, their deity. The respect which the people of Bogota paid to their monarchs was likewise inspired by religion, and the heir apparent of the kingdom was educated in the inner most recess of their principal temple, under such austere discipline, and with such peculiar rites, as tended to fill his subjects with high sentiments concerning the sanctity of his character and the dignity of his station.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Robertson, *The History of the Discovery*, 166.

<sup>30</sup> Of course the Natchez were not extinct. This was not the last person to erroneously label the Natchez “extinct.” On the connections between the Natchez and the people of Bogota, he writes that they “had advanced beyond the other uncultivated nations of America in their ideas of religion, as well as their political institutions,” Robertson, *The History of the Discovery*, 164, 182.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

The hierarchical, rigid, and elaborate structures of the religion, while not Christian, showed to Robertson advancement along his stadial line of history. In sum, Robertson's suggestion that the Natchez and the people of Bogota were related historically to each other is based on his perceptions of their similar economic, political and religious practices. His argument that the Natchez were linked to other empires in the Americas differed from Le Page du Pratz's earlier suggestion that they were related to the indigenous people of Mexico. However, the impulse to draw comparisons between the Natchez and other Native Americans continued to steer the way Europeans and Americans thought about Natchez history.<sup>32</sup>

The Scottish geographer John Pinkerton was next to offer comparisons between the Natchez and other groups, including new comparisons made with Incas and Africans. Pinkerton wrote *Modern Geography* in 1804, an early geography of entire world. While he spends only 187 pages or about 13% of his entire work on the Americas, he does mention the Natchez on three different occasions.<sup>33</sup> The first mention introduces the Natchez as the "chief tribe in North America," second only to "the Mexicans."<sup>34</sup> Like Robertson, Pinkerton saw the Natchez as being higher on the rungs of human progress (stadial history) than other North American Native groups, but also lower than the Aztecs. In a section on South America, Pinkerton parts ways from his contemporaries and Robertson to suggest that all Native Americans come from Africa, and not Asia. He uses a story about the Natchez taken from Le Page du Pratz, that they "came from the rising sun, or the east, that the voyage was long, and their ancestors on the point of perishing when they discovered America," as evidence that indigenous Americans came from Africa rather than Asia.<sup>35</sup> Pinkerton also compared the Natchez to the Incas, rather than to the peoples of Bogota or Mexico. In a section in which he compares the Aztecs to the Incas in order to illustrate the Incas as more "civilized" than the Aztecs, he also compares the Incas to the Natchez. When discussing how Incan "superstition" led to the sacrifice of "numerous victims on the death of a chief, and a favourite monarch was sometimes followed to the tomb by a thousand slaughtered servants," Pinkerton suggests in a footnote that the Natchez had a "system somewhat similar" to the Incas. He draws connections between Incan funerary sacrifices and a scene described by Le Page du Pratz in which at the death of a Great Sun, the community ritually sacrificed all his wives and some of his servants to accompany him to the afterlife.<sup>36</sup> While Pinkerton's arguments

---

<sup>32</sup> Robertson's *History of America* was very influential in the United States, far more than just its content about the Natchez. For example, Thomas Jefferson, and many other prominent Americans, were avid fans of Robertson's work. Jefferson used it when he was Secretary of State to help craft U.S. Indian policy, Lenman, "From savage to Scot", 209; Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 48-49; B. W. Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jefferson Philanthropy and the American Indian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973).

<sup>33</sup> John Pinkerton, *Modern Geography: a description of the empires, kingdoms, states and colonies, with the oceans, seas, and isles, in all parts of the world, including the most recent discoveries and political alterations* (Philadelphia: J. Conrad & Co., 1804); O. F. G. Sitwell, "John Pinkerton: An Armchair Geographer of the Early Nineteenth Century," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 138, No. 4 (1972), 470-479; Robert Mayhew, "British Geography's Republic of Letters: Mapping an Imagined Community, 1600-1800," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (2005), 251-276.

<sup>34</sup> Pinkerton, *Modern Geography*, 503.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 519.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 533-534.

about African origins did not hold up over time, his comparisons of the Natchez to the Incas reveals the protean nature of thought about Natchez history as comparisons between the Natchez and the peoples of Mexico shifted to comparisons made with Bogota and then with the Incas.

In the newly created United States, debates over Native American origins and history became quite popular during the early nineteenth century. Led by men like Thomas Jefferson, Americans began to research and write extensively about pre-contact Native American history and the origin(s) of humans in the Americas.<sup>37</sup> One prominent natural philosopher and friend to Jefferson wrote an important book in 1817 that was cited by later American scholars of Natchez history for most of the nineteenth century. Influenced by the writing of earlier Europeans, James McCulloh argued that Native Americans shared a similar origin with many other world civilizations from the tower of Babel. Comparing “the religious edifices of Babylon, Egypt, Hindostan, and Mexico,” McCulloh claimed they had “such analogies to each other as must convince any one, they are all derived from one and the same model: *which model* appears to be the same as that by which the tower of Babel was built.” McCulloh includes more world civilizations, “Hindoos, old Persians, Ethiopians, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Tuscans, Scythians or Goths, Celts, Chinese, Japanese, and *Peruvians*,” and argues they “had an immemorial connexion with one another; and as there appear no reason for believing that they were a colony from any one of those nations, or any of those nations from them, we may fairly conclude that they all proceeded from the same common central country.”<sup>38</sup> While earlier European thinkers like Robertson had made a similar point, many later American writers cite only McCulloh’s work rather than Robertson to establish the fundamental premise that all people must have come from the same (biblical) source.

Ten years after McCulloh published his ideas, the British author John Ranking argued that the source culture of American civilizations derived from the thirteenth century Mongolian conquest of the Americas and not the Tower of Babel.<sup>39</sup> Ranking asserted that Mongolian armies that conquered most of Eurasia during the thirteenth century also conquered the Americas, including “Peru, Mexico, Bogota, Natchez, and Talomeco.” Ranking’s work was most influenced by Robertson’s *History of America* and Pinkerton’s *Modern Geography*. He cites them directly when writing about the Natchez,

---

<sup>37</sup> Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian*, 42; Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction*. For a general examination Jefferson and his contemporaries ideas on Native American origins see Bernard W. Sheehan, “The Quest for Indian Origins in the Thought of the Jeffersonian Era,” *Midcontinent American Studies Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1968), 34-51.

<sup>38</sup> James H. McCulloh, *Researches on America: Being an Attempt to Settle some Points Relative to Aborigines of America, &c* (Baltimore: Joseph Robinson, 1817), 137, 177.

<sup>39</sup> John Ranking, *Historical Researches on the Conquest of Peru, Mexico, Bogota, Natchez, and Talomeco, In the Thirteenth Century, by The Mongols, accompanied with Elephants* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1827). Ranking’s arguments rely on rough comparisons between Native Americans and Mongolians based on a number of sources, including Marco Polo and the great Incan chronicler, Garcilaso de la Vega. Ranking relies on Vega for the key evidence connecting the Mongolians to Peru. He quotes a lengthy story from Vega about the coming of giants to Peru long before Europeans arrived and argues that the “giants” who “came ashore” were actually elephants carrying Mongolian invaders, Ranking, *Historical Researches*, 51-54; Garcilaso de la Vega, *Royal Commentaries of the Incas and General History of Peru*, ed. Karen Spalding, trans. Harold V. Livermore (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2006).

offering long quoted passages straight from both Robertson and Pinkerton's narratives. However, Ranking does not cite McCulloh, revealing a divergence in thought about the Natchez between Europe and America at this time. Ranking also writes about the exact same groups of Native Americans that Robertson did but with a new angle. The Mongolian invasion argument was Ranking's attempt to explain some of the connections between disparate Native Americans that are suggested Robertson's *History of America*.<sup>40</sup>

Starting in the 1830s, the decade of the Trail of Tears, American anthropologists began to build upon the arguments of Robertson, Pinkerton, Ranking and others. Some anthropologists used ideas about the Natchez as fodder for arguments supporting the birth of scientific racism. The highly influential, and now controversial Samuel George Morton included the Natchez in his *Crania Americana* (1839). Morton classified humankind into four distinct races that could be distinguished by skull size, among many other characteristics. Morton measured the skull sizes of different "races" to defend his argument that whites were distinct and superior to other races.<sup>41</sup> In the section on the Native American "race," Morton begins with a discussion of Native peoples in Peru and Mexico. He then moves to discuss the Natchez, privileging them before any discussion of any other Native American group from North America. Based on some historical research and a comparison of flattened skulls from Mexico and Natchez, he argues that the Natchez had originally "migrated from Mexico" and that, they "were a branch of the great Toltecan family".<sup>42</sup> Morton cites McCulloh when suggesting links between the Natchez and the Mexican empire, but he does not cite or reference Robertson. Morton argues that there are "obvious analogies" between the Natchez and Toltecs because both share a "worship of the sun, the practice of human sacrifices on the death of eminent persons, hereditary distinctions, and fixed institutions, in which respect they differed from all of the other nations" found in the Americas. Like Robertson, the Natchez were

---

<sup>40</sup> Ranking writes, "Bogota and Natchez bear irresistible indications of being likewise Mongol settlements" but does not offer any evidence to defend his assertion, claiming that it would take too much space and it would "swell his work with more researches than were necessary to establish his point." Ranking, *Researches on America*, 17-18, 254-257.

<sup>41</sup> Samuel George Morton, *Crania Americana: or, Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North & South America* (Philadelphia: Dobson, 1839), American Philosophical Society (hereafter APS). There has been much contemporary debate between scholars over Morton's data and his scientific methods. The evolutionary biologist Jay Gould offered the first major critique, arguing that Morton's methods were biased by his racial views and that he intentionally faked evidence to fit his arguments, Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1981). Since Gould's groundbreaking work, scientists have revisited the debate and revealed Gould's own bias. Jason Lewis et al, "The Mismeasure of Science: Stephen Jay Gould versus Samuel George Morton on Skulls and Bias," *Plos Biology*, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011. <http://www.plosbiology.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pbio.1001071>. Scholars generally agree now that Morton's description of a hierarchy of distinct human races is inaccurate and that his ideology of racial hierarchy shaped his interpretation of the data. Kenan Malik, "The science of seeing what you want to see," *Göteborgs-posten*, 24 June 2011, [http://www.kenanmalik.com/essays/gp\\_gould.html](http://www.kenanmalik.com/essays/gp_gould.html).

<sup>42</sup> Morton compares the practice of skull modifications among Native Americans to draw connections between the Natchez and other Native people. He writes, "The practice of artificially moulding the head, varied, it is true, according to fancy, [and] has been traced from Peru into Venezuela, and thence into Nicaragua as matter of fact; and we also find the Natchez and other tribes originally from Mexico addicted to the same usage," Morton, *Crania Americana*, 147, APS.

an anomaly for Morton that could only be explained by connecting the Natchez to other great civilizations in the Americas. Unlike Robertson, Morton compared the Natchez to people in Mexico rather than Bogota, echoing the early suggestions of Le Page du Pratz. Regardless of who he compared the Natchez to, Morton agreed with the fundamental premise of others before him, that the Natchez were partially civilized and that comparisons could reveal ancient links between the indigenous people of the Americas. However, while Robertson relied on rhetoric and the use of “logical” comparisons between the people of the world, past and present, to suggest a hierarchy of civilizations, Morton used science to cement these comparisons as verifiable fact. In effect, Morton’s science “proved” Robertson’s stadial view of history that explained and justified racial hierarchy.

Morton’s arguments about the Toltec-Natchez connection drove debates about the Natchez in the American academe for the rest of the nineteenth century. For example, J. F. H. Claiborne, the “Father of Mississippi History,” included long sections about Natchez history in his epic *Mississippi, as a Province, Territory and State, with Biographical Notices of Eminent Citizens* (1880). Although he does not cite Morton, he must have read his work because he mimics Morton’s arguments about Natchez links to the Toltecs, writing that Natchez “religion was brutal and bloody, indicating an Aztec origin.” Claiborne’s writing also reveals evidence of the hardening of ideas about race in America, ideas driven by Morton’s scientific racism. Claiborne refutes the opinion of early French writers like Le Page du Pratz and Chateaubriand that the Natchez were “a semi-civilized and noble race, that has passed into history.” He says these French writers “often drew upon their fancy for their facts” and insists that among the Natchez, there are “no traces of civilization in their architecture, or in their social life and customs.”<sup>43</sup> Claiborne was unique among writers of his time to completely dismiss any notion of Natchez “semi-civilization.” Perhaps this was because he was a historian and not an anthropologist. For in the burgeoning field of anthropology, the idea that the Natchez were slightly above “savagery” continued to dominate discourse on Natchez history.

In 1886, the American anthropologist E. L. Berthoud took up the question of Natchez origins in “A Sketch of the Natchez Indians.” He addresses several theories of Natchez origins, including Morton’s argument about the Toltecs. He also analyzes the merits of an Aztec-Natchez connection as well as comparisons to South American Native peoples. More interesting than the minutiae of these old debates, Berthoud seems to have a level of self-reflection not found in other non-Natchez scholars. He declares:

Their qualified barbarism, an apparent enhanced civilization, compared to the other wild tribes of that [Mississippi] valley, their peculiar religious belief, and sanguinary religious and mortuary sacrifices, their worship of the Sun, their temples and their admitted mental superiority have proved

---

<sup>43</sup> J. F. H. Claiborne, *Mississippi, as a Province, Territory and State, with Biographical Notices of Eminent Citizens*, Volume I, (Jackson, MS: Power & Barksdale, Publishers and Printers, 1880).

for the Antiquarian and Historian to be full of interest, and the ground-work for many theories of pre-historic derivation.<sup>44</sup>

Berthoud argues that it is the exotic details of the Natchez (mostly taken from the work of the Le Page du Pratz) that inspired so much interest in historian and antiquarian alike. The same stories that attracted Chateaubriand also attracted the attention of American anthropologists. Berthoud's belief that the "extinct" Natchez were a "brilliant and partially civilized race of savages" is precisely why he had so much interest in them. Like Morton, Robertson, and many others, the Natchez fascinated Berthoud because they were seen to be "partially civilized."

Five years later, Howard A. Giddings published a short piece on the Natchez in *Popular Science Monthly*. Reviewing material already presented by other scholars, Giddings offered a now familiar narrative of the Natchez that relies on the perceived notion of Natchez "demi-civilization." He writes about Natchez sun worship, the power of the Great Suns, and the four "classes" of Natchez people. He quotes extensively from the writings of Le Page du Pratz as well as citing information from McCulloh's early work on Native American origins. However, Giddings does not mention the Toltecs. While clearly influenced by previous thinkers, Giddings's arguments foreshadowed the entrance of a new era of American thought that continued to operate within a logic of human stadial history but was less interested in making comparisons between the Natchez and other empires in the Americas.<sup>45</sup>

### History and Anthropology, 20<sup>th</sup> century

At the turn of the twentieth century, the relationship between American anthropology and ideas about the Natchez shifted from a fascination with their "qualified barbarism" to an interest in cataloguing and compiling information on the Natchez before they "disappeared."<sup>46</sup> James Mooney's "The End of the Natchez" (1899) exemplifies this shift in American anthropology. Unlike his predecessors, Mooney begins his essay with the assertion that there were still living Natchez at the time of his writing, maybe

---

<sup>44</sup> Edward L. Berthoud, *A Sketch of the Natchez Indians* (Golden, CO: Transcript Book and Job Print, 1886), Huntington Library. In 1899, James Mooney made a similar observation that the Natchez received a "peculiar interest" because of "their strongly centralized government and highly developed religious ceremonial," and "while their heroic resistance to the French, and their final destruction as nation, lend their history a tinge of romance which writers have been quick to appreciate," James Mooney, "The End of the Natchez," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (July, 1899): 510.

<sup>45</sup> Howard A. Giddings, "The Natchez Indians," *Popular Science Monthly* 39 (1891): 201-207, <https://archive.org/details/popularsciencemo39newy>. The fascination with sun rituals, the powers of Suns, and the organizing of four classes of people continues to fascinate non-Natchez to this day. For a contemporary example of this fascination see George Franklin Feldman, *Cannibalism, Headhunting and Human Sacrifice in North America: A History Forgotten* (Chambersburg, PA: Alan C. Hood & Co., Inc., 2008), 1-15. Feldman is most fascinated by Native practices of violence during the colonial period and relies on the same material from Le Page du Pratz that everyone else uses.

<sup>46</sup> An American obsession with capturing the "vanishing" Native American before they disappeared is not unique to the Natchez. For a similar cases study in New England: Jean M. O'Brien, "Vanishing' Indians in Nineteenth Century New England," in *New Perspectives on Native North America: Cultures, Histories, and Representations*, eds. Sergei A. Kan and Pauline Turner Strong (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 414-432. For an early rebuttal to the idea of the disappearing Native American see Brewton Berry, "The Myth of the Vanishing Indian," *Phylon*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1960): 51-57.

“twenty.” He reviews French and Natchez history to 1730 and then, towards the end of the essay, offers a number of tantalizing historical references to Natchez living among the Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and in Oklahoma and South Carolina. However, while Mooney acknowledges that Natchez still lived at the time of his writing, the intention of the essay is to convey the importance of locating living Natchez before their eventual and inevitable “end.”<sup>47</sup>

After Mooney anthropologists like John Swanton became more interested in locating and interviewing living Natchez speakers. After conducting ethnographic research among some Natchez in Oklahoma, Swanton wrote a book about Native Americans in the Lower Mississippi Valley in which he spends over two-thirds reviewing Natchez history. He spoke to five Natchez speakers, including Creek Sam, Wat Sam, Charlie Jumper, Lizzie Rooster, and Nancy Taylor. However, the majority of Swanton’s study is a review of written sources from the colonial period.<sup>48</sup> Of the seventy pages Swanton spends on Natchez “history since white contact,” the first sixty-five pages cover the years from 1682-1731, while the last five pages cover Natchez history from 1731-1910. The short attention paid to Natchez history after they left their homelands is because Swanton believed that the Natchez were “practically extinct, but thanks to their peculiar manners and customs and the romance and tragedy surrounding their last war with the French they have probably attained a fame which many existing tribes will never enjoy.”<sup>49</sup> Swanton recognized that there were living Natchez in the twentieth century, but they were less important to him than his analysis of the “romantic” and “tragic” encounter with the French in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>50</sup> While recognizing that previous accounts frequently romanticized Natchez history, Swanton’s framing of the Natchez past and his privileging of the early eighteenth century repeat the same patterns of romanticization and exotification as those before him.

Since Swanton, there has been an enormous amount of material written about the Natchez, almost entirely focused on Natchez history before French contact to the 1730s.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Mooney, “The End of the Natchez,” 510-521.

<sup>48</sup> Like most others before him, Swanton includes pages-long excerpts from Le Page du Pratz.

<sup>49</sup> John Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley and Adjacent Coast of the Gulf of Mexico*. Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 43 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 2, 257. Like Berthoud, Swanton recognized that the earlier comparisons of the Natchez to the Aztecs and the Quechua of Peru effectively “surrounded” the Natchez in “glamour... with the result that the true Natchez tribe has become almost unknown.”

<sup>50</sup> The phenomenon of consulting living Native peoples and then downplaying their survival in order to narrate their disappearance is not isolated to the southeast, O’Brien, “‘Vanishing’ Indians in Nineteenth Century New England,” 415.

<sup>51</sup> For the most up-to-date review of Natchez scholarship on this early period see Barnett, *The Natchez Indians*. For a sample of key archaeological and historical inquiries see George Edward Milne, “Picking up the Pieces: Natchez Coalescence in the Shatter Zone” in *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South*, eds. Robbie Ethridge and Sheri M. Shuck-Hall (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 388-417; Lorenz, Karl G, “A Re-Examination of Natchez Sociopolitical Complexity: A View from the Grand Village and Beyond,” *Southeastern Archaeology* 16 (Winter 1997): 97-112; Karl G. Lorenz, “The Natchez of Southwest Mississippi,” 142-177; Daniel H. Usner Jr., “French-Natchez Borderlands in Colonial Louisiana” in *American Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley: Social and Economic Histories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 15-32; Ian W. Brown “Certain Aspects of French-Indian Interaction in Lower Louisiana,” in *Calumet & Fleur-de-Lys: Archaeology of Indian and French Contact in the Midcontinent*,

In 2007, Jim Barnett published the first comprehensive survey of Natchez history to 1735, incorporating extensive research done in the twentieth century. However, while he writes in the epilogue about Natchez communities living today, including a mention of specific people like Hutke Fields (the present Great Sun of the Natchez), the back dust jacket cover reads, “The most complete and detailed examination of a vanished tribe.”<sup>52</sup> Clearly it continues to be profitable to market the idea of the “vanishing Indian,” even while the author writes about the continued existence of Natchez people.

The appeal of the violent Natchez encounter with the French still has influence today upon non-academics as well. In *Nankowetco: A Natchez Odyssey* two public historians offer a fictionalized account of the Natchez and French encounter in the early 1700s.<sup>53</sup> In their version, the main character is Le Page du Pratz and he is Natchez, not French. The authors completely erase any problems with documentation and use Le Page du Pratz’s writings uncritically. Perhaps the novel acts as a fulfillment of Chateaubriand’s dream to join or become one with the Natchez as it brings the French outsider, Le Page du Pratz, to the center of the Natchez story.<sup>54</sup> Again, Natchez history is less important than romanticizing what the Natchez might have been like. Coming full circle, this novel reveals that there is still a strong impulse in Americans to romanticize the Natchez past, while still not recognizing the impact of that past on Natchez people today.

The legacy of ideas concerning Natchez history continues to influence contemporary thought. *Nankowetco* and the genealogical webpage of Adams County, MS, described at the beginning of the essay, clearly illustrate the lasting impact of debunked ideas and how they continue to impact the way people think about Natchez history. The Natchez received a remarkable amount of attention by past European and American thinkers and have appeared in some of the foundational works of Western thought, while simultaneously being denied coevalness. The Natchez are mentioned and discussed in the great works of Enlightenment historiography (Robertson), literary Romanticism (Chateaubriand), early geography (Pinkerton), U.S. Indian Policy

---

eds. John A. Walthall and Thomas E. Emerson (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992): 17-34; Ian W. Brown, “Natchez Indians and the Remains of a Proud Past,” in *Natchez before 1830*, ed. Noel Polk, 8-28 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989); Ian W. Brown, *Natchez Indian Archaeology: Culture Change and Stability in the Lower Mississippi Valley*, Archaeological Report No. 15 (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1985); Jeffrey P. Brain, “Late Prehistoric Settlement Patterning in the Yazoo Basin and Natchez Bluffs Regions of the Lower Mississippi Valley,” in *Mississippian Settlement Patterns*, ed. Bruce D. Smith, 331-368 (New York: Academic Press, 1978); Robert S. Neitzel, *Archaeology of the Fatherland Site: The Grand Village of the Natchez* (New York: Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, Volume 51, 1965); Robert S. Neitzel, *The Grand Village of the Natchez Revisited: Excavations at the Fatherland Site, Adams County, Mississippi, 1972*. Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Archaeological Report, No. 12. (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1983).

<sup>52</sup> Barnett, *The Natchez*. The last sentence in Barnett’s epilogue about contemporary Natchez is, “In the tragic aftermath of the Natchez Rebellion of 1729, the Natchez Indians vanished as a people; however, their descendants have not relinquished their tribal identity.” My question then is, if they will not relinquish their identity, how are they “vanished”?

<sup>53</sup> Christovich and Toledano, *Nankowetco*.

<sup>54</sup> The novel *Nankowetco* fits within a centuries-old American habit of “playing Indian,” Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Deloria argues that, for most Americans, there was “no way to conceive an American identity without Indians. At the same time, there was no way to make a complete identity while they remained” (37).

## 72 End of the Natchez?

(Jefferson), scientific racism (Morton), and twentieth century “salvage” anthropology (Swanton). While the Natchez struggle for Federal Recognition to access funds for important programs such housing, social services, and language revitalization, many Americans seem content to regurgitate false ideas about the Natchez without ever acknowledging that the Natchez survive. In order for a full of the history of the Natchez to be written, the scholarship on the Natchez must begin to address its problematic intellectual roots and also recognize that Natchez history, indeed, continues after 1731.