Frontier Port on the Mississippi: a History of the Legend of Natchez Under-The-Hill, 1800-1900

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FRONTIER PORT ON THE MISSISSIPPI:
A HISTORY OF THE LEGEND OF
NATCHEZ UNDER-THE-HILL, 1800-1900

A Thesis
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Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
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in
The Department of History

by
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B.S., University of Southern Mississippi, 1971
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ABSTRACT

Natchez Under-the-Hill, from 1800 to 1840 the second leading river port on the Mississippi, played a central role in the economic life of the Old Southwestern frontier. Despite this, it was chiefly known to contemporaries in both America and abroad as a center of intemperance, prostitution, gambling, and violence.

During the antebellum years this image of the Natchez waterfront was a symbol of the Myth of the Wild and Savage West, which assumed Westerners were violent, immoral, and uncivilized. The lawlessness and vice of the port, widely touted in travel journals and newspapers, provided evidence to non-westerners that their perceptions were correct.

From 1800 to c.1835 the major contributors of such "evidence" were traveler-journalists. While most focused upon the port's social vices, few provided details sufficient to prove lawlessness was actually a significant attribute of its society. However, their primary effect was to fix the image of the Natchez landing in the national mind. Beginning c. 1830, under the influence of the frontier tradition, this image evolved into a legend emphasizing gambling and violence due largely to its long association with the gamblers of the Mississippi Valley. The identification of the port and the gamblers in this tradition was
assured by two events: the violent expulsion of the gamblers from Vicksburg and Natchez in 1835 and the tornado of 1840 which destroyed the landing town.

Between 1865 and c.1900 the legend was virtually forgotten as a result of the influence of the genteel tradition and the Old South myth which required the suppression of all traditions that countered its own rosy view of the Southern past.

This study concludes that what was written about Natchez Under-the-Hill in that period has less to do with the facts than with the myths by which Americans and others interpreted the experience of the young nation.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Natchy-under-hill, where all things destined for the upper region are landed.

-- Tyrone Power, 1836

Between 1790 and 1830, the Port of Natchez, Mississippi—popularly known as "Natchez under-the-Hill"—was the primary collection point for the raw staples of the Natchez country, principally cotton, which were shipped by wagon or boat to Natchez, purchased by Natchez factors, stored in Natchez warehouses, and transshipped, first to New Orleans, and then to the distant markets of the American East Coast or Europe. The port was also the primary entrepot and distribution point of the manufactured goods of the American East and Europe as well as of the largely agricultural staples of the upper Mississippi Valley imported by

1Tyrone Power, Impressions of America During the Years 1833, 1834, and 1835 (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Carey Lea & Blanchard, 1836), II, p. 108.

2While there were exceptions to this scenario, accomplished primarily by the region's big planters who could often afford direct shipments to Europe and thereby earn greater profits, this was the prevalent pattern of Natchez' export trade throughout the antebellum period. Even many of the planters who engaged in direct trade probably used the Natchez port facilities in the process.
the people of the District. In addition, there is reason to believe that Natchez was also the primary transshipment point for goods originating upriver and destined for the markets of the Louisiana Red River country. Supporting this view is the fact that downriver freight rates were cheaper than upriver rates, and Natchez was better positioned vis-a-vis the Red River Country than was New Orleans to take advantage of this differential. Then, too, as the first major port of call on the Mississippi south of Louisville in the years prior to the mid-1820's, Natchez was the first market in which the boatmen of the Ohio and Mississippi valleys could sell their wares; and, especially when demand was up due to high cotton prices and immigration, Natchez wholesale prices were competitive with and at times even higher than those offered in New Orleans. So Natchez merchants were in an excellent position to dominate not only the markets of their own District, but also those of the adjacent Louisiana country—at least insofar as downriver goods were concerned. 3 Whether destined for the farms and settlements of the Natchez District or those across the Mississippi, the bulk of these goods was of necessity funneled through Natchez Under-the-Hill.

As a result, the Port of Natchez early became

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3The term "downriver goods" as used here refers to goods originating upriver; while the term "upriver goods" refers to goods originating downriver, usually in New Orleans.
important in the logistics of the Mississippi Trade. South of Louisville only New Orleans was more important than Natchez during the decades between 1790 and 1830. Indeed, among the lower Mississippi settlements north of the Crescent City, the Natchez landing remained unchallenged until steam wrought a revolution in the navigation of western rivers in the early 1820's. And despite the competition offered it by the newer ports—Rodney, Grand Gulf, and Vicksburg—which rose in response both to this transportation revolution and to the new immigration of the post War of 1812 years Natchez continued to dominate the commercial economy of Mississippi until approximately 1840. That this commerce helped to make Natchez and its hinterland one of the wealthiest regions of the Mississippi Valley in the early years of trans-Appalachian development simply underscores the economic significance of the Natchez landing.

But the vital economic role played by Natchez Under-the-Hill is largely unappreciated in the historiography of the region because of emphasis placed on the equally unique social phenomena related to the Port. For if Natchez was the first port of the lower Mississippi in which river merchants from the upper valley could trade, it was also, for that very reason, a welcome haven for men weary of the trials and labors of one of the mightiest and most dangerous rivers in the world. This was doubly so for keelboat crews bound upriver from New Orleans who
had already fought the river for 300 miles to Natchez and had yet to traverse a similarly grueling 800 miles of "wild and pathless wilderness" to the mouth of the Ohio— a point still many miles from Louisville, the first major port on that waterway. These men were understandably glad of a respite from their exertions on the river and, in relatively large numbers, took full advantage of the opportunities for indulging in a variety of pleasures offered by some of the houses of the Natchez landing. That Natchez was the southern terminus of the Natchez to Nashville road, today called the Natchez Trace, over which most boatmen journeyed homeward at the end of each voyage greatly added to this function of Natchez and its landing. So, due largely to the geography of the Mississippi Valley during the early decades of the nineteenth century, Natchez Under-the-Hill quickly became identified with the boatmen of the Mississippi, men famous— even legendary— for their intemperate and riotous conduct when in port, and with

those elements who congregated there to serve their unruly appetites.\1

This identification was documented and reinforced by numerous travelers whose published accounts largely, if not completely, ignored the economic function of the landing and helped to spread distorted gossip about the Natchez port farther and more permanently than word of mouth alone could ever have done.\2 The result was that during the antebellum period an image of Natchez Under-the-Hill as "the most profligate place in the country"\5 eclipsed any knowledge or understanding which might have otherwise existed in the popular imagination of the role played by the Natchez port and its merchants in the trade of the developing Mississippi Valley and, more importantly, in the economy of the Natchez District during the early decades of the last century. Instead, the bawdy image of a seedy, sexually permissive, intemperate, and physically abusive landing town filled with gaming houses was readily accepted throughout the Union at least as early as 1815 and probably a decade or more earlier. With the passage of time and the accumulation of what was no doubt a mixture of rumor, gossip, and somewhere at bottom--facts, the image became a legend, and the legend grew and flourished.\6

By the 1830's, travelers were reporting robberies and murder committed by a gambling fraternity openly

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5James Stuart, Three Years in North America.... Volume II (2 volumes; Edinburgh: R. Cadell, 1833), p. 296.
contemptuous of the authorities who, it was alleged, were helpless to secure order in the lower town. By the late 1850's, writers of reminiscence and anecdote, inspired by the new tradition of Western humor which delighted in exaggeration for effect, had added one-sided and often exaggerated incident to a legend already stretched beyond the bounds reason applied to evidence can support. One such writer even claimed that untold numbers of men had been murdered there and dropped unknown and forgotten into the dark currents of the Mississippi River. With such accounts as this abroad about Natchez Under-the-Hill, it was inevitable that its true significance would be overlooked.

This condition has not greatly changed during the one hundred and twenty years since the end of the antebellum period. It is true that in the last four decades of the nineteenth century an intriguing and seemingly inexplicable decline of this legend occurred during which most who wrote about Natchez or the Mississippi Country completely ignored the subject. Few original interpretations of the landing were written in those years and, though most of those were relatively brief and subdued compared to those of the pre-war years, even they neglected the economic side of the story—despite the influence

6Falconbridge, Dan Marble; A Biographical Sketch of that Famous and Diverting Humorist, with Reminiscences, Comicalities, Anecdotes, Etc. (New York: Dewitt & Davenport, 1851), pp. 118-123.
of the New South Creed which gave emphasis to development of commerce and industry and sought to demonstrate that both thrived in the Old South. After 1900, however, the nineteenth century legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill was revived in a process that responded to and interacted with several of the cultural threads of American life of the first half of the present century. Paramount among these were the successful rebellion against the genteel tradition, a tradition which had discouraged and even suppressed such risque subjects as Natchez Under-the-Hill in the Victorian era; the related resurgence of interest in the lore and tales of the American folk which by the late 1920's had resulted in, among other things, a swiftly developing interest in the folk tales and legends of frontier America and, more particularly, of the Mississippi River; and the intensification of a national interest during the 1920's in the "tortured South." By the 1930's, this latter movement--partly in expose and expiation, partly in defense, and partly in the hope of renewal--had spawned the Southern Literary Renaissance and such diverse manifestations of it as the fiction of Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, and Erskine Caldwell, the Agrarian movement of the Nashville fugitives, Margaret Mitchell's phenomenally successful Gone With the Wind, and--most significant to the present study--the still celebrated Deep South monument to the mythological Old South, the
Natchez Pilgrimage, during which each year the Natchez elite attempt to bring to life their conception of the elegant Southern way of life destroyed by "The War."\(^7\)

Given this conjunction of phenomena, it is hardly surprising that the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill should have been given renewed attention not only by local and regional writers but by national ones as well during the 1930's, '40's, '50's, and even through the '60's--for the tradition of Natchez and its landing given birth (or rebirth) in the 1930's continued unabated, on the popular level especially, until it began to lose vitality by the early '70's. Nor is it surprising, given the moral tone of a literature freed from and in reaction to the genteel tradition (one Mississippian referred to the Southern literature of the period as "the privy school of literature")\(^8\), that the "Popularist tradition," (a term used herein to denote the popular treatment of the legend in this century to distinguish it from that of the ante-bellum writers) gave exaggerated emphasis to the unsavory


\(^8\)Tindall, The New South, p. 665.
but titillating aspects of the Natchez landing at the expense of its duller but ultimately more significant economic functions. Indeed, the Popularist legend of Natchez's Lower town ignored the economic importance of the port to an even greater extent than did the ante-bellum legend. The fact that the Natchez landing was the most important way station in the early Mississippi trade is given no consideration, in terms of its economic consequences, in the Popularist legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill.

Were this oversight limited to the popular literature on Natchez, it would be of little moment, at least from the point of view of most scholars. But it is not. Despite the fundamental role of the Natchez landing in the western river trade and in the economy of the Natchez District, the Port of Natchez is chiefly remembered even by historians as having been the most degenerate spot on the entire Mississippi during the first half of the nineteenth century. The economic function of the Natchez Under-the-Hill which existed between 1800 and 1840 has therefore remained a feature of life in frontier Natchez unstudied by historians of the region.

Such neglect seems all the more striking when it is realized that the economic role was recognized long ago by two of the most prominent historians of the Old Southwest, William Baskerville Hamilton and Charles Sackett Sydnor. Writing in 1937, Hamilton noted that the
river trade, and by inference the Natchez landing, made Natchez what it was and observed, whether accurately or not, that "when the river was supplanted by the railroads [as a primary artery of trade], the Natchez district withered into old age . . . ."9 And in 1938, Sydnor wrote that Natchez and its landing converged on the business level, that "Natchez Under-the-Hill made the other possible," and that it was "the most important unit in the economic structure of the city."10 Later historians of the region, most of whom would probably agree that the contribution of Hamilton and Sydnor is basic in the historiography of Mississippi, 11 have had forty years to answer the questions raised by Hamilton's and Sydnor's assessment of the economic importance of Natchez Under-the-Hill; that is, to define the nature and extent of the contribution of the port to the economy of the Natchez District and its place in the trade of the Mississippi Valley. But they have not yet done so. Why?

The reasons for this failure are varied. In the


first place, the sources that deal solely with the port as an economic institution are rare; such as exist are obscure and remain largely untapped. Literate contemporaries who lived along the waterfront or who depended upon it for their support and material comfort on a day-to-day basis no doubt took the lawful business activities of the landing for granted. Neither they nor the many travelers who passed through and who had so much to do with the growth of the legend wished to write extensively of the economic business of the landing. Only those merchants intimately involved would have been qualified to do so in any significant detail and had the idea been put to them, probably would have rebuffed the suggestion with the thought that "my business is my business"! Absorbed in material pursuits as they were, Natchezians seem to have had little regard, before the 1840's, for what posterity would think of them. Even those natives, John W. Monette and B.L.C. Wailes, who during the '40's began to collect and write history, spent little or no time on the port and its commerce. Perhaps this was due to the aristocratic disdain for merchants and tradesmen common among the upper classes both in England and in the American South at the time. But a more likely cause lay in their interest in the more grandiose theme presented by the colonial struggle for empire and by the aggressive Republic which emerged from the American Revolution. The former possibility, however, is suggested
by the whiggish Wailes' treatment of the history of the agricultural development of the State; for though the river trade was crucial to the area's successful cultivation of cotton as its primary export commodity, he hardly discussed it.  

If local residents most familiar with the details of the river trade and with its interaction with the local economy would shed no light on the subject, the casual observer could hardly be expected to do so. He could do no more than some of them did: describe in general terms the quantity of buying and selling apparently occurring there based upon visual observation or upon what could be learned from local authorities--or gossips. Most of these observers were visitors who wrote travel journals, memoirs, and letters expressly for publication and were often predisposed to select details that made for

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12John W. Monette, History of the Discovery and Settlement of the Valley of the Mississippi, by the Three Great European Powers, Spain, France, and Great Britain, and the Subsequent Occupation, Settlement, and Extension of Civil Government by the United States Until the Year 1846. (2 volumes, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1846); B.L.C. Wailes, Report on the Agriculture and Geology of Mississippi, Embracing a Sketch of the Social and Natural History of the State (Jackson, Miss.: E. Barksdale, State Printer, 1854); and Sydnor, Wailes, pp. 234-258. Monette, at least, discussed the Mississippi Trade, if only in terms of New Orleans (which was by 1846 much more important vis-a-vis Natchez than it had been even thirty years earlier). See Vol. I, pp. 465 & 538. He also discussed the character of the boatmen at some length (see Vol. II, Chapter one & pp. 339 & 391) and recognized the importance of Natchez as a commercial center (see Vol II, p. 359). But he did not explore the subject as it related to Natchez to any significant extent.
interesting reading and saleable books which would reflect the Eastern and European view of the barbarity of the American West. The colorful, risque details of immorality Under-the-Hill certainly met their requirements far more readily than did the dull, every-day business of a river port. Besides, since most of them were newcomers to Natchez and its landing, they were obviously unfamiliar with the place previous to their arrival. Thus their impressions were first impressions; few had or took the opportunity to re-evaluate them after a second and closer look. Moreover, often the view they took of the landing was pre-conditioned not only by their belief in Western barbarity and social inferiority but more simply by what they had heard or read of it before they ever saw it. While there were some exceptions to this, generally the legend of a profligate Natchez Under-the-Hill fed on itself, a fact which contributed to the failure of most contemporary observers to create accurate, detailed accounts of the economic function of the Port of Natchez.

Of course, published accounts of the port by residents and visitors are not the only source of primary data. Through the years the daily business of the

landing generated reams of business records; but much of this material, due in part to lack of interest in preserving it, has been irretrievably lost. That which remains must be sorted through carefully and painstakingly. Much the same can be said for other types of sources, but with this difference: other commonly used source materials--letters, diaries, newspapers, county and city records--were not created with the Natchez port solely in mind as were the business records of the Under-the-Hill merchants, hostlers, wharfingers, and those of the import-export merchants and cotton factors of Natchez, a group who composed but a minority, though an important one, in the society of the Natchez district. As a result, references to the Natchez port in the most commonly used sources are rare and fragmentary as compared with records which shed light on "aristocratic" society, plantation life, political affairs, military adventures and the like--subjects which have received the vast bulk of attention by historians concerned with the territorial and antebellum phases of Mississippi history. Indeed, as John Hebron Moore has suggested, the neglect of the State's frontier and antebellum economic institutions by Mississippi historians is due largely to the absence of voluminous business records from the period.\footnote{John Hebron Moore, Agriculture in Antebellum Mississippi (New York: Octogon Books, 1971/orig. publ. 1958), pp. 9-10; and Andrew Brown and Cypress Lumbering in the Old Southwest (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1967), pp. vii-viii.} The memory of Natchez Under-the-Hill,
plagued as it was with frequent floods, landslides, and fires which must have destroyed an untold quantity of such records, could not help but be affected by this trend.

But there are other factors which help to explain the failure of historians in this century to examine carefully the Natchez landing both as a focus of trade and as a social center of doubtful virtue. One is that early Natchez—the Natchez of the territorial and early statehood years—in which the landing flourished as never after, has been virtually forgotten. Arthur DeRosier, biographer of William Dunbar, rightly pointed out that "interest in the city centers around the 1837-1860 period when its influence was gone, and the past seemed to be more alluring than the future."\(^{15}\) It is indeed striking that despite the importance of Natchez to Mississippi and the Old Southwest economically, politically, socially, and culturally in the years between 1800 and 1840, only one full scale monographic treatment of it has been undertaken to date; and that, by D. Clayton James, though a useful survey of the antebellum story of Natchez, relies for much of its information about important matters affecting the economic and social history of the town on post 1835 sources.\(^{16}\)


Perhaps this neglect grew in some part from the
traditional resentment of Natchez by much of the rest of
the State, a factor which might have influenced some
historians—if only subconsciously—to ignore the sub-
stance of its most important period. Or perhaps it had to
do with the power of the Old South myth which suggests
that the period of Natchez's greatest glory was, after all,
the twenty years prior to the war. But, whatever the
reasons, Natchez Under-the-Hill certainly suffered from
this trend more than did the upper town. Such historians
as have written about early Natchez have almost to a man
placed emphasis upon the upper rather than the lower town.
When they mention the landing at all, it is only in passing.

This leads to another reason, and perhaps the major
one, for the failure of historians of the Old Southwest
to present us with even one thorough study of the Port of
Natchez in its heyday: the evocative power of the legend
of Natchez Under-the-Hill, transformed to mythic proportions
in the middle decades of the present century by a number of
popular writers, has clearly influenced the perspective of
historians and predisposed them—as surely as the myth
of a barbaric West predisposed the traveler-journalists
of the last century—to accept without critical examination
the traditional legend of a wastrel, immoral, and murderous
Natchez landing even in the popular form in which it has
existed from the 1930's to the present day. Even Hamilton
and Sydnor succumbed to this tendency. Though Hamilton
did not wholly accept the stereotypic Popularist view as to
the divergence of the landing from the society on the Bluffs, he did not directly challenge it either. Rather he compromised with it. Referring to the bad reputation of Natchez' port in the territorial years, he said that it was a place crowded with boatmen, gamblers, whores, et cetera, and that since there were as yet no steamboat gambling salons, there was only the "filthy and dangerous attraction of Natchez Under-the-Hill" which, he allowed, was much more immoral and violent than the rest of the town or region, though these were also marred by a similar immorality. Syndor, though more subtle and generally more accurate and precise in his characterization of the landing than Hamilton also believed that it was an infamous and rascally place which was socially, if not economically divergent form the upper town. From this we can conclude that while Sydnor may have considered the Popularist tradition concerning the vile nature of the landing exaggerated, he apparently accepted its characterization of a charmingly peaceful and gracious--even luxurious--upper town.

The point is not that their conclusions are necessarily wrong, though they may be, but that neither Hamilton nor Sydnor reached them through any extended

18 Ibid, pp. 358-361.
19 Sydnor, Wailes, pp. 23-24, 46 & 142.
judicious examination of evidence, and that this is typical of the treatment given the subject by historians generally. But neither should be unduly criticized for this failure to refute or correct the ascendant Popularist view. Working as they were at a time when it, and the myth of the wild and woolly West in general, seemed universally accepted, denial would have been difficult. (This was especially true of Hamilton, Sydnor's student, who made several trips to Natchez gathering material and who worked with one of the leading Popularists of the era, Edith Wyatt Moore of Natchez.²⁰) It is one of the ironies of the Popularist tradition that the lower town represented the Wild West; while the upper town, separated from the former by only a few hundred yards and by an elevation—via Silver Street—of about forty-five degrees, represented the mythical genteel and gracious Old South. Incongruous as these two views are, they have exerted a significant influence over the historiography of the Old Southwest, particularly insofar as Natchez' lower town is concerned. No historian has ever seriously challenged the Popularist tradition of the Port of Natchez. Nor have any taken a thorough look at its economic role, a role which hardly fits into either of these controlling myths. There has, accordingly, been no systematic analysis of the society of

²⁰Hamilton-Moore correspondence, Edith Wyatt Moore collection, Judge Armstrong Public Library, Natchez, Mississippi.
the lower town, of its economic arrangements and relationships, nor—with one exception—even of the vices in which it is said to have indulged in such contrast to the upper town. 21

The unfortunate failure of serious, scholarly historians to present an accurate and balanced account of the Natchez Under-the-Hill which existed from 1800 to 1840 left popular writers, who built upon the tradition of legend, humor, and anecdote of the Mississippi frontier and who had less regard for historical accuracy and precision than for a "rip-roaring" good yarn, free to embroider and even, in some cases, knowingly falsify the scant record remaining of a port that was once the second most important point on the Mississippi. The tradition created by these writers has been absorbed into the folklore of the lower Mississippi Valley and still influences the treatment given Natchez in histories and novels about the region. This tradition, though colorful, is often wrong as to specifics and is always exaggerated, distorted, and misleading. At best, while possibly and even probably true in some of its particulars, it remains as a whole an unproven modern interpretation of its ante-

21D. Clayton James' Antebellum Natchez is the exception but only to the extent that he exposed the prevalence of vice and brawling in the upper town. His treatment of the lower town is much less critical than is desirable.
bellum counterpart.

It is this condition that this study seeks to rectify by demonstrating the relationship first of the image and then of the legend to important cultural trends which influenced American life during the nineteenth century. These trends were divided into three distinct phases: 1) the years 1800 to c.1835 during which travel journals, particularly those describing the West, were popular and in which the image of the landing took shape in the national mind; 2) the years c.1830 to 1860 during which the frontier tradition emerged and in which the legend first flourished; and 3) the years 1865 to c.1900, the years of the gilded age and of the genteel tradition, during which the legend was consciously suppressed and virtually forgotten (or ignored) by Americans of both North and South. This study will show that the development of the image and the fate of the legend of Natchez Under-the Hill during the last century was dependent, less upon the demonstrable facts of its daily life, than upon the two fundamental myths that controlled the perceptions of observers and commentators alike: the Myth of the Wild and Savage West during the years 1800 to 1860 and the Myth of the Old South during the latter period.

However, this study does not use the term "myth" in the perjorative sense of "illusion." Rather, myths are recognized as being, as Mark Shorer observed in his essay, "The Necessity for Myth," "large controlling image[s] that give philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life"
which are used to organize experience in order to make sense of it.\textsuperscript{22} Indeed, history could hardly be written without reference to one or another myth which, in its largest sense, simply define "what a people think they are (or ought to be) or what somebody else thinks they are" (or were).\textsuperscript{23} The story of Natchez Under-the-Hill has, manifestly, been told--or not--under the influence of one or another of the myths which have prevailed in our history. To say this is not to say that the story is, in its entirety, untrue. But the myths which have held sway have been so powerful that they have dictated the ordering of the relevant facts concerning the Port of Natchez and predisposed writers, especially the antebellum image-makers and twentieth century Popularists but also many historians, to include those which conform to the myths while excluding those that do not.\textsuperscript{24} Thus has illusion crept into the perception of Natchez Under-the-Hill--and of Natchez generally--handed down to us from the past and distorted the truths which lie somewhere at their root. Taking this into account, this study will attempt to examine these myths as they reflect on Natchez Under-the-Hill in order to gain a clearer understanding of what it actually was.

\textsuperscript{22}Quoted in Tindall, "Mythology," The Idea of the South, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., pp. 1-2.

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid. Tindall recognized this phenomenon as being the central danger of myths.
CHAPTER TWO

Natchez Under-the-Hill and the Myth of the Wild and Savage West

Like the celebrated "Five Points," in New York, "Natchez Under-the-Hill," as it has been aptly named, has extended its fame throughout the United States, in wretched rhyme and viler story. For many years it has been the nucleus of vice upon the Mississippi.

--Joseph Holt Ingraham, 1835

Between 1800 and the Civil War, a period in which much of America's attention--and much of Europe's as well--was focused upon the West and the struggle for Empire occurring there, the original version of the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill gradually emerged from the writings of various travelers, newspaper editors, essayists, and memorialists, and from the even more various pens of a legion of raconteurs and local colorists. These writings were often informed by a notion generally subscribed to among the Eastern and European literati of the day: a belief in Western depravity. This view of the West was revealed at least as early as 1758 in a sermon given by the Reverend Thomas Barnard, a Boston Congregationalist

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minister, who characterized the frontiersman as exhibiting "Savageness of temper, Ignorance, Want of the means of Religion . . . Habits of Idleness and Intemperance . . . ."; these traits he blamed on the availability of free land which allowed men to gain their living "by the spontaneous Products of Nature with Little Labour . . . ." and which encouraged "a solitary State and distant Neighborhood." Belief in Barnard's proposition persisted well into the nineteenth century and was strengthened by the experience of a later generation in the Mississippi Valley. Writers, not only of America but also of Britain, such as the Reverend Timothy Dwight of Yale, the Unitarian minister James Freeman Clark also of New England, and the snobbish Thomas Hamilton of Edinburgh, all of whom thought westerners to be lawless, irreligious, and immoral, attested again and again to this persistence. The popular image of Natchez Under-the-Hill before the Civil War could not help but be affected by the widespread acceptance of a mythic view of the West which portrayed it so unfavorably in the eyes of the rest of the civilized world.

 Granted that there was a certain symbiotic relationship between the facts and the image, it is only

2 Quoted in Smith, Virgin Land, pp. 251-252.

within our present purpose to examine the latter both to demonstrate its place in the larger cultural milieu of the day and to establish that the negative image of Natchez Under-the-Hill was widely known and accepted in the antebellum period due largely to the prejudices of the Eastern and European reading public and of the traveler-journalists whose works they read. Indeed, as Ray Allen Billington noted in *America's Frontier Heritage*, traveler-journalists, because they too accepted the myth, "fastened upon a few pockets of lawlessness--the Mississippi River towns, the annual rendezvous of the mountain men, the cow towns and mining camps--and pictured them as typical of all the west." 4 They also in many cases exaggerated the lawlessness and immorality of their examples because of their preconceived notions and because they wished to write colorful books which would sell. This point of view dominated the printed sources of the first forty years of the period, and, moreover, set the context in which the literature of the remainder--chiefly that of the western humorists--thrived. Natchez Under-the-Hill, due to its place as an important Mississippi River port in the early years of the nineteenth century, quickly became a symbol of the Myth of the Wild and Savage West upheld by these writers.

This anti-western prejudice is too well-established

to require proof; still a sampling of contemporary state-
ments will illustrate just how deep and widespread these
feelings ran. ^5 Perhaps the best known such statement by
an American is the one penned, circa 1821, by the Reverend

5Though it is beyond the scope of this study to
examine in detail the roots of this anti-Western pre-
judice, it is appropriate to note them in brief here.
The American Eastern elite with whom the American ver-
sion of the myth originated harbored a fundamental dis-
trust of the Western settler for both political and eco-

nomic reasons. Economically, the landholders feared a
decline in their land values as more and more of the
citizens of the Eastern states moved west. In addition,
employers must have worried that upward pressures on
wages would result from an ever smaller labor supply—
labor scarcity had long been an economic fact of life in
America even before the Mississippi Valley was opened to
settlement. Both conditions, they feared, would result in
a deterioration of their economic and thus their social
position. Politically, they perceived the immigrant,
with his Jeffersonian principles, as being radical and a
danger both in the West, and by contagion at home, to
their political supremacy. Doctrines popular in the West—
universal white manhood suffrage and squatter sovereignty,
which held that people possessed the right to migrate freely
to Western Lands for the purpose of organizing independent
states—merely confirmed their view. Since Eastern con-
servatives feared they would lose control of both the
lands and the people of the West as settlement progressed,
the practical manifestations of the latter doctrine as
in Judge Richard Henderson's unsuccessful Transylvania
Company in Kentucky and in the State of Franklin in
Tennessee, together with rumors of separatist ambitions
throughout the Mississippi Valley and of intrigue with
Spain—both of the latter were largely unfounded in fact—
lead to a paranoid fear of disunion that affected govern-
ment policy toward the West for years. Conservative
Easterners of the upper class, whether merchants, planters,
or professionals whose interests were tied to the two
former groups, given these fears, these interests, and the
insecure condition of the infant Republic, were understand-
ably prone to regard Westerners as irresponsible, lawless,
and corrupt in the light of such incidents as the Whiskey
Rebellion; land frauds and speculation schemes, epitomized
by the Yazoo land scandal which had been brought to frui-
tion by the wholesale bribery of State legislatures; the
Western agitation to take New Orleans and control of the
Mississippi River from Spain by force; the well-known
tendency of frontiersmen to encroach on Indian lands
Timothy Dwight, the President of Yale. Dwight, who had seen the pioneers of Ethan Allen's Vermont firsthand

contrary to national policy and thereby spark incessant Indian wars; the debtor status of Westerners due to their unfavorable balance of trade and their high living; the activities of Western filibusterers such as Philip Nolan and William Augustus Bowles; and even the Burr conspiracy as it renewed the Eastern fears of Western disunion. The social--and moral--prejudices against the West on the part of these Easterners that accompanied this political/economic conflict was partly a function of these events and partly a function of the older class religious prejudice against immigrants which were quite obvious in the views of the Reverend Barnard of Boston in 1758. That this prejudice was heavily influenced by particular social conditions and habits manifested in the newer settlements in the Mississippi Valley under environmental conditions unique to the frontiers of that time cannot be denied. But the religious, social, economic, and political conceptions through which observers filtered their data were already in place. While this prejudice was manifested in all of the seaboard states, it was especially so in Puritan New England.

The roots of European--particularly British--preconceptions were similar but with significant differences. Conservative and upper class Britons, who had long exercised a disdain for all things colonial and who controlled the British press, regarded all Americans as culturally and socially inferior to themselves; Westerners were simply more so. Having an aversion to Republicanism and democratic theory, they were prone to seek-out examples which would prove the political and moral deficiencies of the new country. To their minds, evidence abounded particularly in the West. As was noted in 1815, by the North American Review, this tendency was intensified during the War of 1812 as the British press embarked on an effort "to blacken and degrade our moral character." (See: Vol. I, May, 1815, p. 62.) It was again intensified during the early 1830's as a result of the agitation in Britain over the Reform Bill as conservative British writers examined American society and institutions hoping to prove the pernicious effects of democracy upon the social stability and morals of a people. Perhaps the most blatant such attempt was made by Mrs. Trollope who stated in her Preface to Domestic Manners of the Americans her intent to expose the "Influence which the political system of the country has produced on the principles, tastes, and manners of its domestic life." Her expressed object was to convince her fellow countrymen that they should preserve the solid principles embodied in their
in 1798 and again in 1806, believed that frontiersmen in general had been too shiftless to gain property or

constitutions in order to avoid "the tumult and universal degradation which invariably follow the wild scheme of placing all the power of the state in the hands of the populace." (See: James E. Mooney, ed., Domestic Manners of the Americans by Mrs. Trollope, (Barre, Mass.: Imprint Society, 1969 [orig. publ., 1832]), p. xix.)


See also: Smith, Virgin Land, pp. 253-260. In these pages, Smith shows that another source of this belief in the West as socially inferior and even primitive was the then prevailing theory of civilization and progress which originated in the middle eighteenth century in the writings of Turgot and Rousseau and was given its most persuasive formulation during the 1790's in Condorcet's Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progres de L'esprit Humain. This idea interpreted human history as a progressive development of civilization through various stages from the most primitive to the most refined, the Age of Universal Enlightenment. This seemed to perfectly fit conditions then extant in America in which, it seemed, one could observe the stages of society that had existed successively through history in Europe all at once: from the earliest stage in which tribal societies supported by hunting existed through intermediate stages, including the pastoral, the agricultural, commercial, etc. The agricultural West, the Mississippi Valley, in which lived, as even Jefferson believed, "our own semi-barbarous citizens, the pioneers of the advance of civilization. . . ." (Quoted on p. 256), was deemed under the aegis of this theory to be, by definition, more primitive and barbarous than the more socially and culturally mature East. This notion was so deeply rooted in American thought, as Smith noted, that it continued to dominate the attitudes and perspectives of writers and observers of the West for decades.
reputation in stable, respectable communities, and so had fled to the frontier to escape law, religion, morality, and government.  

While Dwight's view of the West was typical of that of the Eastern Establishment, particularly that of the Federalists and of Puritan New England, it was neither the earliest nor the harshest expression of it. Six months before the approval of Jefferson's plan to organize the western territories, embodied in the Ordinance of 1784, a committee of Congress had reflected this prejudice by reporting that there was a need to achieve "security against the increase of feeble, disorderly and dispersed settlements in those remote and extended territories; [and] against the depravity of manners which they have a tendency to produce." A few years later, during the controversy over the attempt by east Tennesseans to organize the independent State of Franklin, the Franklinites were described in the Assembly of North Carolina as being "offscourings of the earth, of whom that state was well rid." Frontiersmen were thought to be so irresponsible in economic matters that, in 1787, Congress put into the Ordinance of that year a provision offered by Nathan Dane which prohibited any law impairing the obligation of contracts.

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6 Smith, Virgin Land, p. 252.

7 Quoted in Philbrick, The Rise of the West, p. 128.

8 Ibid, p. 103.

9 Ibid., p. 131.
Private citizens in those years and after were no less prone to the prejudice than public ones. Their feelings were so strong that they quite often succumbed to irrational excess in their judgments. For example, in 1796, Moses Austin found that West, specifically Kentucky, detestable because of its unkempt appearance. This applied to both land and people. Chancellor Kent, at Lake Champlain in 1800, wrote that the "jurors and people looked rude in their manners and appearance and gave me an unfavorable opinion of the morals of the country." Thaddeus Harris, a New Englander who traveled the Ohio in 1802, believed that because the "Back Settlers" of Kentucky gained their living by hunting and fur trading rather than by cultivating the land, they were deficient in character. He said that "they acquire rough and savage manners. Sloth and independence are prominent traits in their character; to indulge the former is their principal enjoyment, and to protect the latter their chief ambition." Another New Englander, William Richardson, who traversed the Mississippi Territory in

10Whitaker, The Mississippi Question, p. 11.
1815, was shocked by the number of white men he saw who were married to Indians, "which," he commented, "is no less disgusting in itself than degrading to human nature." But he made another and an even more revealing observation when he asserted that "It may always be taken for granted that these men are of the basest characters, and often possess a brutish disposition." Frontiersmen were also criticized for their religion, whether they had it or not--though not necessarily by the same persons. Richardson, fifty days out of Boston and about to cross Lake Pontchartrain, longing "for the sanity of a civilized people," noted that, "while I am finishing this, I presume my friends are worshipping God in his Holy Temple--here, no observance of the Sabbath distinguishes it from other days." In the same year, the North American Review observed in defense of American Manners (in the East) against the charge of an English commentator named Lambert which "libelled" the whole country with the "taint" of the Methodist camp-meeting, that "it is indeed true, that the Southern and Western States are infested with these fanatics, but we believe the nuisance is decreasing . . . ."

14Ibid. p. 19 (Italics added.)
15Ibid, p. 22.
Even more convincing of the prevalence and depth of this anti-western feeling, as well as of the error and exaggeration inherent in it, is the evidence that wild and unfounded rumors detrimental to the reputation of western society circulated rampantly among people to the east, who were unfamiliar with true conditions there. Estwick Evans, who took a tour of the Southwestern states in 1818, reported that he "witnesses much less intemperance than information previously obtained had led me to anticipate." Much worse were the rumors of lawlessness and violent habits of westerners. Morris Birkbeck, traveling on Forbes Road in 1817, said that he heard rumors that the people of Indiana were all "lawless, semi-barbarous vagabonds, dangerous to live among." Two years earlier, Timothy Flint, a missionary from New England traveling to the Mississippi Valley who admitted that he started with the same prejudices as other easterners, wrote that "in approaching the country, I heard a thousand stories of gougings, and robberies, and shooting down with the

17Estwick Evans, A Pedestrian Tour of Four Thousand Miles, Through the Western States and Territories, During the Winter and Spring of 1818..., Vol. VIII, Early Western Travels, 1748-1846, ed. by Reuben Gold Thwaites (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966), p. 261. Evans also stated that intemperance in the United States, which he regretted was a problem, was "by no means peculiar, even in degree, to this part of the country;" i.e., the Southwest.

rifle."  

Flint denied that these rumors were well-founded and said that, from his experience, he could confidently state that such murders and brawls, etc., that occurred were the result of "lawless rencounters" in which the "drunkenness, brutality, and violence were mutual" and that, considering "the state of things, the wonder is, that so few outrages and murders occur."  

Flint also rebuked the Reverend Dwight for his representation of "these vast regions as a grand reservoir for the scum of the Atlantic states" and asserted that the backwoodsman of the West "is generally an amiable and virtuous man." While Flint's views may have given the eastern reader pause, the horror inspired in the Atlantic states from Maine to Georgia by the term "backwoodsman" which Flint noted in his book did not soon abate. Nor did Easterners cease exercising moral judgments upon the people of the West. As late as 1836, a missionary to Kentucky named James Freeman Clark, concerned by the gambling,
fighting, and duelling around him, lamented that western society lacked religion, moral principle, and a respect for law. 24

The attitude toward the West of most European travelers and observers of American social life were not dissimilar from the attitudes prevalent in the East. 25 The primary difference between them lies in the not unimportant fact that the Europeans, in the main, were not particularly impressed with conditions in the East either. In May, 1815, less than a year after the end of the War of 1812, The North American Review complained that three of the leading British periodicals, the Times, the Morning Post, and the Morning Chronicle, had for years been engaged in a "systematic . . . abuse of this country" and had sought to "blacken and degrade our moral character." 26 Worse, felt the editors of The Review, was a forty-five page attack on the American character printed in the January, 1815 issue of the Quarterly Review, another English publication. This article, based upon several earlier British accounts of travels in the United States (including one by Thomas Ashe--an account not well regarded for its accuracy either then or now), involved

24Smith, Virgin Land, p. 253.

25See n. 5 above.

the general and state governments, the whole nation from north to south, and from east to west—their character and conduct, moral, social and political, in one wide covering of profligacy, brutality, and crime.27

The extremity of this condemnation may be written-off as the product of wartime propaganda, as to some extent it was. But it revealed a general attitude toward America and her people—mere colonials, they—which predated the Revolution. A more normal and balanced view and one not altogether flattering was given by James Flint, who traveled in America from 1818 to 1820. Flint criticized the country, in general, for its crimes and vices which, he said, usually went unreported in the press. He said that swearing was a highly prevalent and unfortunate vice in the entire country. He also claimed that, due to a mistaken idea of the equality of men, "here are multitudes of persons who have no accurate notions of decorous

27Ibid, p. 65. Nor was this harsh feeling for America limited to the British. Frenchmen could share it also. See, for example, the May, 1816, issue of The Review, pp. 77-91, in which the Frenchman Turreau's examination of American institutions is reviewed. His was one of the harshest accounts—and one of the most inaccurate—ever penned. He claimed that there was a "total absence of regulations of police," an "abuse or contempt of laws relating to elections," (p. 81.) a complete neglect of the education of children, an "abuse in the use of madeira, of spirit, and a generally bad diet" which encouraged disease and brought about premature old age, and that "youth is delivered over to the seduction of every pleasure and of every disorder." (p. 82)
behavior." He distinctly gave the impression, as he put it, that he had been "living amongst a half civilized people." He explained that that was not truly the case; he had given attention to unpleasant incidents because such, he said, always attract attention. Further, concerning his attention to the lack of educational opportunities and "the influx of immoral strangers" in areas in which he had traveled and lived, he wrote:

In these respects the back-woods are mere colonies in comparison with the better state of society in the eastern country. Had I lived in Connecticut or Massachusetts, instead of Indiana, I might have met with fewer irregularities to relate. My acquaintance with many persons from the older communities of the Union, causes me to entertain the highest opinion of the attainments there, and convinces me that it would be nearly as unfair to collect the ingredients for forming the character of the British people in their foreign possessions, as it is to infer the state of American society from the habits and manners of people in new settlements.

Clearly, James Flint believed that while the East was not so civilized as Great Britain, it had its merits; the West, on the other hand, was much inferior to both. Indeed, on his earlier treatment of the morals and


29 Ibid., p. 290.

30 Ibid., p. 291.

31 Ibid, (Italics added.)
manners of the people of the United States, quoted from above, he saved his sharpest criticisms for those newer settlements. He said that "the river Ohio is considered the greatest thoroughfare of banditti in the Union"; that "horse stealing is notorious in the western country, as are also escapes from prison"; that "runaway apprentices, slaves, and wives, are frequently advertised"; and that "the want of schools is a great desideratum in new settlements."32 This last was perhaps the most significant, for it led Flint to conclude that

Hence it is, that in travelling from the coast into the interior, the proportion of uneducated persons appears to be the greater the farther to the westward; a fact that has been noticed by many, and one showing that civilization follows in the rear of population.33

This view conformed to the then widely held theory of civilization and progress, which interpreted history as a progression through higher and higher stages from the most primitive to the highest and under which North America was seen, uniquely, to possess, all—or perhaps, to some, almost all—of the stages at once.34 By this theory, by definition the farther west one went, the more primitive and the less civilized society was. Flint shared this view with most, if not all, European and

33 Ibid, p. 172.
34 See n. 5 above.
American observers.

The observations of American life made by these observers between 1800 and 1840 implicitly confirmed both the theory of civilization as it was applied to the United States and the image of a savage, semi-barbarous fellow, called the "backwoodsman," as the dominant and most conspicuous inhabitant of the western United States. Typically, their accounts dwelt on the role of the pioneer as a hunter rather than as a farmer while such farms as were described were usually depicted as poor and unattractive and their tenants uncouth and ill-mannered. Westerners were also criticized either for their lack of religion and morality altogether or for the rude and emotionally primitive form--the camp meeting--in which such religion as they had was expressed. Finally, special emphasis was given to the westerners' vices: to his habitual intemperance, his fondness for gambling, his swearing, and, most of all, his love of violence. This last gained such attention because the backwoodsman's manner of fighting was at once so colorful and so horrible to the imagination:

Their hands, teeth, knees, head and feet are their weapons, not only boxing with their fists, ... but also tearing, kicking, scratching, biting, gouging each others eyes out by a dextrous use of a thumb and finger, and doing their utmost to kill each other....

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35F. Cuming, Sketches of a Tour to the Western Country, Through the States of Ohio and Kentucky; a
Westerners, such as Zadoc Cramer, protested that this image of the West as a land and a people wild and savage was false; that it captured only some of the facts of life there and those the most unfavorable. They


Cuming, Sketches of a Tour, p. 138. Cramer, Cuming's original American editor and publisher, made such a protest in a note to Cuming's description of the "Rough and Tumble" quoted above. See n. 95, p. 138. For a thorough critique of the myth of a barbarous West and a treatment which puts it into a better perspective, see: Billington, America's Frontier Heritage, pp. 73­95. Billington's conclusion, given on p. 94, is certainly worth quoting in this regard: "Such evidence as may be summoned, then suggests that the frontier was neither a patent-office model of the East nor a land sunk in barbarism. Those who abandoned civilization were few and uninfluential save in the latter-day folklore. Those who sought to transplant to the West the unchanged culture of the East outnumbered them, but they too were not typical. Their efforts were doomed to fail, for the social environ­ment of successive frontiers offered scant substance to modes of thought rooted in a different social order. The opportunity for individual self-advancement, the blurring of class distinctions, the materialism and atti­tudes toward hard work, all contributed to the rejection of familiar patterns of culture. The result was a partial decay of imported civilizations, particularly during the
did so in vain. The rumors of violence and crime reported by Birkbeck and Flint were a powerful force in American life in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and they must have inspired dread on the part of many that if they, too, should travel west, they could be victimized by that violence.

It was within this context that the image of Natchez Under-the-Hill was built-up, layer by layer, during the years between the American occupation of the Natchez country and the Civil War. That it conformed to the image of the West in many or even all of its particulars was inevitable more because of the preconceptions about the Western people which its observers brought to it than due to the objective reality of life at the Natchez landing, a reality almost as much distorted, particularly in the later years, in the literature as was that of the Great West of which it was a part.

According to that image, as it had accrued by the late 1850's, the newcomer to the Port of Natchez during the years between 1800 and about 1840, the years of its heyday, upon his approach from the river to the waterfront, saw a landing about a mile long and from three-quarter of a mile to two hundred yards wide,

first and second generations, but not a total negation. The frontier clung to tradition as tenaciously as it rejected complete dependence on that tradition."
depending upon the year in which he arrived. If the time of year was right, he saw the entire extent of the landing lined with boats—flats, keels, barges, and steamers—and observed their occupants in incessant motion from water to shore and back or lying about in a lassitude brought about by the heat of the sub-tropic sun, or by their prodigious labors on the river, or, perhaps more probably, by their excessive consumption of the spirituous liquors so easily had there. The newcomer docked at one of the several wharves, probably built out over the river and made safe—except in floods—by a large eddy that permitted many boats to stop.


38Steamers were not introduced on Western waters before 1811 and did not become commonplace until after 1817. Most travelers before that latter date traveled in either the keelboats or the flatboats. See: Seymour Dunbar, A History of Travel in America (2nd ed.; New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1937), pp. 307-308, 341-370 and 388-389; and E.W. Gould, Fifty Years on the Mississippi; or, Gould's History of River Navigation (2nd ed.; Columbus: Long's College Book Company, 1951), pp. 196-199.

39Schultz, Travels, pp. 132 & 136; Ingraham, Southwest By a Yankee, II, pp. 19-21; and the Southern Galaxy, February 19, 1829.
there in perfect security. Closer now, he could see that much of the movement from shore to craft and back involved roustabouts and carters and draymen—Negro and white—who were loading and unloading cargoes. These cargoes of cotton, up-country foodstuffs in hogsheads and barrels, dry goods, iron, whiskey, and even ice filled the wharves and lined the busy streets. As he stepped ashore, he could count, again depending on the year and whether or not a flood had recently devoured the place, anywhere from a mere dozen to perhaps as many as 100 ragged, wooden buildings arranged in rows to form rough, low streets that became quagmires of mud during wet weather. The bluff, green with a luxuriant growth of

40 Edouard de Montule, Travels in America, 1816-1817, trans. by Edward D. Suber (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University, 1950), p. 70 (Plate XII); The Emigrants' Guide, or Pocket Geography of the Western States and Territories (Cincinnati: Phillips and Spears, 1818), pp. 132-134; and James, Antebellum Natchez, p. 87.


42 Montule, Travels, p. 74; Evans, A Pedestrian Tour, pp. 318-320; John Bradbury, Travels in the Interior of North America, in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811; Including a Description of Upper Louisiana, Together With the States of Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, and Tennessee, With the Illinois and Western Territories, and Containing Remarks and Observations Useful to Persons Emigrating to Those Countries (2 vols.; London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1817), II, p. 133; Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi Embracing an Authentic and Comprehensive Account of the Chief Events in the History of the State.... (2 vols.; Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing
trees and tangled vines that seemed ready to push the very houses into the river,\textsuperscript{43} towered one hundred (some said two hundred) feet above him and was cut by at least two "dug ways"\textsuperscript{44} or roads that led to the top and to the main town.\textsuperscript{45}

A heavy, rank odor hung upon the land here emanating from the piles of waste left by the many carters' horses and mules and by the dogs and pigs that populated the site as well as from the shallow latrines that dotted the landscape. The offal of slaughtered animals that floated in the water along the shore merely intensified the stench.\textsuperscript{46} Still worse, "clouds of insects" that

\begin{itemize}
  \item Company, 1891), II, pp. 160-161; and Ingraham, Southwest By a Yankee, II, pp. 19-21. The number of streets at any one time is not clear. However, before 1820, based upon a survey of Natchez newspapers published before that date, there seems to have been only two major streets at the landing. Ingraham reported that by 1835 five streets existed there.
  \item Monette, History of the Valley of the Mississippi, II, pp. 359-360; Schultz, Travels, p. 133; and Cumings, Sketches of a Tour, pp. 320-322. This was true in the earliest years; later, most of the timber on the bluff had been cut for firewood, a practice which helped to undermine the bluff and led to serious landslides destructive of life and property under-the-hill. At least one important historical property on top of the hill, the site of Fort Rosalie/Panmure, was apparently lost as a result as well.
  \item Emigrants' Guide, pp. 132-134.
  \item \textit{Ibid.}
  \item Ingraham, Southwest By a Yankee, II, pp. 19-21; and Mississippi Messenger, June 3, 1806.
\end{itemize}
promised to devour all that lived seemed "to issue from the murky, green-scummed water"\textsuperscript{47} that filled the depressions of the landing.

Moving quickly to somewhat higher ground, the newcomer came to the principal street of Natchez Under-the-Hill. "Great numbers of poor, dissipated wretches; of all nations, and of all colors\textsuperscript{48} were to be seen lolling about in idle luxury on the Sabbath as on any other day. Profanity filled the ear as Kentucky boatmen and Mississippi and Louisiana backwoodsmen vied for supremacy or flirted with "tawdrily arrayed, highly rouged\textsuperscript{49} white, Negress, and mulatto females. "Fashionably dressed young men" from the steamboats or the upper town were to be seen "smoking or lounging\textsuperscript{50} against the shops and boarding houses and the "houses of infamy" that existed principally, though not entirely, to serve the boatmen or traveller. Sounds of merriment and debauchery, or the drinking and singing devotees of pleasure, issued from not a few of these houses as he passed. Music thrilled high and melodiously as dancers cavorted

\textsuperscript{47}Taken from a letter written in 1789 by Father Antonio Gonzales of Saragossa, Spain, quoted in Edith Wyatt Moore, Natchez Under-the-Hill (Natchez: Southern Historical Publications, Inc., 1958), pp. 25-26.

\textsuperscript{48}Emigrants' Guide, pp. 132-134.

\textsuperscript{49}Ingraham, Southwest by a Yankee, II, pp. 19-21.

\textsuperscript{50}Ibid.
endlessly to the rhythm of the song. Simultaneously "Blacklegs," or gamblers, preyed on the unwary and the foolish taking their money at dice or thimbles or on the roulette or faro tables or by conspiring with pickpockets and other ruffians to set upon visitors hurrying to get aboard departing steamboats.  

[As darkness fell these hotels, with curtains drawn back, were lit up to keep back the night; the dancing continued as incessantly as the turbulent waters that swirled beyond the light.  

Half naked females, hanging from windows above the street, beckoned to the men below or came out to the boats to "enliven the [men's] idle hours."  

"The sounds of bestial revelry" went on into the night, broken only by the frequent shouts, taunts, and guffaws of the numerous brawls, called the "Rough and Tumble," which often ended in "eyes gouged out" or "noses and ears bitten and torn off," or by screams elicited by a pistol's sharp explosion in the midst of passionate

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52Stuart, Three Years in North America, II, pp. 296-298; and Southern Galaxy, February 19, 1829.

53Schultz, Travels, pp. 132 & 136.

54Ingraham, Southwest By a Yankee, II, pp. 52-61.

debate. 56 Death often hung heavily and willfully in the tepid darkness, for "many a murder had been committed there, of the secret of which the dark tide of the Mississippi is the depository." 57

Surely, this place was "...one of the most wretched places in the world." 58

It can be readily seen that this description contained within it all of the basic ingredients of the larger image of the wild, lawless West: the unkempt appearance and filth of the place, the lack of couth and civility of the people, the evident lack of religion and morality, the vices—swearing, gambling, violence—and one other perhaps even more shocking to the refined mind of the day, the sexual promiscuity. But it was no doubt the violence—the rumors of brutality and murder—that caused the most concern and gave the most support to the belief in a barbaric West, for it touched upon the fear that innocent bystanders could fall victim to the West's brutality. It was this and the unquestionable presence at the landing, especially during the busy seasons of the year, of the backwoodsman and of his twin, the boatman—men deemed ultimately responsible by most for this legion

56Power, Impressions of America, II, p. 117; see also: Schultz, Travels, pp. 145-146.
57Falconbridge, Dan Marble, pp. 118-123.
58Evans, A Pedestrian Tour, p. 319.
of sin—which made the image of Natchez Under-the-Hill a symbol of the Myth of the Wild and Savage West.59

The image as symbol was significant because it was well-known and accepted as a fact of Western life throughout the nation and in Europe as well, particularly in Great Britain. That it was so is evident from the number of travel narratives referring to it published in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and other cities in the United States and London, Liverpool, and Edinburgh in the latter country. That it was a subject deemed worthy of interest is evident from the fact that it received, at times, relatively lengthy notice in these journals. In addition, several of the traveler-journalists themselves provided evidence that an unfavorable view of the Natchez landing was widely held. Thomas Ashe, though generally not to be trusted, was probably correct when he asserted in 1808 that the "vice of the Natchez is proverbial through America."60 Ashe can be believed in this, if in nothing else, primarily because we have it on good authority—that of James Hall, an early missionary to Mississippi Territory—that under the British and the Spanish the

59By the 1830's, as shall be shown below, the gamblers were also singled out for special blame.

area had been considered a "sink for the dregs of the more northern parts of the continent."61 This opinion probably resulted, at least in part, from the fact that many loyalists immigrated to the Natchez country during the American Revolution, and was unlikely to have changed much in the ten years since the onset of the American domination. But Ashe was not the only writer to make such statements. Others made similar and much more specific ones. Henry Ker, a Boston-born Englishman who came to Natchez in 1808, wrote that the "small part of the town...under the hill... is well-known to be the resort of dissipation."62 Joseph Holt Ingraham, who came to Natchez as an immigrant, rather than as a visitor, in 1830, observed that "Natchez Under-the-Hill...has extended its fame throughout the United States..."63 And finally, Sir Charles Augustus Murray, grandson of Lord Dunmore and, eventually, a prominent figure in the British Court, stated that as of 1836, the year in which he saw it, Natchez Under-the-Hill had been a few years ago considered "the most abandoned sink of iniquity in the whole Western

63Ingraham, Southwest By a Yankee, II, p. 19.
country."  

Nor is the evidence for the prevailing acceptance of this image in the years prior to 1840 confined to the travel journals. In 1815, the members of the Tennessee Presbetery concerned with what they had heard of the lack of religion, respect for the sabbath, and morality in the lower Mississippi Valley, petitioned the churches and Christians of Mississippi Territory and West Florida to make a regular establishment of religious societies among them in order to bring about a moral reform in the region. The petition, which was published in a Natchez newspaper in December, 1815, said in part:

Your geographical situation while it identifies our interest with yours, will give you an opportunity of guarding the morals of our sons, and of feeding the souls of the piously disposed with spiritual entertainment, while we are filling your markets with the necessaries of life, with heartfelt satisfaction we can commit them to a country blessed with the advantages of religion and civil order.  

While they nowhere specifically mentioned Natchez Under-the-Hill, the above reference to protecting the "morals of our sons" while "we are filling your markets" and a later reference to their belief that "the strongholds of vice will be pulled down." suggest that they had that

64Sir Charles Augustus Murray, Travels in North America During the Years 1834, 1835, and 1836 (2 vols.; London: R. Bentley, 1839), II, p. 177; and Clark, Travels, III, pp. 67-70.

65Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer, December 6, 1815.

66Ibid.
Given this sort of thing, Natchezians could hardly have failed to be cognizant of the unfortunate reputation under which their town suffered. They did not, and from time to time they expressed their frustration. The editor of the Natchez Ariel, in 1828, complained that

The city of Natchez has by some been emphatically pronounced the "Ill-fated City," and to those who are always determined to look at the dark side of everything, may perhaps in some measure deserve that name. It has been represented by many as the very "hot-bed of disease" and "emporium of vice." This, however, is extremely...unfair...and without foundation in truth. ...With regard to the morals of the city, there was perhaps a time when it deserved all that has been said about it. But thanks to the influence of our free government, that time has passed away...67

Other Natchezians, who apparently accepted the image with fewer reservations, defended the virtue of their city by separating the upper town entirely from the lower one. Ingraham, who did this himself, noted that, a few years earlier, the reputation of the lower town was such that "in a very witty argument, a lawyer of this city demonstrated, that, so far from being a part or portion of the city proper, it was not even a part or portion of the state!"68 Ingraham added, "Where he ultimately consigned

67The Natchez Ariel, January 5, 1828. The phrase, "thanks to the influence of our free government, that time has passed away," suggests that the editor believed that whatever justification ever existed for Natchez' reputation of immorality existed before the United States annexed the District.

68Ingraham, Southwest by a Yankee, II, p. 57.
it I did not learn." 69 The Natchez press too often condemned the infamy of the lower town with hyperbolic abandon while putting a fine gloss on the state of virtue in the upper one. For example, one correspondent to the local Mississippi Republican, claimed in 1820 that "few persons who are not residents, know, that the landing and city are separate and distinct places," and asserted that "the GAMBLING TABLES, the TIPPLING SHOPS, and HOUSES OF ILL FAME, they and they alone, are the hot beds of vice, and infamy and crime, which disgrace the name of Natchez throughout the Union, and identifies it with blood and violence." 70 This peroration was made in response to a murder under-the-hill resulting accidentally from a riot and which had recently been reported in the Republican. 71

69 Ibid.

70 Mississippi Republican, February 22, 1820.

71 For a factual treatment of what had occurred, see the Mississippi Republican, February 29, 1820, in which was printed the results of the official investigations of the incident. The writer of the peroration stated that there were other victims, missing and presumed killed. However, the official account of the riot indicated that this was not the case, but rather that there was but one victim, David Curry of Second Creek and that that victim had been uninvolved in the affray until a misdirected bullet struck him. That this bullet was intended for another victim is clear, but he, one Daniel Brown, according to the Republican, "fortunately escaped by falling under the wheel of a cart." The fact that the murder of Curry had resulted from an intentional and premeditated act is hardly sufficient to prove the validity of the image of a bloody and murderous Natchez landing--such can occur anywhere and at any time--but the discrepancy between the two accounts does demonstrate how easily, in the emotion of the moment, facts can be twisted, distorted, and exaggerated and their character changed entirely. It also demonstrates how easily the image developed in
While such incidents did undoubtedly happen, the fact that this was one of the few reported in the Natchez press during the twenty years from 1800 to 1820 suggests that their frequency had been much exaggerated by the writer. As to the virtue of the upper town, there is evidence that crime and vice, though not necessarily to the extent indicated by the Myth of the Wild and Savage West, were also a problem there. But this citizen did not stand alone in this view. Another anonymous Natchezian who complained a few years later that "against the moral character of no city in the U.S. has the tongue of slander performed its office with more fidelity than it has against that of Natchez," also blamed Natchez Under-the-Hill for the fact.

Though the conditions which to some extent justified this image had passed by, or soon after, 1840, the image retained an active place in the nation's context of the times, for its true character was sufficiently rough—and an innocent man was killed, primarily due to the actions of boatmen, who were behind the affray—to make it susceptible to such distortions.

72 See, for example, a letter signed "T.S." in the August 11, 1826, issue of the Ariel which charged that the Market House, a building located on the bluff, had become "a den of black and white thieves," an evil about which he said the city's Watch was doing nothing. Data obtained from earlier newspapers indicates that this sort of problem was not new in 1826.

73 Natchez Gazette, October 28, 1826, quoted in James, Antebellum Natchez, p. 266.
memory for at least an additional twenty years. Moreover, as we shall see, it was transformed into legend by the many books of reminiscence and anecdote and by the burgeoning folklore of the Mississippi Valley frontier which flourished from the 1830's until, in the late '50's, the country's attention and energies were drawn inexorably into the coming civil conflict.\(^{74}\) Contributing to this process of legend-making, in addition to books, were the anecdotal narratives, which may or may not have been pure fiction, set in Natchez Under-the-Hill published in such "news" sheets as the New York \textit{Spirit of the Times} during this same period. These narratives, of which an example is "My Grandmother's Trick," a gambling tale set at the landing, appeared in papers all over the country.\(^{75}\) The \textit{Spirit of the Times} was simply the leading promoter of a genre which had achieved wide popularity by the 1840's, or even earlier.

But publication of such narratives as "My Grandmother's Trick" in itself does not prove that the old image of Natchez Under-the-Hill was still taken seriously

\(^{74}\)Examples of such works are: Falconbridge, Dan Marble; Johnathan H. Green, \textit{Gambling Unmasked! Or the Personal Experiences of Jonathan H. Green, the Reformed Gambler...Written by Himself} (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: G.B. Zieberd Co., 1847), Philip Paxton, [Samuel A. Hammett] \textit{A Stray Yankee in Texas} (New York: J.S. Redfield, 1853); and Captain Charles Ross, \textit{The Earthquake of New Madrid and Along the Mississippi Valley, Together With Other Tales} (Cincinnati: George Concllin, 1847).

\(^{75}\)McDermott, ed., \textit{Before Mark Twain}, pp. 196-199.
by the second half of the century. These were pieces in which exaggeration for the sake of sensation and humor and entertainment was the rule. However, there is evidence that the dark image of Natchez' lower town was, in the main, if not in its more lurid and fantastic reflections, accepted by eminently respectable journalists and, by implication, by the nation's "best and brightest."

An article appearing in the New York Times of May 29, 1862, following the surrender of Natchez to Union forces, demonstrates this. The Times, while recognizing the important economic role of the landing to the Natchez community, had this to say about Natchez Under-the-Hill:

That portion of the city on the margin of the river is... [where] most of the gamblers, robbers, cyprians [prostitutes] and bowie-knife chivalry, for which Natchez was erst so famous, had their headquarters

Clearly, the image—and the legend—of Natchez Under-the-Hill as a crude and violent whorehouse and gambling district had become fixed in the consciousness of the nation by the second half of the antebellum era. That it was so, should be no surprise in the light of the fact that the Myth of the Wild and Savage West remained a cultural touchstone in the country's mentality until at least 1870.


CHAPTER THREE

The Myth of the Wild and Savage West I:
The Antebellum Image of Natchez Under-the-Hill

At the proper season a thousand boats are lying here at the landing, and the town is full of boatmen, mulattoes, houses of ill fame, and their wretched tenants, in short, the refuse of the world.

--Timothy Flint, 1826

To speak of the emergence of the "image" of Natchez Under-the-Hill in the national consciousness from the work of the traveler-journalists regrettably implies that there was, among those journalists, a monolithic treatment of the subject which, in fact, did not exist. To be sure, all of the major elements included in the description given above (pp. 39-45) were found in the travel literature, but all of them were seldom to be found in any single contemporary source. Most of the traveler-journalists accepted the Myth of the Wild and Savage West and described the Natchez landing in conformity with it; however, a few noteworthy exceptions gave emphasis, to one extent or another, to matters which related to the myth only in inconsequentials or which tended to contradict the myth, either entirely or as it was usually applied to Natchez. Even those writers who wholly accepted the myth usually gave more emphasis to one subject

1T. Flint, Recollections of the Last Ten Years, p. 213.
than to others, whether to intemperance or to gambling or to prostitution or to the violence allegedly perpetrated there. Rarely would a writer give attention to the trade and economy of the landing and upper town; a few did so but even more rarely, if ever, exhibited the practiced eye of the economist or businessman. The determinants of selection were as varied as the writers themselves: it depended upon what the particular writer happened to see when he was there or upon what he expected to see, or upon what his motives were for writing his account in the first place or, perhaps, upon what he thought would achieve the most sensational and entertaining results. Of seventeen of the most familiar and useful travel journals surveyed for this study, all of which were published between 1800 and 1838, during the period of the landing's heydey, ten both discussed and were specific as to the vice or vices allegedly practiced at the landing, five mentioned vice, either directly or by implication but were unspecific as to either place or type, while only three either soft-peddled the subject--for whatever reason--as regards Natchez and/or placed emphasis on the economic role of the landing vis-a-vis the upper town.

The latter group consisted of the journals of Fortesque Cuming, John James Audubon, and Robert Baird. Cuming, who arrived in the Natchez country in late August of 1808, was more concerned by the sickliness of the landing, caused, in his estimation, by the "noxious vapors generated
in the swamps immediately on the river banks,"\(^2\) than he was by any of its alleged vices, which he did not even mention. "The landing," wrote Cuming, "...is particularly fatal to the crews of the Ohio and Kentucky boats, who happen to be delayed there during the sickly season."\(^3\) Despite this relatively neutral view of Natchez Under-the-Hill, Cuming could hardly be considered a defender of the district's morality. He found the residents generally illiterate, altogether too fond of such dissipations as drinking and gambling, and, as he put it, just "a degree above the savage."\(^4\) But Cuming was in Natchez in the slow time--a time when the lack of trade and the threat of fever encouraged people to go elsewhere--so he apparently witnessed none of the dissipations he reported at the Natchez landing. He did see them in Port Gibson almost a month later and concluded that "Port Gibson and its neighborhood is perhaps the most dissolute as well as the most thriving part of the territory."\(^5\)

The view as seen by John James Audubon was quite different. Though Audubon said that in 1820 the scene

\[^3\]Ibid, p. 322.
\[^4\]Ibid, p. 352.
Under-the-Hill "was far from being altogether pleasing," he apparently was not speaking of vices but of the physical appearance of the place which must have been depressing to a lover of nature such as he. The buildings there were highly irregular ones, when he saw them, being "formed of the abandoned flatboats, placed in rows, as if with the view of forming a long street." Worse still was the evident use of the lower portions of the plain beneath the bluffs for the deposit of refuse from the town, a practice which attracted numerous vultures to the vicinity.

Robert Baird, who warned, in 1834, against the machinations of the gaming adventurers who infested "the steamboats and the chief places from Pittsburgh to New Orleans," was, if anything, favorable in his treatment of Natchez. Characterizing its society as good and citing its numerous churches of various denominations, he said of Natchez Under-the-Hill only that it was composed of a collection of warehouses, boat stores, and grog shops.


8Ibid, p. 249.

9Baird, View of the Valley of the Mississippi, p. 91.

10Ibid, p. 252.
If the importance of trade to the life of the landing and of the upper town was only implicit in Baird's treatment --and it was that at least--it was made rather explicit in the accounts of both Cuming and Audubon. Cuming stated that though Natchez was a small town, it was "a place of considerable importance in consequence of its being the principal emporium of the commerce of the territory...."\textsuperscript{11} Audubon was more graphic. He likened the atmosphere of the landing, with its shores "crowded with boats...laden with the produce of the Western country," to that of a bustling general fair where each person was "intent on securing the advantage of a good market,"\textsuperscript{12} and described the "hundreds of laden carts and other vehicles" jogging "along the declivity between the two towns" as a "medley...beyond my power to describe."\textsuperscript{13}

Other authors who cited the economic activity of the landing but who cannot be listed with Cuming et al., because they also gave space to the vices of the landing, include James Hall, Christian Schultz, Timothy Flint, Joseph Holt Ingraham, and Tyrone Power.

Hall, writing in 1801, discussed the activities of the boatmen while in port and stated that the only trade was via the Mississippi, from Pittsburgh, Kentucky, and Tennessee

\textsuperscript{11}Cuming, \textit{Sketches of a Tour}, p. 322.
\textsuperscript{12}M. R. Audubon, \textit{Audubon and His Journals}, p. 246.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid, p. 247.
to the north and from New Orleans to the south--statements which tend to underline the importance of the port, if subtly. Schultz, in Natchez in 1808, cited the extensive mercantile houses of the upper town, the role of the landing as a port of entry, the large number of boats to be seen docked along the shoreline, the extensive cotton trade and the consequent importance of produce from the upper valley, and the barge traffic which plied constantly between Natchez and New Orleans. Flint, who came to Natchez in 1822, noted that the river business was transacted "at the town, 'under the hill'," and that Natchez "is the principal town in this region for the shipment of cotton, with bales of which, at the proper season, the streets are almost barricaded."¹⁴ Ingraham, whose work, issued in 1835, was based on several years' residence in the Natchez area, fully integrated his treatment of the economic activities of the port into his colorful rendering of its seamier social side and noted its mercantile section of stores and warehouses, the presence of steamers and flats loading and unloading, the merchants busily storing their newly procured goods, the presence there of respectable merchants drawn by its superior grocery business, the existence of a saw and an oil mill at the northern end of the landing, and the general air of business to be seen there daily--even on Sunday. It was this last fact that seemed in Ingraham's eyes to turn even business into a vice. Finally, Power had almost nothing to

¹⁴T. Flint, Recollections of the Last Ten Years, p. 213.
say of the economic function of the landing town but what he did say was quite dramatic: "Natchy-under-hill" he wrote, was "where all things destined for the upper region are landed." As significant as these accounts of the economic function of the landing are deemed today, they were hardly noticed at the time and were almost literally buried by the far more numerous and graphic tales portraying the vices which contemporaries, understandably, found much more interesting.

The authors of these tales fall into two groups: those who treated specific vices allegedly practiced at the landing, and those who were less specific as to the vices enjoyed and/or the place or places where they were indulged. The latter group included Thomas Ashe, John Bradbury, Thomas Nuttall, Adam Hodgson, and Harriet Martineau. Of these, only Nuttall and Ashe did not identify the landing as a center of vice in Natchez, but spoke of the vices there as if not localized in any one part of the city. But Nuttall, in 1819, confined his comments regarding vice there to notice of the


number of Choctaws engaged in a "paltry traffic"\textsuperscript{16} for liquor. On the other hand, Thomas Ashe's description, penned in 1806, was far more harsh. Ashe, considered by the editors of \textit{The North American Review} to be one of the "two principal authorities for all the libels published in England against the United States,"\textsuperscript{17} clearly indicted the entire Natchez community without distinction of either class or section as being riddled with sin and degradation. First, he claimed that the American Protestants closed the Catholic church there when the United States assumed control and neglected to erect one of their own; then he asserted that gambling and horse racing were the prevalent amusements and that the men drank profusely. Although this is true so far as it goes, he also blamed the planters, whose passions for riches, he said, overode everything else with setting the "example of dissipation."\textsuperscript{18} Worse, in an exaggeration which paled all others, Ashe told the world that the citizens of Natchez—without exception one must suppose—suffered from venereal disease, a disease which, he wrote, cast "a gloom over every countenance, and sallowing every face."\textsuperscript{19}


\textsuperscript{17}\textit{North American Review}, I, (1815), p. 293. The second "authority" was identified as "Sargeant Cobbet."

\textsuperscript{18}Ashe, \textit{America, Performed in 1806}, p. 316.

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid}, pp. 316-317.
Bradbury, who said that Ashe's account was devoid of truth and who was generally sympathetic to the American West, joined with Hodgson and Martineau in treating the vice of Natchez somewhat vaguely but as if it were a manifestation of conditions confined to the lower town. Bradbury saw the landing town for himself in 1811 and suggested that it was probably more dissipated, for its size, than any other place in the world but attributed its condition not to the nature of frontier society but to factors resulting in similar conditions in ports the world over: the inclination of sailors—in this case the Kentucky men, as they were called—long out of port and relieved from a sense of danger, to indulge in dissipation. 20 Hodgson, who came to Natchez in the spring of 1820, merely called the landing "a perfect wapping," 21 an expression which could have referred either to the London slum district, located in Stepney and along the waterfront or to its archaic slang meaning, "to copulate." If the latter, his reference was probably to the prostitutes at the landing; if the former, it compared Natchez Under-the-Hill with one of the poorest, filthiest, and most crime-ridden sections of the London of his day. (Of course, he may have intended to convey both meanings at once.) Certainly, neither


was very flattering to the lower town. On the other hand, Hodgson said that only in New Orleans did one find public "profligacy;" and while he at least once mentioned gambling in connection with the Kentucky boats, his reference was to New Orleans rather than to Natchez. Harriet Martineau, who saw the lower town in the mid-1830's, was even more vague but less succinct when she said that Natchez, in her view, was fortunate to have "a low platform on which all the ugly traffic of the place can be transacted." Her distaste for


the "perpetually shifting" populace of Natchez and its landing was clear, but aside from a veiled reference to having to lock her door because the natives could not be kept off her steamboat, one is left to deduce the precise reason why.  

The remaining traveler-journalists, those who treated specific vices specifically at the landing, consisted of four Americans--James Hall, Christian Schultz, Timothy Flint, and Joseph Holt Ingraham--and five Britishers--Henry Ker, James Stuart, Captain James Edward Alexander, Thomas Hamilton, and Tyrone Power. But they break down further and more meaningfully into four additional and by no means exclusive groups: those who treated (1) intemperance (Hall, Hamilton, Alexander, and Ingraham); (2) prostitution (Schultz, Ker, Flint, Stuart, Ingraham, and Power); (3) gambling (Schultz, Ker, Stuart, Alexander, Ingraham, and Power); and (4) violence, a division which includes brawling and thievery as well as such more serious crimes as deliberate mayhem and murder (Schultz, Flint, Stuart, Alexander, Hamilton, Ingraham, and Power).  

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25 Ibid.  
26 Ibid.  
27 See: Alexander, Transatlantic Sketches, II, p. 62; T. Flint, Recollections of the Last Ten Years, p. 213; Hall, "A Brief View of the Mississippi Territory," PMHS, IX, pp. 556-557; excerpt from Hamilton, Men and Manners in America, II, (1906), pp. 180-200, in Mc Dermott, ed., Before Mark Twain, p. 56; Ingraham, Southwest By a Yankee, II, pp. 18-21 & 52-61; Ker, Travels Through the Western Interior of the United States, p. 41 [Though Ker was born in Boston, he was taken to England at a young age to be raised; by the time he
Treatment of Natchez Under-the-Hill by these writers, even within these categories of vices, was hardly uniform. Some were more vivid and detailed in their descriptions than others. Generally, Schultz, Alexander, Ingraham, and Power wrote the most detailed and probably the most influential accounts; however, if one considers the particular classes of vices listed above singly, a slight difference emerges.

In the case of intemperance, for example, though Hamilton, Alexander, and Ingraham, in Natchez in the early 1830's, mentioned the prevalence of grogshops, tippling houses, and the like and the drinking that went on in and around them, Hall, there some thirty years earlier (1801), was more precise in his estimate of which class or group of Natchez society was most engaged in the vice. Whereas Hamilton and Ingraham were rather vague in this regard and Alexander seemed to attribute the abuse of liquor to "desperate characters," presumably the boatmen, backwoodsmen, and gamblers, Hall attributed it not only to the boat-

arrived in America, he was more British than American; see: Clark, Travels in the Old South, II, pp. 189-190.]; Power, Impressions of America, II, pp. 113-117; Schultz, Travels, pp. 133-146; and Stuart, Three Years in North America, II, pp. 296-298.

men, whom he characterized as consuming "vast quantities of spirituous liquor" 29 whether on the river, in port, or on the road home, but also to the "class of mechanics and carters, etc." 30 who lived in town. In addition, Hall, a missionary, linked this vice to a particular cause, which none of the others did: he believed that it was due primarily to the lack of education and religious instruction from which these classes suffered. 31 Ingraham, who, overall, wrote the most thorough account of the Old Southwest of any antebellum visitor, seems to have had little to say about intemperance beyond the mere fact of its existence because he thought it altogether unexceptional. On the other hand, he found it at least noteworthy that the one class of inhabitants whose members seldom got drunk and who could be relied upon, in fact, to stay sober despite their fondness for whiskey, were the slaves. This phenomenon, he wrote, "is owing to the discipline of plantations, the little means they have wherewith to purchase, and last, though not the least, the fear of punishment...." 32


31 *Ibid*.

32 Ingraham, *Southwest By a Yankee*, II, p. 56; see also: pp. 20-21 & 61.
The differences in the accounts of prostitution in the writings of those who treated the subject amount to little more than variations in detail and color. Though some differences in point of view existed, they were too slight to be significant. From a moral perspective, the strongest statement regarding the prostitutes of the Natchez waterfront was made by the Boston-born and English-bred Henry Ker. There in 1808, Ker's treatment was more pure condemnation than description: "Here is the bold faced strumpet, full of blasphemies, who looks upon the virtuous part of her sex with contempt and hatred,"33 he wrote. Ker went a bit further, though, when he asserted that every house in the place was a grocery which contained "fornicators"34 among its provisions. Of the remaining five journalists who treated the subject, only James Stuart made an estimate of the number of such houses at the landing and he did so years later, in 1830. Stuart reported that there were three or four houses in the lower town "in which vice and immorality of every kind are unblushingly displayed."35 These houses, we must presume, provided the "fornicators" whom Ker so roundly condemned. But Stuart himself was admittedly vague about whether or not prostitutes were to be found there, though

33Ker, Travels Through the Western Interior of the United States, p. 41.

34Ibid.

35Stuart, Three Years in North America, II, p. 296.
their presence can certainly be inferred from his statement that the dancing assemblies, held almost nightly "in the public rooms of these houses," were "frequented by persons of bad character of both sexes."  

Flint, who, in 1822, the year in which he descended the Mississippi in a flat, described the landing as being full of "the refuse of the world", merely acknowledged the existence of an indeterminate number of "houses of ill fame" there and commiserated with their wretched occupants.

Schultz, Ingraham, and Power, though making no estimates of the number of such houses, did provide vignettes or tableaux of the disreputable ladies of the landing which offer a peek through the narrowly parted curtain of time and a glimpse at creatures who would otherwise be completely lost. Power, an Irish actor who played the Natchez theater in 1834, described a landing laced with numbers of half-clad, "faded" young girls in the barrooms or at the doors of their apartments and who lived in the midst of "wretched devils" and bold, swashbuckling "gemman."

Ingraham, who taught languages at Jefferson College

36Ibid.
37Flint, Recollections of the Last Ten Years, p. 213.
38Ibid, pp. 211-213.
--a scant six miles from the waterfront—from 1830 to 1833 and later became a writer of dime novels, described the occupants of the brothels, which alternated with gambling-houses and barrooms, in scenes worthy of a DeMille or a Selznick:

As we passed through the street...the low, broken, half-sunken sidewalks, were blocked up with fashionably dressed young men, smoking or lounging, tawdrily arrayed, highly rouged females, sailors, Kentucky boatmen, negroes, negresses, mulattoes, pigs, dogs, and dirty children.  

As colorful as this scene would have been without those "highly rouged females," it was their presence and perhaps, by association, that of the "dirty children" which informed the reader that the society of the landing town was openly wicked. As if to be sure his genteel readers understood the message, Ingraham gave them another dose in a later chapter or letter. He depicted a scene observed by him from the bluff, two hundred or so feet overhead; it occurred on a Sunday around a "long, low building, over which proudly waved the star-spangled banner...."^41 The scandal of the "goings-on" here and the contagion of Natchez Under-the-Hill from which the building's rightful inhabitants apparently "suffered" were made manifest by Ingraham's treatment:

From this building issued the sound of bestial revelry, drowning the hum of business and the shouts of boyish merriment. The coarse gray clothing... of most of those lounging about the door, designated

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40Ingraham, Southwest By a Yankee, II, pp. 19-20.  
(Italics added.)

41Ibid, p. 61.
it, in conjunction with the flag...[an army] rendezvous--even had not the martial eloquence of a little, half-tipsey, dapper man in a gray doublet... expatiating to a gaping crowd of grin­ning Africans--night-capped or bare-headed white females, in slattern apparel and uncombed locks--two or three straight, blanketed, silent Indians--noisy boys and ragged boatmen--upon the glories of a soldier's life, sufficiently indicated its character.\footnote{Ibid. (Italics added.)}

As excellent as these tableaux are, they are yet at a distance and convey little more than a sense of the harlot's place in the landing town's society. We are given a notion of how they looked and dressed (or did not dress) but get no more than a suggestion of them as people. This is regrettable, but we could hardly expect these traveler-journalists, who were after all gentlemen, to have been closer to the "ladies" than that; or, if they got closer, to have written of it.

Still, Christian Schultz, a New York businessman and speculator, on a tour of the West to investigate investment possibilities, did get closer to some of them in 1808--in a thoroughly respectable way--and gave this account of his impressions:

When I went on board of my boat, (which was very early, and before the sun had risen,) I discovered that my visit was as unwelcome as it was unexpected. I was so unfortunate as to disturb the morning slum­bers of exactly one quarter of a dozen of the copper­coloured votaries of the Cyprian Queen, [a queen or goddess known to Schultz to have been rather deficient in the virtue of chastity,\footnote{Schultz, Traveles, II, p. 134.}] who it seems had under­taken to enliven the idle hours of our Canadian crew. The ladies really seemed ashamed; but whether from
a conviction of their being the intruders, or considering me as such, I am unable to say. Suffice it, I took my leave until they had time to decamp.44

In addition, Schultz made two comments regarding the male and female citizens of Natchez proper which, if true, reveal, more precisely than perhaps any other journalist, just where and how those three prostitutes—and their uncounted sisters—fit into the spectrum of the sexual morality of the Natchez society of both the upper and lower towns. He wrote of the gentlemen that they "pass their time in the pursuit of three things: All make love; most of them play; and a few make money. With religion they have nothing to do...."45 Schultz's readers could easily imagine these prostitutes in the embrace of men other than boatmen. Concerning the ladies, his report was even more—much more—damaging, given the double standard of the day. Quoting a married gentleman of the town, he wrote, "'the ladies... are...though chaste as the Virgin queen before the Gordian knot is tied, yet indulgent as the Cyprian goddess for ever after.'"46 Though Schultz expressed a doubt as to the general application of "this character," as he termed the gentleman's charge against the ladies, the damage was done; the suggestion of sexual promiscuity among Natchez matrons was effectively sown. This was especially so in the light of the remarks concerning sexual immorality and venereal disease in Natchez made by the infamous Thomas Ashe in a

work published in the same year in which Schultz made his observations. How true this view was further research may indicate; it is at least clear that whether true or not Schultz's report was extremely damaging to the image of not only Natchez Under-the-Hill but also to that of the Natchez community as a whole.

But Schultz's account hardly stood alone in this regard. Whatever differences existed between these six travelers concerning their view of prostitution at the Natchez landing, there was virtually none concerning their impact on the contemporary image of Natchez Under-the-Hill: All agreed it existed there; all disapproved, though with varying accents; and all contributed significantly to the bad reputation of Natchez and its lower town.

Ostensibly, the traveler-journalists dealt with gambling as they had with prostitution and intemperance. Some writers, like Ker, simply listed it among a catalogue of sins; others, like Power, discussed it more fully. Most disapproved of it and its practitioners thoroughly or at least wrote of them disparagingly. Whatever differences regarding gambling and gamblers at the Natchez landing existed in these accounts (with the exception of Schultz's) were differences in degree only. But a significant difference does exist between the attention given intemperance and prostitution and that devoted to gambling in these traveler-journals: it is much more difficult to separate the vice of gambling from all other vices in the accounts of
Ker, Stuart, Alexander, Ingraham, and Power than it is to isolate either of the former ones. For in these accounts, gambling is inextricably linked to all other vices as if it were both a cause and an effect of them; as if in revealing the gamblers they revealed the whole power structure of the Under-the-Hill community devoted to the exploitation of vice for their material support. Whether or not this was true in reality, most of these writers seem to have thought it was.

Ker's account, which entered the "image-mill" in 1816, was the first to note the association between gaming and the other vices of the landing. When he claimed that every house was a grocery providing prostitutes among its provisions, he did so in this manner:

...every house is a grocery, containing gambling, music, and dancing, fornicators, etc; yes, I have in that place seen 150 boats, loaded with produce, bound to New Orleans, delaying their time, and spending days in the lowest orders of dissipation.47

Stuart, who added his bit in 1833 based upon observations made in 1830, also noticed the juxtaposition of gambling to the other vices, vices which, in the opinion of his steam-boat captain, Captain Paul, made Natchez "the most profligate place in this country."48 Stuart noted that in the same three or four buildings in which he had seen "vice and immorality of every kind,"49 he had observed alongside the rooms devoted to dancing public rooms dedicated to gambling.50

47Ker, Travels, p. 41
48Stuart, Three Years in North America, II, p. 296.
49Ibid.
50Ibid.
That he made less of this than later writers would probably resulted from his more sanguine view of the gamblers.\footnote{Ibid, p. 295.}

Alexander, who also published his account in 1833 thought much less of gamblers, and thus agreed with Captain Paul as to the base character of Natchez Under-the-Hill. And he graphically linked the drunkenness that he witnessed there to the gamblers:

\begin{quote}
Here the most desperate (sic) characters congregate, particularly in the Spring of the year, when the up-country boatmen are returning home with their dollar-bags from the New Orleans market. They are plied with rum, and induced to gamble all their money away.\footnote{Alexander, \textit{Transatlantic Sketches}, II, p. 62. (Italics added).}
\end{quote}

Ingraham, whose influential description of life in the Old Southwest was based upon his observation in the region from his arrival there in 1830, did not go so far as to accuse Natchez gamblers of plundering their victims, but he did believe that they were thoroughly disreputable and obviously prominent in the houses of vice at the landing. He described a street:

\begin{quote}
... lined with dancing-houses, tippling-shops, houses of ill fame, and gambling-rooms. --Here may always be heard the sound of the violin, the clink of silver upon the roulette and faro-tables, and the language of profanity and lewdness: and the revellers, so far from being interrupted by the intervention of the Sabbath, actually distinguish it by a closer and more perservering devotion to their unhallowed pursuits and amusements.\footnote{Ingraham, \textit{Southwest by a Yankee}, II, p. 59.}
\end{quote}
Power, who was in Natchez in February, 1835, a time when the local feeling against the gamblers in both Natchez and Vicksburg was rising, made the most dramatic contribution of all of the traveler-journalists to the image of the gambler as the leading villain of the landing. Power observed "a succession of barrooms, dancing-shops, and faro-banks or roulette tables...each in full operation, although it was not yet two o'clock P.M. Each was open to the street, so he could observe without entering (as he carefully pointed out) that they "were more obscene in their appointments than the lowest of the itinerant hells found at our English races." He saw piles of silver upon the tables and "observed wretched devils playing there, whose whole standing kit would not have brought a picaroon at vendue." emphasized the violation of the Sabbath to draw attention to the irreligious, hedonistic atmosphere of the lower town.

54Power, Impressions of America, II, p. 113.

55Ibid.

56Ibid. Given the context of the phrase "picaroon at vendue," it is likely that Power intended to use the work "picayune," meaning a small amount of money, about ½ bit, rather than "picaroon," which meant rogue or thief. Perhaps he intended a pun; i.e., the "whole standing kit" or everything the poor devils owned would not have, in one sense, brought ½ bit in price at auction, and, in the other sense, would not have prompted a thief at that auction to bother to steal them. In any event, the poverty of the "victims" at those gaming tables was well-established by Power.
He also noticed two "of the same style of gemman to be met with about the silver hells of London," except that these "gemman" were more "bold and swashbuckling." The implications of this description are clear: those Swashbuckling "gemman," were quite likely to fleece those "wretched devils," who were quite likely so poor as a result. This impression was clenched but two pages later by Power's claim that the gamblers, who were called "Black-Legs," were organized in gangs and carried on their trade with impunity, not just in Natchez but up and down the Mississippi system, in the steamboats and in the river ports; that they systematically plundered hundreds of victims, including honest planters, each year; and that they were responsible for much crime, including murder. Power's account was published in 1836, the year following the violent expulsion of the gamblers from both Vicksburg and Natchez.

The one exception to this melody of condemnation is found in the 1808 account of Christian Schultz. Schultz, who seemed more tolerant of the prostitute he had found in his boat than most observers tended to be and who seemed to take human foibles in his stride better than most, was not shocked by the gambling he found in Natchez. On the contrary, he seemed to regard the sport as relatively harmless. He was,
however, disgusted by what he regarded as a hypocritical and discriminatory policy repressing gambling in the lower town while allowing it "in its fullest latitude up on the hill...." He wrote:

I had an opportunity of seeing this republican regulation put in force against a Monongahela boatman, who having had some trifling dispute with a spy of one of the ministerial officers of the tribunal, offered to leave the event to the turn of the dollar. This the other objected to; but offered to pitch a dollar at a point, which was agreed to by the first. The boatman lost his wager fairly; but what was his surprise when he afterwards found himself arrested upon the information of this very villain, and fined either twenty-five or fifty dollars for gambling! Schultz's information, whatever its source, was mistaken. The gambling law in force at the time of Schultz's visit—did not discriminate between the upper and lower towns. Gambling of the sort involved in Schultz's incident was illegal wherever it occurred and punishable by a fine of $10 if tried before a Justice of the Peace or of the Quorum or by a fine of up to $50 if tried before a Circuit Court. Schultz's account raises the question of whether the law was being equitably enforced in Natchez, although it is equally probable that the sort of gambling which Schultz saw openly engaged in in the upper town consisted of betting on horse races and cock fights. This was perfectly legal since the Assembly had, due to their popularity among people of all classes, exempted both sports from the legal prohi-
bitions on gambling. For all of this, there was nonetheless an injustice in the results of this case: for, according to law, the informant, who was a party to the offense, received one-half of the fine charged against the defendant!  

Schultz's accuracy in this case is irrelevant to the broader question of the account's effect on the image of Natchez Under-the-Hill. Thus, it emphasized gambling in the upper town more than in the lower one. If it injured the reputation of the landing, far more did it reflect on the Natchez community as a whole both because of the gaming itself and because of the alleged discrimination and hypocrisy. The story's significance lies in the fact that it made an early contribution to the ideas of Natchez as a community where gaming thrived and as one where the law could be manipulated by local residents or experienced gamesters to the injury of uninformed and relatively innocent victims. This certainly added to the impression, held by many, that Natchez— all of Natchez— was a wild and lawless community.

This impression was strengthened through the years by tales of violent doings in Natchez, particularly Under the-Hill. Most of these were spread orally by boatmen

62 Mississippi Herald and Natchez Gazette, February 11, 1807. The law in question was "an act to prevent the evil practice of gaming," passed by the territorial assembly in January, 1807.
and others who visited Natchez but some were written down by traveler-journalists. These accounts, of course, did not all dwell on the same kind of violence. Of the seven writers who treated violence at the landing, four (Schultz, Flint, Ingraham, and Alexander) dealt with brawling and the related crime of mayhem; three (Hamilton, Stuart, and Alexander), with thievery; and two (Flint and Power), with murder. It is impossible to be certain, too, that some of the tales were not exaggerated or distorted, or even entirely false. But it scarcely mattered. True or not, all the stories of violence contributed to the lasting image of a lawless Natchez Under-the-Hill.

Brawling was the most open and probably, given the proclivities of the boatmen, the most frequent violent vice at the landing during its heydey. So says the tradition anyway, a tradition reaching back into the years before the steamboat tolled the deathknell of the keelboatmen, best epitomized by Mike Fink, as the lynchpins of the Mississippi trade system. The travel literature supports it, generally, no less than does the folk literature from the latter half of the antebellum period. Yet there are really very few contemporary stories of brawls that occurred at Natchez Under-the-Hill preserved in the literature. Of the four journalists who discussed or mentioned brawling, most generalized so that it is difficult to tell whether they were reporting from firsthand observation or merely repeating the oral tradition. This is especially true of the accounts of
Flint and Alexander. Flint wrote that "here they have what are called 'rows,' which often end in murder."\(^{63}\) Alexander claimed that "dreadful riots" were started by drunken rivermen after they had lost all of their money at the gambling tables and that this fighting consisted of "fist and scull fighting; where eyes are gouged out, noses and ears bitten and torn off."\(^ {64}\) Both were referring to the classic "Rough and Tumble," a singularly gruesome form of hand-to-hand combat practiced throughout the western country in the early nineteenth century.\(^ {64}\) Both regarded it as barbaric. Ingraham also reported wrestling and fighting Under-the-Hill, and he may, as he said, have actually seen it in progress. But he seemed to have taken it, as such, less seriously than did either Flint or Alexander:

The streets of the lower town were alive with boatmen, draymen, buyers and sellers, horsemen and hacks, and scores of negroes, some wrestling, some fighting, others running foot-races, playing quoits or marbles, selling the products of their little gardens....\(^ {65}\)

In this account, even the fighting sounds as if it was part of the festivities of a fair day--as if it was all in fun. It also, considering the context, sounds as if it were the Negroes, in town from the plantations for a holiday, doing the fighting. (Ingraham's account is unusual in this regard, for he placed far more emphasis upon the universal presence

\(^{63}\) T. Flint, Recollections of the Last Ten Years, p. 213.

\(^{64}\) Alexander, Transatlantic Sketches, II, p. 61.

\(^{65}\) Ingraham, Southwest By a Yankee, II, p. 54.
of the Negro at the landing than did any other journalist.) To be sure, Ingraham was appalled by the display, but, judging from his comments regarding the violation of the Sabbath, primarily because it occurred on a Sabbath rather than because he thought anything that he witnessed was in itself shocking. 66

Schultz was the only one of our traveler-journalists to both witness a frontier boatman's brawl in Natchez Under-the-Hill and leave an account of the bragging that preceded it. And it is one of the classic examples of frontier braggadocio. Schultz wrote:

In passing two boats next to mine, I heard some very warm words; which my men informed me proceeded from some drunken sailors, who had a dispute respecting a choctaw lady. Although I might fill half a dozen pages with the curious slang made use of on this occasion, yet I prefer selecting a few of the most brilliant expressions by way of sample. One said, 'I am a man; I am a horse; I am a team. I can whip any man in all Kentucky, by G--d.' The other replied, 'I am an alligator; half man, half horse; can whip any on the Mississippi, by G--d.' The first one again, 'I am a man; have the best horse, best dog, best gun, and handsomest wife in all Kentucky, by G--d.' The other, 'I am a Mississippi snapping turtle; have bear's claws, alligator's teeth, and the devil's tail; can whip any man, by G--d.' This was too much for the first, and at it they went like two bulls, and continued for half an hour, when the alligator was fairly vanquished by the horse. 67

66 Ibid, pp. 53-54. He spoke of sounds of merri- ment, dispute, and blasphemy "breaking the Sabbath silence of the hour, in harsh discord with its sacredness (p. 54).

67 Schultz, Travels, pp. 145-146.
As usual, Schultz exhibited bemused good humor and tolerance rather than shock at what he observed. And he did not seem to regard them as an exclusive property of the West. Yet his portrait of the absurdly swaggering, boisterous, and violent boatmen engaged in combat at Natchez Under-the-Hill surely documented for the armchair traveler rumors of the violence of the Natchez landing and thereby strengthened the negative image that it would have had even had Christian Schultz never been there.

But if the crux of the bad reputation of Natchez Under-the-Hill was the fear that innocent people would be victimized by the immoral purveyors of depravity who resided there, there were vices worse than brawling about which stories circulated. These stories concerned thievery and murder, but few have been preserved.

Evidence indicates that, by the 1830's, those on the river, travelers and professionals alike, believed that robbery was a constant possibility at the Natchez landing. Mrs. Martineau was warned to lock her door when her steamboat docked there. Captain Paul advised James Stuart to leave his money and his watch on board when he went ashore at the landing.68 The acerbic Thomas Hamilton was warned "not to walk to any distance from the landing place, for the

68Stuart, Three Years in North America, II, p. 296.
risk of being robbed was considerable."^69 (He did so anyway and was not robbed.)

Yet, there is only one firsthand account available today of thievery or robbery there. It was provided by James Stuart in his Three Years in North America, published in 1833. Stuart, who had himself walked through the landing town and to the upper town and back without mishap, stated that "a Kentucky farmer, who went on shore with us, had his pocket picked of a pocket-book containing 500 dollars."^70 Stuart was obviously annoyed; his comment could have done the reputation of neither the landing nor the upper town any good (the latter because it and its officials were apparently deemed responsible by Stuart for the state of law enforcement in the lower). He wrote:

Such a nuisance as that which exists in the open and avowed manner which I have mentioned, so near the landing place at Natchez, would hardly be tolerated anywhere, in a similar situation, in Great Britain, or in Europe. Strange it is that it should exist here, in a country, in the chief cities of which so much more decorum is observed than in the capitals of Europe.71

While this was bad enough, an even more damaging report, written by Captain James Edward Alexander of the 42d

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69Quoted from Hamilton, Men and Manners in America, II, pp. 180-200, in McDermott, ed., Before Mark Twain, p. 56.
70Stuart, Three Years in North America, II, p. 297.
Royal Highlanders, appeared the same year. Alexander claimed (his source is unknown) that steamboat passengers were habitually plundered at Natchez Under-the-Hill. Attracted by the lights and the sounds of merrymaking, he said, passengers drifted ashore and mixed with men and women of the landing, drinking, dancing, and gambling. When the boat's bell called them back aboard, the lights were put out suddenly in the dance halls and gambling parlors, and the passengers, rushing to get back to their boat, were tripped by ropes and set upon by ruffians who stole their valuables. The account, true or not, hardly helped the image of Natchez' lower town either at home or abroad.

Most damaging of all to that image were the rumors that the stranger in Natchez ran a high risk of being murdered. This is perhaps the strangest of all aspects of the contemporary image of the Natchez port town, for there are fewer written accounts of this vice than any other. There are in fact only two: the brief reference of Timothy Flint, already quoted, and the account penned by the Irish comedian, Tyrone Power. Flint's statement that the "rows" or brawls, the Rough and Tumbles, which frequently occurred Under-the-Hill often ended in murder is disappointingly terse. He said little about who was likely to be involved in such conflicts or how often they were likely to occur, though he did say

72Alexander, Transatlantic Sketches, II, p. 62.
that bystanders rarely got involved in such affairs.\textsuperscript{73} Since
the only other contemporary source—within the travel liter-
ature—which claims to document a danger of murder to anyone,
whether innocent bystander or otherwise, as a regular feature
of Natchez Under-the-Hill is the journal of Tyrone Power, it
is tempting to assume that that particular feature of the
contemporary image did not arise until the mid-1830's, the
period of Power's visit. Yet Power himself testified that
the danger of murder in "Natchy-under-hill," as he called
it, was not as great when he was there as it once had been.
As he and his friends strolled down the lane (presumably
Silver Street) he noted that:

\begin{quote}
From no party...did our company meet the slightest observation; although, a very few years back, for strangers to have strolled about here...might have proved, to say the least of it, a perilous adventure; as it is more than probable they would have been fol-
lowed by a long shot; likely enough to bring a book of travels to an abrupt conclusion; but even at Natchy-
under-hill, manners, if not morals, are improving. Murder is not nigh so common as it was a few seasons back....\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

Power's statement, even though it is probably exaggerated,
provides at least presumptive evidence that Natchez Under-
the-Hill had a reputation of condoning violent death prior
to 1835. But the landing's repute certainly grew worse
following the publication of Power's book in 1835, for aside
from the above statement, his narrative related the only two

\textsuperscript{73}T. Flint, \textit{Recollections of the Last Ten Years}, pp. 213 & 128.

\textsuperscript{74}Power, \textit{Impressions of America}, II, p. 114.
specific stories of murder alleged to have been committed under-the-hill in the entire travel literature. "Now and then," Power reported, a murder "of an extraordinary nature does take place...." Power then told of a murder that occurred a few months previous to his arrival. A stranger, he was told, had been shot while boarding a steamer and an "inquest returned a verdict of murder against some person unknown." Either Power or his informant or both assumed that the murderer was a gambler. "It was presumed," wrote Power, "as he was a stranger from the west country, that in a play dispute he had excited a spirit of revenge amongst some of these desperadoes, which was thus promptly gratified." The then current unpopularity of gamblers in Natchez explains this assumption and it was, as Power had it, assumed as a matter of course that the "Black Legs" always had "a ready specific" with which "to silence noisy pigeons." Power's second murder case was not based on hearsay. He was on the bluff overlooking the lower town one night when he heard the sounds of a brawl taking place below him; soon he heard two shots: "crack! crack! went a couple of

75Ibid.
76Ibid.
77Ibid.
78Ibid, p. 115.
shots, almost together;--the piercing shrieks of a female followed, and to these succeeded the stillness of death."  

A murder? Possibly; but it could just as easily have been a matter of self defense or the shots could have missed entirely. Power could not know with any certainty; nor did he, apparently, bother to inquire. Power's testimony would hardly stand in a court of law, but his readers did not require ironclad certainty to believe what they wanted to believe. They were not interested in the niceties of evidence. Power's statements--as had Alexander's before him--fit their prejudices, and they believed that he had all-but-witnessed a murder. The legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill as a lair of death and violence would but grow with the telling.

As various as were the treatments given Natchez Under-the-Hill by the traveler-journalists, there was at least one factor which, consciously or otherwise, underlay all of them: their awareness of the Myth of the Wild and Savage West. They knew before they ever saw Natchez, that it was widely believed (whether they personally believed it or not) that western society was inherently vulgar, violent, and immoral.

It is hardly necessary to examine in detail all of the accounts of the traveler-journalists who treated Natchez

79 Ibid, p. 117.
Under-the-Hill and Natchez to show that those journalists were aware of the myth. We have already demonstrated the myth's pervasiveness throughout both the American East and Europe. To demonstrate that the myth affected the perceptions of those travelers who saw Natchez first hand it is only necessary to illustrate that effect upon a representative sample of them. As to the rest, the awareness of the myth among some of them, such as James Hall, Thomas Ashe, and Timothy Flint has already been shown. Christian Schultz seemed least affected by the myth, and attributed the barbarity he saw to the weaknesses of human nature generally rather than to any particular failure of it unique to Natchez or to the West. Thomas Nuttall, interested primarily in the Indian cultures of the West, said little about white society there. Finally, Henry Ker's Puritan roots and his harsh treatment of the vices he observed at the landing fit him into the pattern of such New England visitors to the West as Thaddeus Harris and William Richardson, who were discussed in the previous chapter.

Of the three journalists who did not depict the vices in Natchez' lower town, only Audubon actually seemed to reject the myth out of hand. As we have seen, Fortescue Cuming fully accepted western savagery as a fact and definitely thought Mississippi Territory as Barbaric as any part of the West. Seeing no evidence of such activities at the landing because he was in Natchez during late summer when business activity of all kinds was slow, he reported instead
on how sickly the place was. Robert Baird, though he said nothing of Natchez per se in this regard in his *Emigrants' and Travellers' Guide to the West*, also accepted the validity of many of the facts observed by such travelers as Cuming. He agreed that westerners exhibited an independent spirit, a spirit in some "greatly perverted or degenerated" so that those "were not pleasant members of...society." He thought too, that westerners possessed "an apparent roughness, which some would deem rudeness of manners." He also agreed that these traits were particularly evident in "the agricultural portions of the country," though they were also to be found to some extent in the towns and villages of the West. However, Baird insisted that these traits did not spring so much from "ignorance and barbarity, (as some would suppose)," as from "the circumstances of a people thrown together in a new country, often for a long time in thin settlements" in which isolation, a necessary hardiness and independence of enterprise, and material equality were the rule. Baird concluded:

These circumstances have laid the foundation for that equality of intercourse, simplicity of manners, want of deference, want of reserve, great readiness to make acquaintances, freedom of speech, indisposition to brook real or imaginary insults, which one witnesses among the people of the West.

80See above, pp. 55-56.
82Ibid. 83Ibid. 84Ibid.
Clearly, Baird was fully aware of the myth of a barbaric West. So, too, was John James Audubon, whose portrait of the Under-the-Hill community was the most favorable—or the lease unfavorable—of any. Audubon defended the West, and the entire country for that matter, against the charge that innocent life was constantly in danger there. He said that in his twenty-five years of travel in the United States, his life had been in danger only once and that travelers in the United States ran few risks.85 This was certainly contrary to the many rumors of violence in the West which flourished particularly in those regions just east of the agricultural frontier.86

Two writers who treated the Natchez landing negatively but who regarded Western—and American—society favorably, John Bradbury and Adam Hodgson, both Britons, also illustrate the awareness of these traveler-journalists of the Myth of the Wild and Savage West. Bradbury, who likened the vice of Natchez to that common to seaports the world over, devoted several pages to a defense of Western manners and morals. He praised Western people for their hospitality and defended their inquisitiveness as a virtue. He also defended the morality and civil peace of the West:

85Audubon, *Delineations of American Character*, p. 18.
86See above, pp. 31-32.
In respect to their moral character, my experience reaches chiefly to the western, middle, and some of the southern states. In the western states, I noticed that very few of the houses in which I slept had either locks or bolts on the doors, and that the jails were in general without a single tenant. ...I believe no country, having a population equal to the United States, can exhibit the records of their courts containing fewer statements of crimes committed against the laws.  

Adam Hodgson, the respectable English merchant of Liverpool and church layman who had called the lower town of Natchez "a perfect Wapping," also informed his readers that he was well aware of the typical English view of America and the American West and that he did not accept it.  

He wrote that while the use of spirits is general in the United States, he had not seen six cases of drunkenness in the country--in either East or West--during his entire stay. He also asserted that immoralities existed in America pretty much as they did in England and that only in New Orleans, of all American cities, did he witness evidence of public profligacy.  

Most of the traveler-journalists who wrote of Natchez in the 1830's, consciously linked their treatment of Natchez and its landing with conditions found in the West in

87Bradbury, Travels in the Interior of America, pp. 193-194; See also, pp. 191-192.  

88For a brief biographical sketch of Adam Hodgson, See: Clark, Travels in the Old South, II, pp. 244-247. Hodgson was treasurer of the West-Lancashire Association of the Church Missionary Society when he came to America.  

in general, though they did so in varying degrees. This linkage clearly reflects the assumptions of all of them regarding the state of Western society in general, with the possible exceptions of James Stuart and Harriet Martineau, and is easily compatible with the image of a lawless and barbaric West. Ingraham, who noted the bold, rude habits of the men in Natchez, traits which, he said, often resulted in "dark and fatal consequences," and who observed that the Natchez country had once deserved the bad reputation it had for the prevalence of the duello there, blamed these excesses on the unequal ratio of men to women in its population. He also noted that this ratio (in Natchez, there were 10 unmarried men for every 3 married ones) was common throughout the western settlements and implied that its results, in social problems, were similar in all of them. 90

The connection between the general myth of the West and the particular image of Natchez' landing town, was clearer in Alexander's account. After his departure from New Orleans, he noticed that his steamboat carried deck passengers who, he said, were backwoodsmen that had previously descended the river in flatboats to trade in New Orleans. As he described them, they were a coarse, "wild and fierce-looking lot" who drank excessively, gambled endlessly, and used knives all too frequently. 91 He treated the squatters

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90 Ingraham, *Southwest By a Yankee*, II, pp. 45-49.
he saw along the river similarly, saying they were
great rogues and desperadoes who stole from the boat-
men whenever they could.92 His treatment of Natchez
was in exactly the same vein; Alexander blamed the evils
of the landing on the same sort of rogues whom he
called "desperate characters."93 Finally, he wrote that
"knives are oftener drawn in anger on the Mississippi than
they are in Italy or Spain."94 Thus Alexander's description
of the Port of Natchez was part and parcel of his percep-
tion of the entire western country.

The accounts of Power and Martineau, who were both
at Natchez in 1835, the year the gamblers were expelled from
Mississippi's river towns (five of them were hung in Vicks-
bur95), understandably focused on the theme of western
barbarity more narrowly than did Alexander's. But they did
so with an important difference between them. Power, as
we have seen, blamed most of the evils of Western Society
on the gambling fraternity. Martineau, though she plainly did
not respect gamblers, blamed the people of the Mississippi River

92 Ibid, p. 61.
93 Ibid, p. 62.
95 For an account of this incident see: H.S. Fulkerson,
Random Recollections of Early Days in Mississippi (Baton
country--specifically those in Vicksburg--for, as she saw it, barbarously taking the law into their own hands and hanging the gamblers and others as well who, she believed, were completely innocent. Her comment was caustic:

The effect of barbarism like this is not to justify the imputation of its excesses to the country at large, but to doom the region in which it prevails to be peopled by barbarians. The lovers of justice and order will avoid the places where they are set at naught.

While Martineau may not have thought the entire West barbaric, she certainly thought of the Southwest in those terms.

Even more illustrative of the power of the myth to influence visitors' perception of the West is the treatment given Natchez by the disdainful Briton, Thomas Hamilton. Hamilton described the squatters of the Mississippi country in terms similar to Alexander's, alleging they were depraved and violent men who had fled from either justice or contempt, and he condemned those he saw about him on his steamboat for having "an utter disregard of all the decent courtesies of society." When he got to Natchez, he reported,


97Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travels, II, p. 17.

98Quoted from Hamilton, Men and Manners in America, II, pp. 180-200 in McDermott, ed., Before Mark Twain, p. 52. For Hamilton's description of the squatters, see pp. 51-52.
his boat halted at the landing for only an hour and that he did not see the upper town. "But," he continued, "the place was described by the passengers as being the scene of the most open and undisguised profligacy. All I observed in the lower town, certainly gave me no reason to doubt the accuracy of the description."99 Hamilton's reaction was typical of the reactions of many other travelers who, as Ingraham said in 1835, saw the landing briefly and came away with "very inaccurate and unfavorable" impressions of all of Natchez.100 They did so, primarily, because the assumptions about the West—that it was a region which was the abode of dissolute and disorderly and even depraved characters of both sexes—were so strong that, fortified with a heavy dose of hearsay and rumor, they easily "reasoned" from areas observed, if only briefly, to regions that were not. That their conclusions may have been inaccurate never seems to have occurred to such as Hamilton. No doubt many armchair social critics of the West, in general, and of Natchez and its landing, in particular, armed with such accounts, were led by the same assumptions to the same conclusions.

These assumptions—reinforced by years of word-of-mouth tales, rumors, gossip, and, especially, by the travel

99Ibid, p. 56.

100Ingraham, *Southwest By a Yankee*, II, p. 18-19.
accounts themselves--gradually gave rise to the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill which flourished in the latter half of the antebellum period. Certainly, these travel accounts did not, by themselves, create the legend nor did they, by themselves, create the image itself. The myth of a wild west, together with oral tales and whatever relevant newspaper stories there were, were doubtless sufficient to accomplish the task. Did not James Hall state, in 1801, that the Natchez region was already considered a "sink for the dregs of the more northern parts of the continent?" 101 Did not Timothy Flint's statement that the Natchez landing was a gathering place for the "refuse of the World" reflect not only one man's judgment of the moral quality of one particular western locale, but also the moral judgment of an entire culture about the West in general? 102 Nonetheless, these journals had a significant impact on the image projected by Natchez and its port to the rest of the world. This is equally evident not only from the seriousness with which Americans and Europeans alike treated them (as witnessed by


102 T. Flint, Recollections of the Last Ten Years, p. 213.
by the uproarious reaction to Mrs. Trollope's indictment of America in her *Domestic Manners of the Americans*), but also from such comments as that of the English traveler, Harriet Martineau, who noted in 1838, that the landing had, in her opinion, "not improved its reputation since the descriptions which have been given of it by former travellers."103 Perhaps the primary impact of the descriptions of these "former travellers" was to give the image of Natchez Under-the-Hill, and that of Natchez itself, a broader range and a greater permanence than would otherwise have been the case. In the process, the image was refined, fleshed out with increasingly lurid details, and, eventually, made a legend in the mythology of the Great American West.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Myth of the Wild and Savage West II:
The Antebellum Legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill

Landing at Natchez in the winter of 1824-5, about ten o'clock in the evening, I thought I would stop for a few minutes Under-the-Hill, with the view of ascertaining, if possible, what peculiarity it was, that had made "Natchez under-the-hill," so celebrated throughout the Union. I walked up the street, and entered the first door I saw open. The room into which I entered, was a brilliantly lighted saloon, around which, two gaily dressed, sylph-like forms were whirling in the waltz. .... I...retreated into an adjoining room, the door of which stood invitingly open. Here a scene presented itself which made a lasting impression upon me. Immediately in front, as I entered, stood a Roulette table, revolving like the flood wheel of a tubmill, from which I ever and anon heard the ominous exclamation of "double 0 black!"

--William C. Hall (or "Yazoo"), 1843

Precisely when the image of Natchez Under-the-Hill became the legend is impossible to say. To be sure, the travel literature and other sources indicate conclusively that the myth of a wild and lawless Mississippi Valley was well established before the turn of the nineteenth century and that the similar image of the Natchez landing had become

1Quoted from William C. Hall, "My Grandmother's Trick," in McDermott, ed., Before Mark Twain, p. 196-197. This sketch first appeared in the New York Spirit of the Times in December, 1843.
accepted at least as early as 1815 and probably earlier.

But it takes more than the repetition of "facts," however distorted by moral and social prejudice they might be, in travel volumes to create a legend. These were read, after all, primarily by the literate elite of America and Europe, and it is not among such people that legends were created in 19th century America. The more critical travel-journals certainly contributed to the legend's creation, generally by "trickling-down", ideas and attitudes to the folk through local and regional newspapers and journals which were more widely read than were the travel volumes themselves.² More important in this process, however, was the creation of an oral tradition by the western folk themselves who, after an experience of twenty years or more in the West, began to interpret their own society, or at least certain aspects of it, in terms similar to but even more exaggerated than those of the traveler-journalists.³


³Blair & Meine, Mike Fink, p. vii. According to Blair and Meine, "Folk invention passed the mundane boundaries of mere fact and made sagas of their characters much more interesting than are dry biographies compiled by scrupulous historians. And the result was that in the end homely narratives re-created the men and the times with more vividness and more flavor than most histories reveal."
Indeed, the waxing frontier tradition of exaggerated incident, innuendo, and tall tales, which had begun to flourish by the early 1830's, seems to have itself affected some of the journalists who passed through the Mississippi Valley in those years. This is particularly true of Alexander, Hamilton, and Power, all of whom cited the oral authority of natives as the basis for many of their most exaggerated statements. (Stuart also relied upon oral authority, but his observations were more considered and probably not exaggerated.) In some cases, such as in the case of Hamilton's impression of Natchez, the natives plainly went out of their way to feed the visitors these stories.⁴

The first real evidence that a commonly held view of a social "fact" has begun to enter into the realm of the folklegend is its appearance in the oral tradition of the

⁴An even more glaring example of this is found in Mrs. Trollope's Domestic Manners of the Americans (See the Mooney edition, pp. 18-19.) in which Mrs. Trollope relates that "we were told" (p. 18.) of a squatter, who resided near the river bank and who loved whiskey too much, awakened one night by the sounds of a large crocodile gorging on the remains of three of his children. The squatter, so the story went, left his sleeping wife and his two remaining babies to go for help only to find them also devoured upon his return. This story, evidently, was intended to impress the European visitor both with the indolent, thoughtless, and ignorant character of the squatters who inhabited the Mississippi's banks and with the savage aspects of the region's natural environment. That such a thing could actually happen is hardly to be given credence.
tale as the particular author directed. What had been merely a "bad image" grew quickly into the legend of the Natchez landing under the auspices of the new school of humor. This was probably inevitable since the society of the landing did contain some of the worst elements in frontier society—the prostitutes, gamblers, boatmen, and backwoodsmen—that the humorists and taletellers burlesqued with such delight.

The period in which this genre emerged roughly coincided with the period of renewed American confidence and nationalism which followed Andrew Jackson's victory at New Orleans and continued until the eve of the Civil War—a period commonly denominated the Age of Jackson and of Manifest Destiny. One of the first of the stock characters to be celebrated in the new genre and the one which most closely related to the realities of life in Natchez Under-the-Hill was the boatman, a character that best epitomized the fiercely independent spirit of the American westerner. Possibly the earliest work of the imagination glorifying the Mississippi sailor was a sentimental poem by William O. Butler, "The Boatman's Horn," which rhapsodized about the freedom and

7 Ibid.

happiness to be found on the western waters. But the character really came into his own with the publication, in late 1828 in a ladies' annual, *The Western Souvenir*, of the first fictional treatment of the swaggering, vulgar, whiskey swilling hero, Mike Fink.

"The Last of the Boatmen," written by Morgan Neville, was a sensation at home and abroad and was soon followed by numerous other stories about Fink and other frontier characters such as Davy Crockett and the entirely fictional Simon Suggs (created by Johnson J. Hooper in the 1840's). The work of Hooper and other writers of the west and south—notably Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Joseph J. Cobb, Joseph G. Baldwin and Thomas Bangs Thorpe,—was encouraged between 1830 and the mid-1850's no less by developments in the east than by its popularity in the west. Easterners, influenced by the values of Jacksonian democracy and nationalism, developed an interest not only in their own regional folk heroes but also in those of the west.

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10 Ibid; and Blair & Meine, *Mike Fink*, pp. 251-253. *The Western Souvenir* was edited and published by James Hall.


day.\textsuperscript{5} It is, of course, impossible to know precisely when oral tales of such frontier subjects as Mike Fink, the archetypical boatman, and Natchez Under-the-Hill first appeared. However, it seems clear that these tales first found their way into print at least as early as the 1820's, and that they reflected (and became a part of) the region's burgeoning folklore and soon spawned an entirely new and vital literary tradition—a tradition which can be loosely termed the "School of Mississippi Valley Frontier Humor."\textsuperscript{6}

The legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill was a part of that new genre which drew on the boatmen, prostitutes, gamblers, outlaws, conmen, backwoodsmen, barkeepers, preachers, lawyers, and a myriad of others for subject matter and which took the form of reminiscence, anecdote, poem, song, or tall tale.


\textsuperscript{6}Botkin, ed., \textit{A Treasury of American Folklore}, pp. xxii-xxiii; Botkin, ed., \textit{A Treasury of Mississippi River Folklore: Stories, Ballads, Traditions and Folkways of the Mid-American River Country} (New York: Bonanza Books, 1955), pp. vii-xx; Arthur Palmer Hudson, \textit{Folklore Keeps the Past Alive: Eugenia Dorothy Blount Lamar Memorial Lectures, 1961} (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1962), pp. 50-51; Bernard Devoto, \textit{Mark Twain's America} (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1932), pp. 91-98 & 240-268; and A. P. Hudson, \textit{Humor of the Old Deep South}, pp. vii, 2-6, & 13-18. Some authorities have more narrowly delineated this School of Humor as having been of the Old Southwest, but while it is true that this School flourished there under the influence and leadership of such as Augustus Baldwin Longstreet and others, it is also true that from at least the 1820's the genre was indigenous to the entire Mississippi Valley rather than to just its lower portions.
interest resulted in the establishment in 1831 of William T. Porter's New York *Spirit of the Times* which soon became the pre-eminent disseminator of the New Folk Literature in the entire country. "Hard-drinking, hard-riding young Southern squires" contributed to it frequently by the 1840's. Indeed, the very existence of this sheet from its inception did much to promote its favorite genre whether or not such writings ever made its pages. Many lesser writers emulated the work of Thorpe, the tall-tale teller, Longstreet, and others which they read in it. And small, local papers published all over the country in these years also mined this vein of folk humor and adventure.

The literature of this tradition, which reached its apex between the mid-1830's and the late 1850's, was, in the words of Bernard DeVoto, "enormously male--emphatic, coarse, vivid, violent, uproarious. A great part of it, too, was bawdy." It was unquestionably of the frontier; but why, in


15DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America*, p. 93. The bibliography of the original tales of Mike Fink, provided by Blair & Meine in their "biography" of Fink, gives us a helpful, representative sampling of this literature and shows that the great bulk of them were published in the years indicated; See pp. 273-277. Original "legends" of Fink, noted the authors, reached a peak in the '40's and '50's, and then seem to have passed out of circulation entirely soon after 1860; See p. 256.
asmuch as most literate westerners had long been rather sensitive about the image which their region obtained in the East and abroad, did so many of them cooperate with and subjugate their literature to the Myth of the Wild and Savage West? The answer lies in two mutually dependent factors. First, the era which saw the rise of the genre of frontier humor was the era, symbolized on the highest public level by Andrew Jackson, of the ruggedly individualistic common man—a man celebrated in the East as well as in the West. Second, was the victory over the British army at New Orleans in January, 1815. The victory, most Americans thought, demonstrated that the American nation had the heart and the will and the strength to defeat soundly its enemies and defend its freedom, something much in doubt until Jackson's victory. The General's—and the nation's—triumph was resoundingly celebrated throughout the Union, and was widely thought to have been made possible by the very class of Westerner that had been so reviled by the myth of the barbaric West—the common farmer, the backwoodsman. This belief was proclaimed in Congress by Representative Troup of Georgia. Said Congressman Troup:


17Remini, Andrew Jackson, pp. 294-296; and Davis, Old Hickory, pp. 147-149.
It was the yeomanry of the country marching to the defense of the City of Orleans leaving their wives and children and firesides at a moment's warning. On the one side, committing themselves to the bosom of the mother of rivers, on the other side taking the rout (sic) of the trackless and savage wilderness... The farmers of the country triumphantly victorious over the conquerors of the conquerors of Europe, I came, I saw, I conquered, says the American Husband-man, fresh from his plough. The proud veteran who triumphed in Spain and carried terror into the warlike population of France was humbled beneath the power of my arm. The God of Battles and of Righteousness took part with the defenders of their country and the foe was scattered as chaff before the wind. It is, indeed, a fit subject for the genius of Homer of Ossian or Milton...that regular troops, the best disciplined and most veteran of Europe, should be beaten by undisciplined militia with the disproportionate loss of an hundred to one is...almost incredible...18

The common yoeman--the backwoodsman--had been made glorious by his own heroic efforts on behalf of his country, and he had become fit not only to participate more fully in his nation's governance but to be a proper subject of its literature as well.

The victory at New Orleans resulted in a new confidence in western society and in its people and was, as a result, probably the single most important psychological and symbolic event in the rise of a new and unique Western literature. Of course, there were other factors important to this process. The growth in the population, trade, and

18Quoted in John William Ward, Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 7-8. This speech was originally printed in the National Intelligencer, February 17, 1815, and was subsequently widely reprinted throughout the country; see p. 216, n.16.
Prosperity of the Mississippi Valley during the succeeding decades following that victory cemented the confidence that made the new literature possible. For, with the worth of the Man of the West proven, western leaders, editors, commentators, and writers did not need to be so defensive as they once were about the Western Character. They could now celebrate and glory in those traits—democracy, individualism, perseverance, generosity, heroism—they believed made their society unique, and they could laugh uproariously and bawdily about those aspects widely perceived as faults. In doing so, they captured in print a tradition which had grown up orally over a generation or more of frontier living. That

19Encomiums as to the wealth, fertility, and potential power of the West were widely printed in newspapers throughout the Union. The Savannah Republican, in early 1819, extolled the enterprise and industry of Western citizens who had conquered the wilderness and developed there "seats of civilisation, of wealth and of social happiness." (See the Mississippi State Gazette, March 3, 1819.) Later in the same year, the St. Louis Enquirer boasted that there was so much potential for wealth and power in the Mississippi Valley that some day soon the Atlantic states might become "a mere skirt of the empire of the Republic." This, in the view of the editors of the National Intelligencer, was too magnificent a vision. (See Ibid, June 12, 1819.)

20Billington, America's Frontier Heritage, p. 93. Billington, who listed these traits, suggested that Westerners themselves, whether rightly or wrongly, believed that they composed the "new moral values" of the West.

21Hudson, ed., The Humor of the Old Deep South, pp. 16-17; and DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, p. 92.
humor should have been a consistent thread throughout a literature so versatile in its expression was simply characteristic of the Western Character--frontiersmen had always confronted adversity with humor.  

Natchez was affected by these developments, particularly in terms of its inner life, no less than were other localities in the West. Natchezians celebrated the victory at New Orleans, in which her young men participated with some distinction, with as much gusto and pride as did any other young western city. Afterward, Natchezians shared the confidence which swelled the western spirit. In the spring of 1817, for example, that spirit of faith in the present and future development of Natchez was expressed in a speech at a public examination of the Lancastrian Academy of Natchez by the director, a Mr. Eastman:

May I not...congratulate you, my fellow citizens, on the rapid advancement which learning and civilization have made in this part of happy America? The spot on which we tread, snatched from the rude dominion of the untutored savage and prowling tiger, can now boast a flourishing city of more than 3,000 inhabitants, under the protection of salutary laws, and in possession of the urbanity and refinement of manners.... This spot ...is now enlivened by the voice of harmony and the din of industry. ...and here, may we not, with joyful anticipation, look forward to the time, not far distant, when Learning and Virtue shall realize still

22 DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, pp. 92-98.

23 Mississippi Republican, January 18, 1815. See also: Claiborne, Mississippi, pp. 342-346.
greater encouragement and respect.  

Even so, the shame of Natchez' reputation still stung. Defensiveness, as shown by comments regarding the city's character in the local papers, was still apparent. For example, in 1816, Anthony Campbell, preparing to launch the first serious reform movement in the city's history, complained that for "too long has the character of our city been tarnished by the vices and crimes of devouring, itinerant vagrants and gamblers floated to us by every fresh of the Mississippi...." Later that year, another writer asserted that "no country ever was more erroneously represented... abroad than the Mississippi Territory," which at that time virtually was Natchez. Natchez, like all towns in all times and places, was not united in the attitudes of its people toward the vices which marked its life. Some, concerned, were serious and even wrathful; others took a lighter, more indulgent approach. This difference was reflected in the town's political life, as disputes over moral

24Washington Republican & Natchez Intelligencer, April 9, 1817. For a similar, if not quite so confident, assessment of progress in Natchez, see also the Ariel, May 10, 1828.


26Ibid, December 11, 1816. This defensiveness did not soon pass. In 1828, in the Ariel of May 3, we find, in accompaniment of an announcement of the reopening of the Catholic church of Natchez, this: "If the number of churches be a good criterion for estimating the morality of a town, we are acquainted with no place that could stand the test better than our own little city. We have five temples dedicated to the solemn worship of God, each of which, have respectable congregations. We are in fact a 'church going people.'"
reform smouldered beneath the surface. But despite the remnants of defensiveness and despite the differences in viewpoint, the self-confident mood was reflected in humorous sketches and poems in the humble literature encouraged by local newsheets within the first decade after the West's triumph at New Orleans. That these works often depicted Natchez Under-the-Hill is no surprise.

One such work, penned by one Andrew Haslett, a native of Baltimore and a former U.S. Naval Midshipman then residing in Natchez, was dedicated "To 'Under-the-Hill'" and was published by Andrew Marschalk in January, 1817, in the Washington Republican & Natchez Intelligencer:

Dear Friend,
For each kind wish that you express
In my behalf, I can no less,
Than all the gods implore;
That you and all your sisters be
For ever bless'd with harmony,
With peace forevermore.

Long may your midnight revels show,
"There is a little heaven below"
Where happy sinners dwell;
Long may each generous fair be bless'd
Safe in the vale, be oft caress'd
And hours of rapture sell (sic)

27Campbell's attempt at reform may have been, itself, a manifestation of the new confidence and sense of purpose which flowed freely in the West after New Orleans. In any event, it ultimately failed.

28For biographical information on Haslett, see his death notice in the Washington Republican & Natchez Intelligencer, July 26, 1817.
For you who boast no vulgar muse,
"Twould please your friends, would you but
choose,
And oftner frame the lay:
Yours is a home where joy might rest,
But I've been told, and 'tis no jest
That you are going away.  A.H.

The last two lines referred to an effort then afoot to drive all the gamblers and "fair sisters"--termed vagrants by the authorities--out of Natchez Under-the-Hill. 30 In a poem published a week earlier, on Christmas Day, Haslett had, in a humorous pique, bid:

Fair Poll adieu, with thee sweet Jenny goes,
And Moll, and Bet, and Nell, and Rach, and Rose.
Lost o'er the watry way compell'd to roam,
They seek, midst strangers, for a transient home.
Concordia's banks receive their wand'ring feet,
Concordia's crops supply them beds of rest,
Concordia's bach'lors are supremely bless'd.
Close, keen-eyed justice, close thy lids once more,
Let the vale flourish as it did before,
From where the hapless charmers weep in vain,
Let pity call them to their homes again.
Let music soothe their hearts from morn till night.
From ev'ning shadows till returning light,
Let dance, and dice, and wanton pasttime prove
That life was given for liberty and love.  A.H. 31

While it is true that Haslett's style did not fit into the mainstream of the frontier tradition, being reminiscent of the satiric, mock epic style of Pope, it is also true that

29Washington Republican & Natchez Intelligencer, January 1, 1817.

30See n.27 above.

31Washington Republican & Natchez Intelligencer, December 25, 1816.
his material was purely of the West and that his humor fore-
told, if in subtler shades, the humor of later writers who,
unlike Haslett, were westerners native born. But what is
more to the point is the fact that his poetry, satirical
and expositive of Natchez faults as it was, met a sympathetic
reception in Natchez. Not that Haslett did not lack for
critics. The more serious and religious among the Natchez
citizenry seem not to have liked his, to them, amoral, cyni-
cal and sardonic tone. But he and his publisher, Andrew
Marschalk, were undeterred from producing more poems like
the ones quoted above. More significant is the fact that
Marschalk, who had been an editor and publisher in Mississippi
Territory since about 1800, regarded Haslett's poetry as
"Memorials of genius worthy of preservation," and proposed,
after the poet's untimely death in the summer of 1817, to
publish his works in order to rescue them, as he put it,
"from oblivion."33

In the first decade after the War of 1812, it is
ture, humorous pieces such as Haslett's came out more in a
trickle in Natchez than in a flood. By the late 1820's
and '30's, however, this situation had changed. In fact,
one of the earliest examples of unadulterated western humor

32For evidence of this dislike, see the relevant entries in Ibid, January 8, January 15, March 5, and March 12, 1817.

33Washington Republican & Natchez Intelligencer, August 9, 1817.
was published in Natchez in the *Southern Galaxy*, edited by Cyrus Griffin—a humorist in his own right as a close reading of his paper will show— in February, 1829, within two months following the publication of Morgan Neville's "The Last of the Boatmen," in the *Western Souvenir* (1829).  

According to this anecdote, it seems that in the autumn of 1828, a backcountry farmer by the name of Billy Longwhip came to Natchez for the first time to sell his cotton. While there, he described Natchez' lower town in a letter to his brother Neddy back home. He wrote:

> In the first place, we wanted to see the steam-boats, and so we had to go under the hill, as they calls it here; and thare they was, you may be sure, thick as three frogs in a hole; some had cotton all over'em, and some had nothing at all on 'em; and you never seed so many people at a muster or 'lection, as thare was going in and comin out on 'em; they all had iron chimbllys, some had too, and some had just one—and thare was the most flatboats, my patience! and then they had all sort o'things in 'em; thare was meat and apples, and corn and oats, and cider, whiskey, and inyons and Irish taters; some had collards too, what they called cabages, right round white ones, like sister Bet's little Dave's head.  

Billy and his companions, Uncle Jim and Joe, then got themselves enticed into a house by what Joe considered to be

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34 *Southern Galaxy*, February 19, 1829. For bibliographic information regarding the original publication date of Neville's tale of Mike Fink, See: Blair and Meine, *Mike Fink*, pp. 273-274.

35 *Southern Galaxy*, February 19, 1829.
"the prettyest chance to make a fortune in the world."
There they saw "four galls, three men, and one drunk."
Joe promptly lost twenty dollars at a game of thimbles. That made Joe look a fool and the "galls" laughed at him, so they went to another house where "thare was the most galls comin' in your ever seed" with "the ridest faces and the prettiest frocks and red shoes" and who "was the politest to Joe and me in the world." In fact, Billy lauded all of the "under the hill folks" for being the finest "lookin' folks...and the best natured too, in the world." Then, said Billy,

Arter a while there comed in a niger with his fiddle, and he was the best lookin niger in Natchey; he had on a new broad cloth coat and breeches, and boots, and his hair looked like it was greased; and he had on the quarest specks you may be sure; why they had speck glasses on the sides too, and the galls called him Mr R______, and all on 'em liked him prime--when he began to play, thare began to come in a heep of men, and then maybe they didn't begin to dance to Boston; and you never seed the like on't in your life; there was the sweetened licker, and all sorts o'stuff to drink--37

After the dance, one of the "galls" went over to Uncle Jim and offered to sit in his lap. "He," wrote Billy, "axed her no, and slipped round to me and said it was his opinion this was no place for a one eyed man." This revelation and Uncle Jim's action seemed to have surprised the "gall" who asked, "What, my sucker, ...you an't off are you?" Meanwhile

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
Joe had meandered off; where they found him Billy would not say, because, he said, "'tis gittin too dark to write any more." 38

This colorful rendering of a backwoodsman's reaction to the wicked world of Natchez Under-the-Hill pokes fun not only at the country yokel's naivete when confronted with that world for the first time but also at that world and its evils itself. Such was the hallmark of the frontier tradition at its humorous best. 39 But as convincing as the tale of Billy Longwhip and the poems of Andrew Haslett are of the influence of that embryo tradition in Natchez between 1815 and the early '30's and of its tendency to highlight the Natchez landing, there is at least one additional, more subtle and yet possibly more significant proof available: a certain street, located under-the-hill near the landing and running toward the bluff between the river itself and Silver Street was named, by the city authorities apparently, "Maiden Lane!" 40

38Ibid.

39For a similar treatment of a more serious subject, the legend of the outlaw, Samuel Mason, see the Southern Galaxy, October 22, 1829. In this story, Mason caught two members of a posse skinny-dipping in the Pearl River and used their helpless plight to force the remaining members of the posse to give-up their arms. Then Mason and his gang escaped, leaving his naked hostages unharmed.

40Deed Book X, p. 403; Adams County Chancery Clerk's Office, Adams County, Mississippi.
Whether or not Haslett's "fair sisters" resided along this Lane, we know not; but the ironic humor of this street's name in the midst of the poet's "little heaven below" can not be lost.

This evidence shows not only that the frontier tradition in Natchez had its roots in the fifteen years following the battle of New Orleans, but also that the image of Natchez Under-the-Hill had, during those years, begun to evolve into a legend. But this was local material and there is no evidence to show that this sort of humorous/"life-like" treatment of the landing had yet caught on either regionally or nationally. Before 1836, few if any journals or newspapers of wide circulation seem to have carried stories describing Natchez landing after the fashion of Billy Long-whip's letter. Of course, the influence of the oral frontier tradition upon the travel journals written during the '30's indicates that the process leading to the emergence of Natchez Under-the-Hill as a theme popular among western writers, was fast coming to a boil.

Within about a decade after Billy's sortie into the

41Much more research in the widely circulated journals and almanacs, such as the Western Souvenir and the Crockett Almanacs, is needed to support a more precise statement as to when the first anecdote treating the Port of Natchez within the framework of the frontier tradition was given a national audience.
lower town's saloons the pot had boiled over. Natchez Under-the-Hill, still a symbol of western barbarism, had become a legend transformed by frontier raconteurs into a parody of itself. All of the elements of vice which had formed the image—the drunkenness, the prostitutes, the gambling, and the violence—were present, to be sure. But the former two, in most cases, were reduced to mere incidentals while the latter vices, especially the violence, were enlarged and distorted beyond all reality. (Of course, the economic function of the landing had no place at all in the legend.) This distortion was because, according to the legend, the Natchez landing was dominated by gamblers—professional Blacklegs—who were, as a class, evil and violent beyond measure. The trend which led to this feeling can be discerned in the travel journals of the early '30's in the accounts of Alexander, Power, and Martineau. (Martineau had reported that she was told by her fellow passengers on her steamboat that the gamblers aboard, who never slept, could be expected in the event of fire to steal the lifeboats and abandon other passengers to their fate. 

42Paxton, A Stray Yankee in Texas, p. 388. For additional examples of this treatment, See also: Hall, "My Grandmother's Trick," (1843) in McDermott, ed., Before Mark Twain, pp. 196-199; Green, Gambling Unmasked (1844), pp. 123-136 in Ibid, pp. 200-208; and Falconbridge, Dan Marble, pp. 118-123.

43Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travels, II, p. 6.
This prejudice against the gamblers is strikingly evident in most of these stories. Gamblers, being for several years at least the most visible and apparently prosperous of those westerners who did not seem to contribute anything to western growth and prosperity, were thought of as parasites. By the mid-1830's, they had become pariahs regarded by many respectable, God-fearing citizens as villains. The raconteurs and humorists played on this feeling and, ridiculing them, wrung as much fun out of them as possible.

A story, ostensibly written by Davy Crockett, about "Thimble-rig," a riverboat gambler, published in 1836 in Col. Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas, illustrates this point very well. "Crockett" wrote that upon boarding a steamboat on the Mississippi he observed a crowd gathered about apparently engaged in sport. He continued:

Accordingly, I drew nigh to the cluster, and seated on a chest was a tall lank sea sarpent looking blackleg, who had crawled over from Natchez under the hill, and was amusing the passengers with his skill at thimblerig; at the same time he was picking up their shillings just about as expeditiously as a hungry gobbler would a pint of corn.44

The image of the blackleg as a "sea sarpent" who had crawled to the boat is a quaintly humorous way to depict the mean lowness of the gambler; similarly, the reference to "thimble-rig" as the name of the game (it was commonly known as "thim-

44Quoted from David Crockett, Col. Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas, Chapters VI & VII, in McDermott, ed., Before Mark Twain, p. 209. (Italics added.)
bles") suggests that the game was rigged. Calling the gambler an Under-the-Hill leg succintly conveys the idea that the landing was a haven and headquarters of blacklegs and that it was commonly known as such.

Not all descriptions of the gambler found in these stories is as funny as Crockett’s was intended to be. Jonathan Green, who billed himself as a reformed gambler and who considered most of the men who gained their living in the Mississippi trade to be "villains, gamblers, and pickpockets," said that to kill time "they are ready to sacrifice the last vestige of principle, or of human feeling in their hearts. And when their interest is concerned in the result, as is usually the case, it gives their fiend-like sport a double relish."45 But, usually, even this sort of denunciation was intended either to setup a humorous incident or to justify its exposition from a didactic or moralistic point of view. Such was the case in Green’s narrative for he followed it with an hilarious story about how a rather slow-thinking

45Quoted from Green, Gambling Unmasked! (1844), pp. 123-136, in Ibid, pp. 204-205. For a discussion relevant to Green’s charge that thousands of men in the Mississippi trade were involved in gambling and crime, see: Louis C. Hunter, Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History (New York: Octagon Books, 1969 [orig. publ., 1949]), pp. 408-410, in which a balanced view of gambling on steamboats is presented. Also relevant are pp. 410-414 in which are discussed "Order and Morals," both of which were strictly enforced on the steamboats. Green's charges, in the face of the evidence presented by Hunter, are simply absurd nonsense.
gambler in Natchez Under-the-Hill had been brutally out-smarted by his compatriots in a game called the "Spanish Burial."  

The common view of the Mississippi's gamblers was not held by everyone or even by all of the writers of the new frontier genre. Joseph L. Cowell, a comic actor, artist, and writer, for example, thought the professional gamblers unjustly abused and misrepresented, "especially," he wrote, "by those who sit down to bet against them every night... and who would think it most praiseworthy to cheat them out of every dollar they had, if they knew how."  

Cowell, who as an actor frequently on tour had spent years among the gamblers in hotels and steamboats, believed that "as a general body, for kindness of heart, liberality, and sincerity of friendship--out of their line of business--they cannot be excelled by any other set of men who make making money their only mental occupation."  

Cowell's view, however, was an exception. Even Cowell had preceded his assertion with a humorous tale of how a blackleg had out-foxed himself while trying to stack a deck. His intended victim, who received the winning hand, ended up richer by $2300!  

46See below, p. 113.  

47Quoted from Joseph L. Cowell, Thirty Years Passed Among the Players in England and America (1844), pp. 91-95, in McDermott, ed., Before Mark Twain, p. 68.  

48Ibid, p. 69.  

49Ibid, p. 68.
Cowell did accept the existence of blacklegs; he simply believed that such clever rascals were a tiny minority. Such was probably the case.

To our minds today the humor evoked by the typical treatment of the Mississippi gambler in the frontier tradition is a dark, brutal comedy. It was so of necessity, because the assumption—whether true or not—that gamblers were capable of crimes of swindle, robbery, and murder was widely held. The humorists, being primarily satirists, exposed that fact with sensational and exaggerated delight. The crimes of the gamblers of Natchez Under-the-Hill which were most often caricatured were the swindles and rough, practical jokes. The story, "My Grandmother's Trick," by William C. Hall, relates how a greenhorn—these writers loved to ridicule greenhorns as much as they did gamblers—was tricked into playing against a man evidently drunk in order to prevent the latter from losing his $500 to some gambler. The game was to identify any card out of three held by the drunken man. The greenhorn was to win the money by identifying the card—the nine of diamonds—and give it back to the drunken fool when he sobered-up. The landlord of the house, identified as being the headquarters of the gamblers under-the-hill, talked the victim into it with intended irony: "'If you don't,' said he, 'some gambler will, and keep it.'"

The victim, neatly maneuvered into play by the landlord and a second accomplice, a man very friendly and upright in manner who purported to be a local farmer, was assured by the latter that he could easily win by marking the diamond. The farmer did so, turning it up at one corner. But when the drunk shuffled the cards he deftly turned that corner down and turned-up a corner on another card. The victim, unaware of the maneuver, confidently staked his $500 and picked the bent card—a Jack of Clubs! The winner became suddenly quite sober and "coolly informed me that it was 'all fair;' and that I had lost my money, upon 'My Grandmother's Trick.'" 51

A rougher, if silly, trick, according to the tradition, was a game often played against greenhorns, called the Spanish burying or burial. The game was played in the following manner: A man, usually big and burly, would pretend to be dead. The conspirators would induce an innocent to join in, form a ring around the "dead" man who lay prostrate on the ground, clasp hands, and march ceremoniously around him. Each man in the ring would kneel down to the "dead" man and pretend to kiss him. When the victim did so the "corpse" would grab him and everyone else in the circle

would beat him with handkerchiefs knotted for the purpose. After the victim received 500 blows, he would be let-up and was expected to buy everyone drinks. A truly funny story, written by Jonathan Green, was built around this custom, if such it was. A poor, stupid gambler of Silver Street, Natchez Under-the-Hill, named "Clifton," after being tripped by a rope in a race on which he had bet, was twice induced to play this game thinking that another was to be victim. Each time he was the hapless one beaten about the body with knotted rags. A man identified as the "'hoosier' gambler" was each time full of sympathy for Clifton, though he had been in the play.

''Friend Clifton,' said he, 'have they hurt you?'
'I reckon they have,' he replied, 'and you are the only man that sympathizes with me,'
'Certainly I am,' said the 'hoosier;' when at the same time it was the young 'hoosier' that had stretched the rope and planned the whole series of Clifton's misfortunes.53

By the late 1840's and '50's the level of exaggeration in these stories had become intensified; the crimes attributed to the gamblers, blacker and blacker. Tales about two frontier heroes, Jim Girty and "Roarin'" Jack Russell


(as he has since become known), both river men, who confronted and overwhelmed the gamesters in Natchez Under-the-Hill, illustrate this point. Girty's story, published in a book of reminiscence by a former riverboat captain named Charles Ross in 1847, related how Girty and his men fought the gamblers under-the-hill in early 1815 in a violent melee which resulted from Girty's men being cheated by the blacklegs. (Girty was not himself cheated; his men were. Frontier heroes were never cheated by anything as low as a gambler; had they been they would not have been heroes.) According to Ross' version, which he said he got from Girty's own mouth, Girty's men had lost all their money and fought the gamblers but were defeated. They came to Girty and urged him to lead them against the gamblers so they could have revenge. Girty did so reluctantly and met the gamblers armed with pistols, knives, and guns; three of the brotherhood were killed. Girty was arrested for this riot but after a long series of adventures was acquitted because no witnesses appeared to testify against him. There were strong hints that the witnesses had been done away with, but Girty was a hero primarily because he had defeated the infamous gamblers of the Natchez landing. 54 Jack Russell, according to a story published in 1853 in a book called A Stray Yankee in Texas by Samuel Hammett (under the pseudonym "Philip Paxton"), was another such hero. Captain of a

steamboat, one of his passengers had been unfairly deprived of his pocketbook while in a gambling house under-the-hill. Russell threatened to pull the house, which was built out over the river on a wharf, into the river with all its occupants if the money was not returned. The gamblers offered no resistance as the boat's lines were tied to the house. Just before the house was broken from its moorings, the money was returned. 55 The former story, to the extent that it highlighted the gamblers, emphasized their perfidy and their willingness to do violence; the latter one emphasized their cowardice in the face of determined and concerted resistance.

Yet Hammett was not entirely consistent. He would have it both ways for he also said that the gamblers were "reckless men, without hope or fear." 56 One must suppose that so long as the gamblers' characters were drawn unfavorably, consistency did not matter. Hammett met the former requirement well. Hammett's gamblers, who haunted the Mississippi's river towns,

herded together, setting all law, both divine and human, at defiance, and shielding their companions from the consequences of any act, however, heinous. Their only argument was the Bowie-knife, their only rejoinder the pistol-bullet. 57

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55 Paxton, A Stray Yankee in Texas, pp. 407-408.
56 Ibid, p. 386.
57 Ibid.
But Hammett was hardly alone in this tendency to dramatize both the villainy of Power's fraternity of gamblers and the wickedness of the Natchez Under-the-Hill which they allegedly dominated. Another writer, published under the name of "Falconbridge," asserted in 1851 that at least one hundred "infamous and abhorrent scoundrels" who had once been river pirates and land robbers became, in the 1830's, "genteel gamblers and counterfeitters" and took-up their principal abode in Natchez' landing town. Moreover, "Falconbridge" claimed that the genteel blacklegs regarded one street there as being their own; that it was dangerous to pass through it after dark and even in the daytime if ladies were with you; and that many murders had been committed there which were known of only by "the dark tide of the Mississippi." Though most writers pointedly noted the conjunction of the gamblers and the violence of Natchez Under-the-Hill, at least one was more general in his emphasis of the latter. The author of a Life of David Crockett, published in 1860, perhaps sensing that the "ol' gambler" was for the moment getting to be a worn subject, introduced as the principal villain of the unholy lower town, Satan, who, he wrote, "looks on...with glee, and chuckles as he beholds the orgies of his votaries." He accused the strumpets of often tearing

58Falconbridge, Dan Marble, p. 118.
59Ibid.
the clothes from a man's back and leaving "his body beautified with all the colors of the rainbow." Then, referring to the custom of the "Spanish burial," he said that since its object was to induce the victim to "treat all hands; ...should he be penniless, his life will be endangered by the severity of the castigation. And such is Natchez Under-the-Hill."  

However many exceptions there may have been, the gamblers and their sensationalized foul deeds were closely linked to the Natchez landing in the frontier literature of the last twenty years of the antebellum period. As a result, the image and reputation of Natchez Under-the-Hill was blackened far more in those years than it had ever been by the traveler-journalists who wrote of it during the first forty years of the nineteenth century.

Morally conservative, serious-minded Natchezians must have felt the irony of this situation deeply, for by 1836—and certainly by the early 1840's—the character of Natchez Under-the-Hill had undergone an apparent reform. No traveler-journalist who visited Natchez after 1835 made any mention of vice and crime in Natchez Under-the-Hill except in the past tense. The first such writer to notice the change in the landing's character was Sir Charles Augustus

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.
Murray, who visited the town briefly in 1836 (but since his account was not published until 1839, it had little if any impact on the reputation of Natchez during the '30's). Murray, while he did discuss the port town's former immorality, noted that the town had of late become much improved. The Reverend G. Lewis of the Free Church of Scotland, who came to Natchez on church business in 1844, treated the subject in much the same way except that he provided greater detail. Neither John Banvard, the artist who created the famous "Banvard's Panorama," nor Frederick Law Olmsted, the author of The Slave States, mentioned vice at all in connection with the lower town (The two were in Natchez in 1846-47 and 1853, respectively.).

63Murray, Travels in North America, II, p. 177.


65John Banvard, Description of Banvard's Panorama of the Mississippi & Missouri Rivers, Extensively Known as the "Three-Mile Painting," Exhibiting a View of Country over 3,000 Miles in Length, Extending From the Mouth of the Yellow Stone to the City of New Orleans, Being By Far the Longest Picture Ever Executed By Man (London: W. J. Golbourn, 1849), p. 34; and Frederick Law Olmsted, The Slave States: Revised and Enlarged Edition, ed. by Harvey Wish (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959), pp. 193-196. Olmsted did mention the presence of "low drunken fellows" (p. 196) in the best hotels of Natchez, but this had absolutely no connection with the landing. (The Wish edition of Olmsted's work was condensed from the latter's trilogy on the slave estates, published between 1856 and 1860 and from The Cotton Kingdom, published in 1861.)
In the broadest possible perspective the irony is more apparent than real because the frontier tradition, by its nature, was retrospective. It looked to the past and to past conditions and glorified them, exaggerated them, and laughed at them. True to the romantic spirit of the day, it also sensationalized them. But two dramatic incidents in the history of Natchez, both of which gained national and even international attention, help to explain why Natchez Under-the-Hill received a great deal of attention from the followers of the frontier tradition in the two decades between 1840 and the Civil War: the expulsion of the gamblers from Natchez (and Vicksburg) in 1835 and the famous tornado of 1840.

The first followed hard upon rumors that a large number of whites in Mississippi were planning to raise the slaves in revolt, murder all the whites not in league with them, rob the banks, and... what they were supposed to do after that is hardly clear. The gamblers in Vicksburg and Natchez, who were already universally unpopular, were, by this rumor, attached to the plot. Accused conspirators were rounded up--and some, hanged by panicky mobs at Livingston and Clinton, both towns in the central western portion of the state, and on the Big Black River. The citizens of Vicksburg, who had already had trouble with the gamblers, organized and ordered them out of town. They resisted; a Doctor Hugh Bodley, a highly respected member of the community,
was shot and killed in the first disturbance. Following that, the citizens became enraged and stormed the house in which the gamblers had taken refuge. Five of the leaders were summarily hanged. The survivors fled from Vicksburg to Natchez, whereupon the citizens of the latter place organized and ordered the gamblers out of town within twenty-four hours. A vigilante committee, led by John Quitman, captured several gamblers near the Pharsalia Race Track and whipped them on the spot, then released them. They and the others fled down river to New Orleans.⁶⁶

The extra-legality and the violence of this event shocked the nation. The editor of the *Nile's Weekly Register*, who did not believe in the existence of the plot that had touched off this orgy of violence, regarded it as a species of barbarism and a disgrace unmitigated by either the supposed plot or by the most offensive conduct of the gamblers. "There is neither mercy nor justice in the decisions of a mob," he wrote, "and when mob-law is tolerated, statute and moral law will become a dead letter."⁶⁷ Europeans also took


⁶⁷*Nile's Weekly Register*, August 1, 1835.
note of it. Power and Martineau, who had been in Natchez shortly before the incident, and Murray, who had been there just one year after, all commented on it. The affair in Vicksburg had prompted Martineau, who called it a "massacre," to brand the people of the area "barbarians." Murray said that the gamblers in Natchez were threatened with hanging if they did not leave. Power, who had vilified the gamblers of Natchez and of the Mississippi Valley generally, sympathized with the vigilantes; but in addition, he reported that he had read of an attack upon a "rendezvous of known gamblers" by a party of planters "near this place" (Natchez) and that, once taken, the gamblers were hung. The accounts of Murray and, especially, of Power indicate that there was some confusion among contemporaries as to just where the gamblers were hanged and that there was at least a tendency on the part of some to blur the distinction between what had happened at Vicksburg and what had happened at Natchez. When thinking of gamblers and violence in the lower Mississippi Valley, it must have been a natural response to think of Natchez Under-the-Hill first. The fact that the Reverend Lewis provided a relatively detailed account of the expulsion of the gamblers in his description of Natchez in 1844 (the

book was published in 1848) indicates that the subject was still important to many, not only in Natchez but elsewhere as well.71

The second incident, the tornado of 1840, was the first serious natural disaster of its kind to hit the Mississippi country since the beginning of American settlement in the Valley in the eighteenth century.72 According to an eyewitness, Captain J. H. Freligh of the steamboat Prairie then loading cotton at Natchez landing, in the early afternoon of May 7, 1840, the sky had become overcast with dark, heavy clouds and a dull roaring, "more the sound of moaning," he wrote, which made them suppose they were in for a violent rain storm.73 They had no idea. "Suddenly," he said, "the appearance of the sky changed, and showed by various signs the approach of a mighty wind."74 The crew scrambled to secure the boat; Freligh dove from the roof, where he had gone to help pay out a hawser to the forecastle, onto the boiler deck as the wind ripped the roof and the entire upper works away. That action saved his life.75

71Lewis, Impressions of America and the American Churches, p. 230.


73Quoted from an account by J. H. Freligh published in the St. Louis Daily Commercial Bulletin, June 9, 1840, in McDermott, ed, Before Mark Twain, pp. 159-160. This account was originally published by the New York Herald, May 16, 1840.

74Ibid, p. 159. 75Ibid.
the three to five minutes that followed, the powerful wind wrought utter destruction upon the lower town. Two miles in breadth, the tornado ruined everything at the landing from the Vidalia ferry to the Mississippi Cotton Press. The whirlwind carried away or crushed every dwelling and store in its path under-the-hill except for one or two buildings. Andrew Brown's sawmill was severely damaged, and the Steamboat Hotel collapsed. Eleven occupants of the hotel, including the owner's two children, were killed. Of the three steamboats then lying in port, the St. Lawrence was a total loss. The Hinds was capsized and fifty-one men and women, it was reported, died aboard her. The Prairie was a wreck, but was later able to proceed to New Orleans for repair. During the first minute or so of the disaster, the river rose six to eight feet and sank fifty to sixty flatboats. An estimated two to three hundred people drowned within minutes. When, after ten terrible minutes, Captain Freligh could get up and look about him, he saw:

--all was horror, desolation, ruin. Houses were laid level with the earth--the shore was entirely covered with the wreck of buildings, boats and goods. Two steamboats were sunk--fifty or more flat boats engulfed in the raging waters, with their contents and their crews. The forests opposite were transformed into mere stubble-fields of splinters. The surface of the

The destruction in the upper town was great also. E. W. Gould, in 1889, wrote that two whole city blocks were destroyed there; damage elsewhere, though not so complete, was extensive. Almost every family in town was affected by the loss of either loved ones, businesses, or houses. Estimated property loss in the entire town stood at about five million dollars. See: Gould, Fifty Years on the Mississippi, 1st ed., p. 363; and Davis, "Tornado of 1840," JMH, 36 (1974), pp. 46-49.

77McDermott, ed., Before Mark Twain, p. 160.


79McDermott, ed., Before Mark Twain, p. 159.
(Gould, who reprinted Floyd's account, also had reason to doubt that fifty-one people were lost aboard the Hinds.)

No doubt many strict moralists of the day regarded the death and destruction at Natchez Under-the-Hill as no more than just retribution visited upon a wicked city by a wrathful God. Certainly, the people of Natchez themselves seem to have felt so; or at least that the catastrophe had been dealt them by God. The headline of the Mississippi Daily Free Trader of May 8, read, "Dreadful Visitation of Providence." A resolution passed by a public assembly on the same day read in part: "though, for purposes of us unknown, it has pleased the Almighty to add to the pecuniary distresses, pestilences, and the permitted destruction...[by fire the year before] the unparalleled disasters of yesterday by the tornado...."

In any event, the violent expulsion of the gamblers from Vicksburg and Natchez and the worst natural disaster on the Mississippi in American history up to that time virtually assured the maintenance of public interest in Natchez Under-the-Hill for the next twenty years. These incidents


81Mississippi Daily Free Trader, May 8, 1840.


83The New Madrid earthquake of 1811 can not be counted as there were too few people and too little developed property in the Valley at that time to result in the degree
symbolized the basic elements which composed the legend of the Port of Natchez in those two decades: the former evoking, in particular, the sinful gaming, the crime, violence, and lawlessness; the latter representing the death and destruction, temporal and spiritual. These were the features of life at the landing that the humorists and reconteurs who followed the frontier tradition highlighted most often. As to the role of the two events as a catalyst of public interest, it is significant that one of the earliest references to the gamblers of Natchez Under-the-Hill in this literature, aside from the earlier local productions such as "Billy Longwhip's letter," came out in Col. Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas in 1836, the year following the expulsion. 84 Perhaps even more significant is the fact that, out of the purely random sampling of such sources on which this study is based, all but one originated after rather than before the tornado of 1840. In addition, two of this latter group, both of which were published in the 1850's, gave rather explicit and apparently exaggerated accounts of the expulsion of the gamblers from both Vicksburg and Natchez. 85 These facts indicate at least the possibility that, while the expulsion of the gamblers was an important cause of the rise of the antebellum legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill, it was of destruction which would have made that quake a major catastrophe.

84Crockett, Col. Crockett's Exploits (1836), in McDermott, ed., Before Mark Twain, p. 209.
85Falconbridge, Dan Marble, pp. 118-123; and Paxton, A Stray Yankee in Texas, pp. 386-389.
the destruction of the old landing by the tornado of 1840 that truly kindled the interest of raconteurs in the infamous river port. Perhaps this only seems to be the case. Perhaps the apparent phenomenon merely resulted from the passage of time necessary to ferment the legend and would have occurred with or without the tornado. On the other hand, if in this case the semblance is the reality, perhaps it is so because the tornado of 1840, as a symbol of the death and destruction of the lower town of Natchez, offered a subconscious, moralistic denouement to the legend: The wages of sin is death.

Whether or not this is so, it is certainly clear that, ultimately, the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill arose from the image which, justly or otherwise, it had worn since the first traveler-journalists described it to a curious public. Nor can there be doubt that both the image and the legend—with their mutual emphasis on the drunkenness, prostitution, gaming, and crime and violence of the Port of Natchez—was throughout the antebellum era a colorful though lurid symbol of the Myth of the Wild and Savage West.
Old South Myth/New South Creed: Decline of the Legend in the Age of Gilt Gentility

Some persons in the South affect to be desirous of forgetting the past. This sentiment, if more than an affectation, is a morbid one and unworthy of those who hold it. It is at least unphilosophical. The past is always pregnant of the future and, as it is right or wrong, deserving to be followed or avoided; it can only be judged of and its precedents acted upon as they are discovered in the light of recorded history. In shunning this light we are only at a disadvantage. There is surely nothing in the past history of the South to be ashamed of, while there is much to excite a just pride. Our young people owe it to themselves...to acquaint themselves with its history in all its details.

--Horace S. Fulkerson, 1885

Following the Civil War the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill suffered a precipitous decline, at least as measured by the number of works of history and anecdotal reminiscence published after 1865, both in Mississippi and in the country as a whole, that dealt with it. Few even bothered to acknowledge the existence of such a legend with its lurid themes of vice and corruption. The treatment of those that did was, for the most part, moderate and even subdued compared to the treatment given the legend in the nation's popular press before the war. This decline continued until some years after the turn of the twentieth century, and was a reflection of

1Fulkerson, Random Recollections, pp. 5-6.
the cultural and moral forces which distinguished the Gilded Age from the era that came before and from the one that followed. It was an age characterized in the South by total acceptance of the idealized myth of the Old South which harmonized completely with the conservative moral values, concerning all things personal, that underlay the public mores and social standards of America between the Civil War and the First World War. It was an age characterized as well in the South by an acceptance of the realities of power and material affluence realized in the North by the industrial system so staunchly opposed by many Southerners before the War. The interplay of these forces and ideas, particularly in the years between 1865 and 1900, created a situation in which the decline of the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill was probably inevitable and in which the legend was not forgotten but was, rather, consciously suppressed. This suppression was not accomplished solely by men in authority, such as publishers, writers, ministers, and judges, but was imposed by society itself or, more precisely, by the tacit consent of a vast majority of literate

and influential Americans to standards and values which discouraged even the mention of such subjects as the infamous old river port of Natchez represented. The writers and historians and publishers, who having the opportunity to treat the story of the Natchez landing and similar topics did not do so, simply reveal the phenomenon of which they were only a part. This phase in the life of Natchez Under-the-Hill's legend possesses intrinsic interest partly because it survived despite the effort to kill it through benign neglect, but also because it illustrates the connections between the local and regional conditions in the state and the larger currents in the national life which Mississippi historiography has neglected.

Those Mississippians, some of whom lived in Natchez, who wrote about Natchez as it existed before the war, provided proof that the legend of Natchez landing had not been forgotten as late as the 1880's. This is evident from the need Natchezians felt to distance themselves from the stigma of its memory. A promotional pamphlet, published in 1881 for distribution in the North, for example, insisted that "among all the communities of the Mississippi, Natchez is conspicuous for the refinement and native gentility of her citizens." The writer admitted that Natchez was once "afflicted with a discreditable appendage in Natchez Under-the-Hill, which, at a distance, cast a reflection upon her reputation." But he informed readers, that had been many years before and the "resident vicious population" (which had been an imported
one) had long since been expelled, so that "this precinct, at one time hideous in debauchery and crime, is now remarkable as an important steamboat landing, for its excellent order and absolute freedom from sharpers and others of the criminal class." The investor could thus be confident that all of Natchez was now a model of morality and decorum. Ambitious by the 1880's to develop new manufacturing establishments to supplement the cotton, oil and lumber mills, foundries and other manufactories they already had, the leading men of Natchez--men who were clearly devotees of the New South creed and who accepted the values of Victorian America--thought it necessary to assure prospective investors of the stability and orderliness of their community. Had the old reputation of Natchez and its lower town been totally buried and forgotten the adherents of progress in Natchez who had never been proud of their town's repute would have hardly dredged it up again after so many years. Another pamphlet, published circa 1887 with the same motives as the earlier one, also repudiated the taint of the old legend, though it did


4Ibid, passim. Any who doubts that the opinion leaders of Post-Civil War Natchez did not wholeheartedly embrace the ideology of the New South have only to examine any one of the several promotional brochures and pamphlets produced by them in the 1880's and '90's, used to attract investments from northern capitalists, to be quickly disabused. See, in addition to Rattray, Natchez, 1881: Natchez on Top, Not "Under the Hill" (Natchez: Daily Democrat Steam Print, n.d.) and Power, The Memento.
so with rather more subtlety. All was in the title: Natchez, Mississippi, On Top, Not "Under the Hill." Not another word was said about the legend in the entire booklet.5

Except for the title, this was typical of the treatment given the legend of Natchez' landing after the Civil War. Just as new, printed tales about Mike Fink and other frontier heroes disappeared from the mainstream of American literature during this period, so, too, did similar writings about Natchez Under-the-Hill.6 Between 1865 and 1900 few Mississippi historians who might have been expected to discuss it so much as mentioned the old legend, though they more clearly implied the economic importance of the Natchez landing than had earlier been the case. For example, an early history of Adams County written by Gerard Brandon, a scion of one of the oldest and most distinguished families of the county, published by the Mississippi Historical Society in 1899 referred to Natchez as the "financial and commercial center of this State" in a time "when ships from the ocean were moored at the wharves of Natchez, bringing

5Natchez on Top, Not "Under the Hill", Passim. This pamphlet has been dated, approximately, by its lead article, written by Major Thomas Grafton, "Natchez: It's Past, Present and Future," dated 1887, in Power, The Memento, in which it was reprinted.

6Blair and Meine, Mike Fink, p. 256. There is but one exception to this. A new story of Fink, written by Frank Triplet, was published by the Warren Company of New York in 1895.
and taking in exchange the treasures of the old world and the new." 7 Obviously these wharves had to have been at the landing, but Brandon made no specific reference to the lower town. Other historical works by Mississippians gave even less original notice of the town under-the-hill than this. The author of a sketch on Natchez found in the Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi, published in 1891, merely quoted an old listing of business establishments that operated at the landing in 1812. The rest of the sketch focused on the upper town. 8 A History of Mississippi by Robert Lowry and William H. McCordle, published in the same year, gave similar short shrift to Natchez Under-the-Hill. The authors merely discussed the tornado of 1840, which devastated all of the lower town and much of the upper one, followed by what seems in retrospect to have been a subtle

7 Gerard Brandon, "Historic Adams County," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, II (1899), p. 217. Another work which closely parallels this treatment of Natchez was Mary V. Duvall, The Student's History of Mississippi From Its Earliest Discoveries and Settlements to the End of the Year 1886 (Louisville, Kentucky: The Courier-Journal Job Printing Company, 1887), pp. 65-66 & 233. Though Duval pointed out that Natchez was an important cotton port with connections by steamboat with the entire Mississippi Valley, she made no direct reference to Natchez Under-the-Hill as such.

8 Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi, II, pp. 160-167. This list originated in Andrew Marschalk's Almanack of 1812, published in Natchez in that year.
effort to glorify the beauty, culture and, true to the New South ideology, factories of Natchez proper in contrast to the silently looming legend of Under-the-Hill. Still another history of the state, this one appearing in 1880, though peppered with references en passant to Natchez' landing as a geographic entity, made no significant mention of it as either port or center of vice.

This omission of a subject which an earlier generation had found so fascinating is particularly significant when it is realized that the gentlemen historians of the region in the two decades before the war, a genus admittedly small, could not ignore it even had they wished to--and they probably had. A survey of their work reveals that a


10J. F. H. Claiborne, Mississippi As A Province, Territory, and State With Biographical Notices of Eminent Citizens (Spartanburg, South Carolina: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1978 [orig. publ., 1880]), passim. Of course, it is possible that Claiborne had written about Natchez Under-the-Hill in a second volume to his history, but since the manuscript was destroyed in a fire in 1884, we will never know. See Sanford W. Higginbotham, "The writing of Mississippi History: A Brief Survey," The Journal of Mississippi History, XX (July, 1958), p. 159.
majority of these writers contented themselves with brief and restrained depictions of a legend which was by then becoming inflated beyond the limits which reality could justify. John W. Monette, who wrote a monumental history of the Mississippi Valley, published in 1846, and who lived on his plantation, "Sweet Auburn", near Washington, in Adams County, Mississippi, noted the commercial importance to which the settlement had already attained by 1803 and commented upon one of the problems this had created: "Such was the number of lawless adventurers and boatmen from the Ohio region which annually infested the city and habitually defied the municipal authorities, that," he claimed, "no man was safe from their depredations and assaults until the city authorities were clothed with ample powers for their punishment."\(^1\) This was a clear reference to the legend of the lawlessness of the landing; yet, he made no direct reference to the lower town as such. Monette's restraint could be explained by his residence in Adams County; but Albert James Pickett, author of *History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi, From the Earliest Period*, published in 1851, who lived in Alabama, though somewhat more graphic as to the variety of vice practiced by the boatmen while they were in Natchez, nonetheless shared Monette's basic restraint

\(^{11}\)Monette, *History of the Mississippi*, II, p. 359 (Italics added.) This lawlessness of the boatmen, argued Monette, justified powers granted in the city's charter (1803) which he said "leaned to the despotism of monarchy...."
and point of view on the subject. Both purposefully neglected to cite Natchez Under-the-Hill by name and both, while tacitly refusing to lend credence to the myth of numerous murders there, blamed the problems that did exist on the boatmen of the Mississippi trade rather than on the town itself. A third historian of the region, B.L.C. Wailes, who lived in Adams County, came closer to the trend common to later historians of the nineteenth century. He ignored the legend altogether in his study, published in 1854, of the agriculture, geology, and history of the State.

Generally, the contrast between the treatment given Natchez Under-the-Hill by historians in the post-bellum years and those of the antebellum period can be put succinctly thus: the former group ignored the social questions raised by the subject—and therefore the legend altogether—while attending only to its economic aspects; the latter group, on the


13Wailes, The Agriculture and Geology of Mississippi, passim. Another historical work relating to Mississippi published in the antebellum period which is omitted from consideration here is: J. F. H. Claiborne, Life and Correspondence of John A. Quitman, Major-General, U.S.A., and Governor of the State of Mississippi (2 vols., New York, 1860). The work is excluded because its only significant reference to Natchez Under-the-Hill was not original to Claiborne but was in a letter written by Quitman in 1822. As such, it reflects nothing of value regarding the attitude of Mississippi historians toward the under-the-hill legend during the late antebellum period.
other hand, tended to treat both though with a restraint and brevity that revealed either a disinterest born of tired familiarity or a sense of regional pride or both. While it is relatively easy thus to explain the hasty manner in which antebellum historians disposed of the legend in their writings, it is less easy to explain the apparent attitude of historians who, in the main, wrote 40 to 60 years after the heyday of the landing had ended. Why had they ignored a subject that should have been "safe" after so many years?

A tempting explanation of this phenomenon is simply that interest in the Civil War pre-empted everything else from the field. The answer is certainly somehow entwined in the effects the war had upon the region. As Professor Sanford Higginbotham once noted, the Civil War and Reconstruction were cataclysmic events: which "left an enduring imprint upon the life of the state"14 and which inspired a quantity of historical writing about the state that had been absent before the war. Yet, though much of this writing consisted of war reminiscences and histories, much of it, a sample of which we have already seen, reached far back into the antebellum history of the state. Such an obsession was to come only after the turn of the century when, under the direction of Franklin L. Riley, Mississippi's pioneer professional historian and a

14Higginbotham, JMH, XX (1958), p. 158.
student of Johns Hopkins' Herbert Baxter Adams, the publications of the Mississippi Historical Society began to place a heavy emphasis on slavery, nullification, secession, the Civil War, and Reconstruction at the expense of other aspects of Mississippi's history. Even then Mississippians did not completely ignore earlier phases of the state's history and such works as they produced which dealt with Natchez before 1860 indicate, as we shall see, an increasing willingness to deal with the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill on its own terms. So the explanation we seek lies not in a presumption that interest in the Civil War and in its aftermath overshadowed all that had gone before.

Clearly, the effect of the war on the life of the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill was more indirect than that. Perhaps, if our suggestion that antebellum writers soft-pedaled the legend out of a defensive sense of regional pride is true, the historians who wrote after the South's defeat felt even more compelled to cover up any flaws which the Old South in Mississippi had had out of the same sense of regional pride. This must be partially true, if only


16 Higginbotham, JMH, XX (1958), p. 163.
because it is true that there existed in the defeated South a deep reverence for the old order totally dedicated to an idealized version of the antebellum South. But if this were the sole cause, how do we explain the similar fate of this and other Mississippi Valley frontier legends, such as that of Mike Fink, in the national literature during the last forty years of the nineteenth century? Granted that there were some exceptions both in Mississippi and in the country as a whole, exceptions which are particularly instructive on this point; generally, however, the literature of frontier characters and institutions which had flourished before the war -- i.e., those of the Mississippi Valley -- lost respectability and entered a decline that led to a near-death hibernation from which it did not recover until after 1900.

True, the frontier by 1865 had moved beyond the Mississippi Valley; true also that frontier conditions had by then passed from the Valley, never to return. It is equally indisputable that there was a local color tradition in the

17In Gaston, The New South Creed, pp. 153-175, the reader will find an excellent discussion of the paradox inherent in this acceptance of the "moonlight and magnolia" myth by New South ideologues who hoped to build a bustling, industrial society.

18It is an often overlooked fact, though one reflected in some of William Faulkner's stories, such as "The Bear" in Go Down, Moses (1940), that frontier conditions continued to exist in parts of Mississippi, particularly the Delta, even into this century; though here the dominant theme, in so far as it depended upon frontier conditions, is man against the wilderness rather than man against man.
trans-Mississippi west, best represented by such writers as Bret Harte and Ned Buntline, which drew on the earlier tradition if only because of the similarity of theme between the two. But this tradition by the mid-1870's degenerated to the level of the dime novel and was no more respected by the eastern literary establishment than were the older frontier stories. As a result such fiction went underground, as it were, and had little discernible impact on mainstream literary circles in the three decades before 1900. In fact, the grand western tradition which has been so celebrated by film and television in this century, in terms of serious literature only originated with the publication of The Virginian by Owen Wister, a Harvard educated man of the East, in 1902; and serious consideration of the western gunfighter did not begin until the 1920's and '30's with the admittedly romantic work of F. J. Wilstock, W. N. Burns, and S. N. Lake on Wild Bill Hickock, Billy the Kid, and Wyatt Earp, respectively. This is the same period in which the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill would undergo a kind of renaissance of its own.

What, then, lies at the bottom of this neglect of the legends of Natchez Under-the-Hill, Mike Fink, and the like between the Civil War and 1900? The stories and legends of the Mississippi Valley frontier, as was properly pointed

out by Walter Blair and F. J. Meine in their excellent "biography" of Fink, possessed strong elements of the picaresque tale: elements of violence, of crime, of rough practical jokes played on one another--and on innocent, unheroic victims--by the rough characters who inhabited the substrata of the pre-war society along the Mississippi River. In short, these tales and their heroes, far from being moral, were quite amoral or worse.  

Between 1861 and the close of Reconstruction, the country had experienced a plethora of violence, vice, and corruption. It was sated and weary of the harsh realities of life and of human nature. It earnestly desired a respite, an escape. Such tales as were represented in the old tradition of the frontier tale offered none and had, by the nature of things, to go. The moral reaction to this excess quickened after 1873, aided by the panic, with its additional hardships, of that year and, in turn, quickened the decline of the frontier tradition. The fall from favor of Bret Harte, who in 1871 had signed a contract with The Atlantic Monthly for $10,000, an exceptionally large sum for a writer at that time, by the mid-1870's serves to illustrate this fact and helps explain why the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill suffered a similar, though less tragic, decline.

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20Blair and Meine, Mike Fink, p. x.
The old, pre-war tradition in which the legend of the Natchez landing had flourished was replaced by what Sinclair Lewis in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech to the Swedish Academy, in 1930, termed the "genteel tradition," a tradition perhaps best epitomized by the deservedly popular but idealized treatment of New England family life found in the fiction of Louisa May Alcott or by the work of Henry Van Dyke, a Presbyterian minister and Princeton professor who was also a writer, poet, and essayist, which consisted of pleasantly sentimental religious fiction such as *The Story of the Other Wise Man* and *The First Christmas Tree*. Since both were immensely popular in their day, which almost bridged the span between the late 1860's and 1900 (Alcott's first successful book was published in 1863; financial success came with *Little Women* in 1868-69; and her death came in 1888, while Dr. Van Dyke's first book was published in 1896 and his writing career extended well into this century.), their work and their pre-eminence can be taken as evidence of the dominance of this "genteel tradition" which they, among many other writers, represented. The new tradition, according to Sinclair Lewis, encompassed "a glorification of everything American, a glorification of our faults [perhaps sublimated, understated, and glossed over] as well as our virtues...." And as consisting of "a hearty and edifying chorus" proclaiming the survival of a simple, pastoral America.22 According to Malcolm Cowley, this tradi-

22Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 5.
tion, which exacted the prudish standards of a "strict girls' boarding school," focused on the American middle-class home" and elevated the American female, all of whom were "presented as milk-white angels of art and compassion and culture", to unearthly heights at the same time that it optimistically celebrated the material success of the upper class.23 An early Hamlin Garland novel was once rejected by Scribner's, a principal voice of this era, because it resounded with "'slang, profanity, vulgarity, agnosticism, and radicalism.'"24 In short, the "genteel tradition" celebrated an idealized, pure and successful America and excluded or ignored an often brutal and tawdry reality.

Thus, it is easy to understand how the writers and opinion leaders of the North, many of whose intellectual forebears had been abolitionists, so readily accepted the equally idealized and mythical chivalric antebellum South of the New South novelists and publicists. This Old South offered many pristine images craved by the followers of the genteel tradition: a peaceful, pastoral society in which everyone knew his place and was content; a land presided over by men imbued with the aristocratic graces and yet enlightened by the noble virtues, including generosity, so fitting to a democratic society; a people adorned by beautiful maidens

23Ibid, p. 10.
24Ibid.
endowed with the purest of Christian virtues but leavened with endearing feminine weaknesses that demanded protection by gallant and handsome heroes; a way of life inspired by regal holiday festivities, especially at Christmastime, which enriched the lives of all--white and black alike. 25

In sum, this image of the Old South fitted neatly into the idealized view of America, her past, and her institutions required by the dictums of the genteel tradition. Plainly the painted harlots, shifty gamblers, bawdy boatmen, thieves, murderers, and backslid planters and townsmen of Natchez Under-the-Hill had no place within the confines of this tradition.

The literature of the Mississippi River and of the Old Southwest originating in this period, contains few real exceptions to the general trend outlined above. Aside from the mere fact of the dominance of the genteel tradition, there are two reasons for this. First, the new literary standards were backed not only by wealthy patrons but also by powerful institutions. These consisted of the major periodicals, Scribner's, Harper's, the Century, the Atlantic and the North American Review--periodicals read in the best southern homes, the well established publishing houses of the Northeast, and the powerful universities of the East which had long been arbiters of the public taste. In addition,

there were the less formal organizations such as the writers' clubs in New York, which only accepted gentlemen who by definition conformed to the genteel taste, and the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, both of which were dominated by genteel writers until the 1930's. Writers who did not conform to the optimistic standard of the tradition, according to Malcolm Cowley, had difficulty getting published and were excluded from these influential societies. Second, in addition to this array of powerful institutions the tradition long enjoyed another bulwark: popular support across the country. It had this support because, as indicated above, it satisfied the emotional needs of the nation's literate class which consisted primarily of descendants of the older immigrant groups who were largely Protestant and English but which also included Scots, Dutch, and French Huguenot. As a result, there was little market for any literature which was antithetical to the new tradition. If most southern writers were indisposed to write of such subjects as Natchez Under-the-Hill, it is little wonder that northern and eastern writers also neglected them.26

The most important exceptions to these generalizations insofar as breadth of influence is concerned are found in works written by a lifelong river man named E. W. Gould

and, not surprisingly, by the bard of pre-war life on the river, Mark Twain. Gould, whose career on the Mississippi stretched from 1835 through the 1880's when he wrote a history of Mississippi River navigation, Fifty Years on the Mississippi, published in 1889, was not disposed to ignore altogether a subject which he knew to be of intrinsic worth in the history of the Mississippi trade. 27 He noted that from 1780 to 1830 Natchez was the 'largest and best known town above New Orleans on the Mississippi'; that Natchez Under-the-Hill had a notoriety known to no other point, during those years, in the great valley; and that it "had...long served as a rendezvous for the thousands of desperate and dissolute that congregated there." 28 He commented further, perhaps in an effort to reassure his readers, that this center of corruption was all in the past, that after the tornado of 1840 destroyed it, the Under-the-Hill landing never was rebuilt. 29 This came from a man who should have known better (Natchez Under-the-Hill had been rebuilt and was an important though not pre-eminent river port in the 1880's). Furthermore, the fact that his treatment of the landing was both brief and moderate seems to indicate that


29 Ibid.
Gould, too, was affected by the "genteel tradition".

Mark Twain, who, in 1883, described the heavy drinking and coarse frolicking boatmen of the Mississippi with great gusto and linked them to "moral sties like the Natchez Under-the-Hill of that day,"\(^{30}\) is another matter. It would be untrue to say that he was unaffected by the standards in vogue in his day and would, perhaps, be too much to say that he was in conscious rebellion against them. But it is clear that as both a man and a writer, Mark Twain lay outside the boundaries which constrained the genteel writers he envied. This was primarily because he drew his inspiration from the raucous frontier tradition the fruits of which were popular in both East and West, North and South, before the war and in which he was rooted from birth.\(^{31}\)

This was the tradition of which, as we have seen, the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill was fundamentally a part and which was ultimately founded on the story-telling arts of the people of the frontier. Its purpose was to get a laugh; it was anecdotal in form and found its way into print via hundreds of now anonymous western newspapers, of

\(^{30}\)Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publications, 1917 [orig. publ., 1883]), p. 18. Significantly, Twain did not name other favorite rendezvous of that singular breed of men, such as the one in New Orleans or the one in Memphis.

\(^{31}\)See Bernard DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America*, pp. 240-268, for an illuminating essay on this very point.
one of which Twain was himself, in his youth, a compositor. It was a genre fostered by William T. Porter through his Spirit of the Times. It was developed into literature by Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Johnson J. Hooper, George W. Harris and William Tappan Thompson, and, as Bernard DeVoto asserted, was carried to "its greatest incandescence, realizing its fullest scope and expressing its qualities on the level of genius" by Mark Twain. Its humor was boisterous, as were the folk of the Mississippi Valley--especially those who earned their living on the great river as Twain once had--and of the Far West, and took delight in exposing the foibles and follies of human nature and in burlesquing the society which gave it birth. As a result, it was satirical and often exaggerated though it drew its pictures directly from reality. (It was this latter quality which gave the genre a vitality hitherto known in most American literature; unfortunately, however its former qualities detract from its value as history except in the broad, cultural sense.) In addition, its humor was apt to be rough and sometimes crude, certainly according to the

32Ibid, pp. 95 & 243. This newspaper was the Hannibal Journal, established by Twain's brother, Orion Clemens. Twain was apprenticed to a printer in Hannibal when he was 13.


34Ibid, pp. 95, 240-241, & 257.
standards of the genteel tradition. For example, Twain often used anecdotes which employed corpses as a comic device; as DeVoto remarked, he thought they were sure to appeal to his readers. By the puritanical, prudish standards of the genteel sensibility, this literature also exhibited a tolerance for vice and immorality which must have offended weak hearts of Twain's generation. As evidence of this tolerance on the part of Mark Twain, note the delight with which he extolled the failings of the boatmen of the Mississippi frontier in the passage referred to above:

In time this [river] commerce increased until it gave employment to hordes of rough and hardy men; rude, uneducated, brave, suffering terrific hardships with sailorlike stoicism; heavy drinkers, coarse frolickers in moral sties like the Natchez Under-the-Hill of that day, heavy fighters, reckless fellows, every one, elephantinely jolly, foul-witted, profane; prodigal of their money, bankrupt at the end of the trip, fond of barbaric finery, prodigious braggarts....

Note, also, the manner in which he excused these excesses of soul in an age which hid from such behavior in its "best" literature:


36An explicit example of this tolerance, that of a steamboat captain for gambling gentry in the face of objection by followers of the cloth, is found quoted from a tale by Twain in DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, pp. 258-259.

37Twain, Life on the Mississippi, p. 18.
...yet, [these men were], in the main, honest, trustworthy, faithful to promises and duty, and often picturesquely magnanimous.38

Not surprisingly, Twain's work was received poorly by the literary critics whose power was lodged in the halls of academia and in the influential journals of the day. H. L. Mencken, the controversial journalist of the Baltimore Sun and the American Mercury who Sinclair Lewis facetiously characterized in his speech to the Swedish Academy as being "the worst of all scoffers", 39 wrote in 1925:

I examined all the treatises on American literature current in the federal union between 1870 and 1900--all the books in common use in schools and colleges. I found that, without a single exception, the learned authors had dismissed Mark as a clown--a fellow belonging to the lodge of Petroleum V. Nasby and Bill Nye. A few allowed that, as clowns went, he had some merit, but the majority held their praises, and devoted themselves to lamenting that he was often so vulgar. Such was the best critical opinion of his contemporaries.40

Mencken concluded that "Mark remains a colossal monument to the imbecility of pedagogues."41 Perhaps he felt so because he could justly observe that despite this critical disdain Twain had been more widely read and more thoroughly enjoyed than any other American writer of his or of his

38Ibid. E. W. Gould shared this conception of the boatmen; See Gould, Fifty Years on the Mississippi, 1st ed., pp. 53-56.


41Ibid.
children's generation. Indeed, Mencken praised Huckleberry Finn, which was informed with the same comic "vulgarities"--and more--as was Life on the Mississippi, as "the greatest work of the imagination yet produced in America...[and as] the one most likely to endure." But this was the judgment of a later generation which had grown up reading Twain. Twain's popular success hardly alters the fact that, among those in a position to set the cultural tone of an age, he stood apart. Lesser writers who followed his lead remain obscure. Certainly, none seems to have made any discernible impact upon the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill in these years. Twain's own contribution to it was negligible enough. The treatment he gave it in Life on the Mississippi probably did no more than rekindle old memories in older readers and provoke curiosity in younger ones.

Two other postwar writers whose work ran against the dominant trend of the age, but who had primarily only a regional or even local influence, were John Griffing Jones and Horace S. Fulkerson, both Mississippians. Jones, an itinerant Methodist preacher in frontier Mississippi from 1824 to the 1860's, wrote two histories of the Protestant religion in the Old Southwest, A Concise History of the Introduction of Protestantism into Mississippi and the South-

42Ibid; and DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, pp. xi-xii.

western, published in St. Louis in 1866, and *A Complete History of Methodism...* [in] Mississippi...*, published in Nashville in 1887. \(^{44}\) In neither of these was Jones reluctant to expose the ungenteel and scandalous aspects of his subject; though, much more disapproving than Twain, he did not take such delight in them. \(^{45}\) In the first mentioned volume he took direct and fiery aim at Natchez Under-the-Hill. Condemning it for being one among several reasons for the slow progress of the Protestant denominations in early Mississippi (that Catholicism and French philosophy were also listed removes some of the sting), Jones bitterly characterized the Natchez landing as:

that celebrated school of every grade of licentiousness, known as "Natchez under the hill," made up mostly in the days of the Provincial and Territorial Governments, of barrooms, gambling houses and brothels of the vilest class. These haunts of hydra-headed vice were inhabited by the most degraded and lawless men and women, whose sole object seemed to be to beguile, entrap and ruin their heedless victims. \(^{46}\)


\(^{45}\)Ibid. See, in particular, Miller, *JMH*, XXXIX, pp. 35-36.

Jones, who spent much of his adolescent years until his conversion at a camp meeting at the age of 17 (in 1821) in Natchez in pursuit of such licentiousness, seems to have known what he was talking about, although his passion on the subject led him to use highly colored rhetoric which can be easily misinterpreted today. Why did Jones, a devoutly religious man, not ignore such subjects as this in his writing in an age when most of his fellow writers and practically all of his fellow historians did? To say that it was because his writing of the *Introduction of Protestantism* came close upon the war and before the corruption and violence of Reconstruction had even begun and, thus, before the genteel tradition had taken firm hold, though true, would be deceptively simple. Although he was undeniably close, in 1866, to the antebellum tradition, his treatment of related subjects in his second history, written twenty years later in the middle years of the genteel tradition, was essentially as uninhibited as in his first book. As Rush Miller, Jones' biographer and, himself, an historian of religion in antebellum Mississippi found, "Jones sat on committees of the annual conference which judged accused ministers on numerous occasions and did not shrink from printing [in the latter history] the sordid details involved in those trials." There seem to be two fundamental reasons

48Ibid, p. 35.
for Jones' lack of reticence in an area judged so distasteful by his contemporaries: One is the sort of man he was. Honest and forthright, Jones had long before become inured to the physical hardships and spiritual and intellectual opposition he encountered in his effort to Christianize the people of an inattentive and hostile frontier. In fact, he rather enjoyed it. He once responded to drunken hectoring during one of his services with this revealing remark: "... the devil seems to anticipate coming events and hence the rally of his forces tonight.... I rather enjoy a thing of this sort. I would rather have a fuss anytime than a cold lifeless monotony."49 The other reason for Jones' treatment of vulgar subjects was that the history of Protestantism in the Old Southwest was primarily the story of its confrontation with the irreligion and love of vice, principally drinking and gambling, but also illicit sexuality, so well represented in the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill. To have soft-pedalled this would have largely falsified this history and would have betrayed an essential part of Jones' own experience.

Horace S. Fulkerson, who published his Random Recollections of Early Days in Mississippi in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1885, as historian stood much closer to Twain in spirit than to either Gould or Jones, even though as a

49Quoted in Ibid, p. 25. This service was held in the State Capitol in 1837.
ruling elder of the Vicksburg Presbyterian Church in his later years he was so faithful to his duties that he was affectionately dubbed "The Bishop" by his brethren. This fact is important in the light of the body of Fulkerson's work which shares with Twain's, to some extent, a good-humored and genial tolerance for certain vices and a willingness to talk about them, for it demonstrates that Fulkerson did not share the latter's cynicism and lack of religious faith. What he did have in common with Twain was that both drew from the antebellum literary tradition. Fulkerson, who had lived in various parts of Mississippi and Louisiana since 1836, was particularly steeped in the literature and folklore of the Old Southwest on which he relied for several of his best stories and which, in general, greatly influenced the tone and point of view of his writing, although, as he said, he sought to eschew the extravagance endemic in that tradition.

A classic example of this influence is found in Fulkerson's treatment of the story of Shocco Jones, a smooth-talking con artist of the first order who appeared in Mississippi in 1839 in the guise of a U. S. Treasury agent authorized to inspect state banks in which government monies had been deposited. He also claimed to have been requested by the cashier of the Cape Fear Bank of North Carolina to

50 Fulkerson, Random Recollections, p. v.
invest gold from that bank in Mississippi land mortgages. In the weeks following he traveled about the state making a particular splash in its financial centers, Natchez and Vicksburg, impressing such respected gentlemen as "the great lawyer", Sargent S. Prentiss, "inspecting" banks, and collecting land titles which were to be paid for out of a large chest of gold being sent from North Carolina. As it turned out, Shocco decamped with the titles and the chest contained nothing but scrap iron. 52 As Fulkerson put it, ";...Shocco was gone! and the country was sold!" 53 Yet Fulkerson delighted in this story and characterized Shocco as "that wonderful genius and Prince of Humbuggers", 54 whose only object was the pursuit of "fun". 55 One suspects that the source of Fulkerson's delight, at least in part, lay in its exposure of one of the foibles of human nature, gullibility in this case, which laid bare the pretension inherent in the soi-disant status-seekers of every age and of every society. Says he of Shocco's operations:

The gullible trait in human character was the field of his operations, and he had unbounded confidence in its resources, in its capacity to yield him an abundant harvest of fun under his skillful cultivation. A crisis in public affairs, a period of anxiety when everybody was on the qui vive for (sic) strange and startling things, was his fit occasion. 56

52Ibid, pp. 66-75.  
53Ibid, p. 75.  
54Ibid, p. 66.  
56Ibid.
What makes the story work so well is that Shocco's success in duplicity was derived solely from his own pretense: from his "imperturbable impudence, a gracious manner, bright intelligence, and the business air of a monied man without solicitude for the future...."\(^5^7\) He had no forged documents nor letters of introduction nor any other material thing with which to substantiate his would-be authority. People believed in him, so the story goes, even Mississippi's best and brightest, because he cultivated their sense of self-esteem and because his pleasing manners and sharp wit--his very gentility--made them want to. And beneath this superficial gentility lay only a kind of sardonic greed which arrogated to itself the right to a harvest of fun at other people's expense.

This, though subtler, was in the mainstream of the tradition which also extolled the heroic virtues of the practical joking, fun-seeking boatmen and gamblers of the Mississippi's waterfront society which thrived before the war. Nor did Fulkerson neglect either of these classes. His accounts of the hanging of the gamblers and of "the flatboat war," both of which occurred in Vicksburg in 1835 and in 1838, respectively, have long been standard sources of that aspect of the state's antebellum history.\(^5^8\) But, for our purposes, it is more important that he also did not

\(^{5^7}\)Ibid.  

\(^{5^8}\)Ibid, pp. 95-99.
neglect the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill. His account of it was contained in a story of John W. Russell, the legendary steamboat captain, a story which has since been retold often by popular writers and historians. Briefly, Captain Russell, the self-confident, powerful hero of the tale, had stopped at Baton Rouge and taken on as passengers several Methodist ministers while on his way from New Orleans upriver. When his boat stopped at Natchez, one of the "unsophisticated younger preachers," as Fulkerson described him, who had a great sum of money on his person which he held in trust for some unknown society, decided to take a stroll Under-the-Hill. While he was about it, he somehow innocently wandered into "a den of gamblers and other loose characters". Before the young preacher had left he had been "dispossessed, in a skillful way and without violence, of his money." Upon discovering his loss, he reported it to Captain Russell, who promptly demanded the money's return. The gamblers denied they had it, but Russell persisted and said that if the money was not turned over within the hour, he would pull their house into the river. When, an hour later, he proceeded with every sign of success to carry out his threat, the gamblers relented, came aboard and gave up all the preacher's money.

60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
It is significant that this anecdote did not originate with Fulkerson and that it had, in fact, been published in almost the same form at least as early as 1853 in a book written by Samuel A. Hammett under the pseudonym, Philip Paxton. For one thing, it further demonstrates that the antebellum tradition was the wellspring of much of Fulkerson's Recollections. For another, it indicates that even in such works as dared treat Natchez Under-the-Hill after Jones penned his derogatory description in 1866 nothing essentially new was being written about it. More important still, what differences did exist between them, found in relatively minor details of the narrative, suggest that even Fulkerson may have felt himself in some degree restrained by the prevailing literary tenets of the postwar years. According to Fulkerson, the victim was a young Methodist preacher; Hammett said that he was a flatboat trader. (Perhaps Fulkerson was trying to poke a little genial fun at his Methodist friends here.) This otherwise minor point is significant because the two accounts also differed as to the motive which prompted the victim to enter the house in which he was despoiled: Fulkerson had it that the preacher was merely curious, unknowing, and naive; Hammett, that the trader was out, quite knowing, in search of a bit of fun.

63Paxton, Stray Yankee in Texas, pp. 407-408.
In addition, Fulkerson was much less explicit regarding the vices practiced by the inhabitants of the landing than was Hammett. One example of this is the manner in which the two raconteurs characterized the house in which the deed was done. While Hammett described it as one of "the various drinking, gambling, and dancing houses that made up the town...." and, later, as a "den of thieves," Fulkerson quickly passed over it with the descriptive phrase, "a den of gamblers and other loose characters." More basic still is the manner in which both treated the violence inherent to the story. Hammett clearly stated that the victim was "robbed of his pocket-book" and played with great effect on the constant threat of violence necessary for Russell to carry out his threat to tumble the house into the river, saying that Russell came to the house with a gang of deck hands and a large cable which "was passed around the house and in and out some of the windows," while a room full of gamblers and thieves offered no resistance. This improbable and seemingly exaggerated scenario was accomplished, according to Hammett, because the miscreants "were too well acquainted with [Russell's prowess] to make any overt demonstration." On the other hand, Fulkerson tried to

64Ibid, p. 407.  
65Ibid, p. 408.  
66Fulkerson, Random Recollections, p. 18.  
68Ibid, p. 408.  
69Ibid.
finesse his way around all this violence. According to his version, the preacher was "dispossessed, in a skillful way and without violence, of his money,"70 and Russell fulfilled his threat merely by hitching on to "the under-gearing of the house"--71 whether within or out of sight of the villains is unclear but, regardless, he did so without resistance.

That Fulkerson's account of the Russell legend was so much tamer than Hammett's reflects the degree to which his writing was tempered by the genteel tradition and by the myth of the Old South. Fulkerson, himself, as much as admitted in his "Preface" that he had changed some of the incidents related in his book so that instead of being literally true, they merely rested "upon a foundation of truth."72 This was done, he wrote, to accord "with the taste of the writer, and...to make them, in his judgment, the more acceptable to the public."73 Even so, as was demonstrated above, both the tone and the themes developed by Fulkerson in the Recollections place him, with Mark Twain, outside the tradition which dominated his later years and prove that, though he was influenced by it, it did not deter him from giving

70Fulkerson, Random Recollections, p. 18. (Italics added.)
72Ibid, p. 5.
73Ibid.
expression to the older and more vital tradition of humor, anecdote, and myth of the antebellum frontier of which the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill was a part.

Despite the treatment given it, such as it was, by Gould, Twain, Jones, and Fulkerson—and perhaps some others who remain unnoticed—the legend of the Natchez landing declined into obscurity in the latter half of the nineteenth century because the writers and publishers of America, and their readers, felt impelled to escape from the darker side of human reality which had led to the tragic experience of their younger days. Americans, weary of strife, craved escape from the unpleasant aspects of life and, especially in the South, began to look upon the pre-war years as a golden age of peace, plenty, and rectitude. There was, by the late '70's and '80's, an increasing tendency, in the words of Charles Colcock Jones, the president of the Confederate Survivors Association, to "covet a remembrance and an observation of the patriotism, the purity, the manhood, the moderation, and the honesty of the days that are gone."74 This cultivation of the cherished and pleasant memories of those days, remembered purer than ever they really were, led to a state of mind, lamented by Horace Fulkerson, as an unphilosophical affectation by some in the South of wanting to forget the past, a past which Fulkerson believed should

74Quoted in Gastón, The New South Creed, p. 155.
be remembered in all its details—and learned from.\textsuperscript{75}

Actually, the desire to forget was quite widespread. In the South, even the New South ideologists fully accepted this idealized view of the region's past, although their creed of industrialism and nationalism was quite antithetical to the agrarianism and localism which had dominated Old South thought.\textsuperscript{76} Seemingly even more ironic is the fact that this romanticized view of the Old South as "The Plantation South," as a South of nobility and grandeur, was also accepted in the North without reservation. Thus Albion W. Tourgee, a carpetbag judge in North Carolina and a writer of fiction himself, after surveying the popular monthlies of the late '80's, could declare that "our literature has become not only Southern in type, but also distinctly Confederate in sympathy."\textsuperscript{77} These apparent ironies seem much more explicable when it is realized that this mythical view of the Southern past not only conformed to but was actually a manifestation of the genteel tradition which required that the baser aspects of the pre-war society, so celebrated in the journals, books, and newspapers of the country before 1860, be forgotten.

This explains why Natchez Under-the-Hill was so much ignored in the years between 1865 and 1900. Given the

\textsuperscript{75}Fulkerson, Random Recollections, pp. 5-6.
\textsuperscript{76}Gaston, The New South Creed, pp. 160-167.
\textsuperscript{77}Ibid. p. 171.
cultural tone of the time, it is not surprising that such Mississippi historians as Gerard Brandon, Robert Lowry, and William McCardle purposefully neglected to discuss the legend of Natchez' lower town. Nor is it surprising that these New South historians, who wished to prove that the Southern heritage included industry and a successful pursuit of commerce, cited the importance of the cotton trade and manufactories of antebellum Natchez without direct reference to the scandal-ridden landing which had made these things possible. Any such reference would have dredged up memories best kept buried.

The power of the taboo which inhibited discussion of subject matter, such as this legend, once so popular, was so great that it not only clearly influenced writers who would have otherwise been inclined to treat it freely, but it also prevented anyone from even questioning its authenticity—at least directly and in print. Of course, we will never know how many of the writers and historians who ignored the Natchez landing in their work actually rejected the validity of the legend. Evidence available suggests that most people familiar with Natchez accepted it as true. The pamphlet, Natchez, 1881, certainly pulled no punches in its condemnation of the old landing.78

Another factor that inhibited Natchez and Mississippi

historians from openly discussing the legend in print was that such a reference would have conflicted with the genteel image of Natchez, and Old South cities in general, encouraged by them. The treatment given the old town by Mary Duval in The Student's History of Mississippi, published in 1887, kept perfect step with other histories in support of this image. Not only did it treat the importance of the cotton trade of Natchez while simultaneously ignoring the landing per se, it also glorified the town as "the home of wealth and refinement...." Duval claimed, erroneously, that Natchez "has always been the true type of a Southern city; its streets broad, shaded, and handsomely laid off; its residences ornamented with large yards and beautiful gardens." (She described Vicksburg in much the same way

79 Duval, The Student's History of Mississippi, p. 65. See n. 7 above.

80 Ibid. (Italics added.) While Natchez was laid out with broad streets, set at 90° angles to one another, the city was not always as refined and handsome in appearance as Duval liked to think. Even aside from the existence of Natchez Under-the-Hill and of crimes and vices in the upper town, Natchez long had a problem with drainage, muddy streets in wet weather, and a general lack of cleanliness. The former problem was a fact of nature as Natchez was a town built upon hills until it was levelled, over a period of years, into some degree of uniformity; even then the problem of muddy and impassable streets in wet weather was not eliminated until the streets were paved after the Civil War. The latter problem, however, was a product of human carelessness and neglect. In may, 1819, a correspondent to the Mississippi State Gazette (see the issue of May 15) complained that "there are stagnant ponds in vacant lots, and in the precincts of private dwellings; masses of filth are disgorged from kitchens and thrown a putrifying mass into the streets and gutters; the ledges under the bluff are the deposits for dead horses, cows, and every breeze from that quarter comes
and failed to mention the "hanging of the gamblers" there.\textsuperscript{81}

charged with unhealthy odours into our doors and windows." (Italics added.) Two years earlier, in the Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer (See the issue of September 27, 1817), the citizens of Natchez were urged by the City Board of Health to take action by reporting abuses of this sort so that the magistrates could take action. Apparently, the citizens continued unconcerned. They must have continued so throughout the balance of the antebellum period for the Natchez Courier of October 20, 1863, noted that hogs rooted in the streets at will and wallowed in slops thrown from the houses into the streets. They had completely choked the gutter along one street, and the same odors as had abused the sensitive in 1819 still wafted into the air. (See: John Stafford Coussons, "The Federal Occupation of Natchez, Mississippi, 1863-65," Unpublished MA Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1958.) As to the grand houses for which Natchez is justly known, such structures did not begin to be built in Natchez in any significant number until at least the 1830's. Said Estwick Evans of the Natchez which he saw in 1818: "Many of the houses and stores are large; but there are not many buildings here which can be termed elegant. The courthouse is inconsiderable, and the theatre is a very ordinary building." (See Evans, Pedestrian Tour, p. 319.) In addition, though a minor point, it is nonetheless true that when Duval claimed that Natchez was always a typical Southern city, she was mistating the case for the early town--architecturally--came much closer to the West Indian pattern than to the Georgian and Federal styles common to the older parts of the South. Its buildings had balconies and piazzas which were, according to Fortescue Cuming, quite similar to features on buildings that he had seen in the West Indies. (See Cuming, Sketches, p. 320.) To be sure, even as early as 1820, there were some large houses surrounded by fine gardens. Audubon saw at least one, separated by a considerable distance from any other buildings, in that year. It was a hotel owned by a Mr. Garnier. Audubon also observed, as did other travelers, that "heaps of cotton bales and other produce...encumbered the streets." He did not like the churches he saw in the town and observed numerous vultures in and about the town. (See Audubon, Audubon and His Journals, pp. 246-248.) See also: Monette, History of the Valley of the Mississippi, II, p. 359; Schultz, Travels, p. 133; and Natchez-Adams County, Ms. Assessment Roles and Ordinance 1803-- (Natchez: Judge Armstrong Library, nd.). Regarding problems of vice and violence atop the hill, see: James, Antebellum Natchez, pp. 201 & 260-266; and p. 38 & p. 38, n72 above.

\textsuperscript{81}Ibid, pp. 65-66.
Not that all agreed that that refinement for which Natchez was now famous was necessarily centered in the town itself. Major Steve Power, the editor of *The Memento: Old and New Natchez, 1700-1897*, published locally in 1897, who had resided in Natchez for some fifty years, wrote that "the wealth, the beauty, the elegance of living [for which Natchez was known] was in the homesteads scattered on every side in the vicinity within a radius of three miles." But that hardly matters; the important thing was that no "dark" memories of Natchez' frontier past be brought forth to discolor this pristine image so well suited to a genteel age. This neither Power nor others in Natchez or elsewhere wished to do. The manner in which Natchez Under-the-Hill was mentioned in the promotional pamphlets cited earlier was perfectly consistent with this desire. The editors and publishers of both, especially those of the first, took particular pains to disassociate their town from the scandal attached to Natchez Under-the-Hill because its memory still lived and might otherwise discourage the investment they sought.

The effect of the genteel tradition and its primary Southern manifestation, the myth of the Old South, on the vitality of the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill is unmistakable. But, in a broader sense, it is no less certain that the moral and cultural attitudes which fostered these traditions and which gave them their power in the post-bellum period

was the first cause of the decline of this and other legends of the Mississippi country's frontier culture. These attitudes insofar as they demanded that man not examine his darker side, whether of the past or present, were opposed by such men as Horace S. Fulkerson who admonished the young people of the South "to acquaint themselves with its history in all its details." But these men, who were a distinct minority especially in the South, admonished and protested with little effect during the gilded years before 1900. The legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill would only emerge from its vitiated state as the uncompromising value system commonly labeled "Victorianism" loosened its grip on American thought and literature. This began to happen, gradually after 1900, first in the North and West and somewhat later in the more conservative, rural South. The effects of this process upon the health of the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill in the early decades of the present century are clear to any familiar with the work of such Popularists as Edith Wyatt Moore, Harnett T. Kane, and Jonathan Daniels. That, however, is a different story. For now it will suffice to observe that

83Fulkerson, Random Recollections, p. vi. (Italics added.) The idealized genteel tradition was more forcefully opposed after 1890 by such writers as Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser. These had begun to have some impact by or soon after 1900, but not until the decade which followed 1910 did they begin to win their battle. See: Cowley, After the Genteel Tradition, pp. 13-18.
had the conservative and prudish values of the late
nineteenth century directed the standards of the Nation's
literature during those decades, the legend of Natchez Under-
the-Hill would probably have been forgotten. Such was
clearly the intent of Mississippi historians in the Gilded
Age.
CONCLUSION

The strength of the legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill during the nineteenth century manifestly depended primarily upon the myths about the American West and South through which contemporaries filtered the facts of the American experience. The objective facts of life at the landing, though not unimportant, were of secondary consideration simply because, due to the influence of the Myth of the Wild and Savage West prior to the Civil War and that of the Old South after it, any facts inconsistent with either were largely ignored. That is why, in the former period, the role of the Port of Natchez in the economic development of the Old Southwestern frontier, particularly within the Natchez District, was either downplayed or ignored by most of the traveler-journalists who focused instead upon the landing's vices. That is why the legend which emerged in the 1830's under the aegis of the frontier tradition ignored that role absolutely. And that is why, during the latter period, the very memory that Natchez Under-the-Hill, as such, had ever existed was suppressed.

While the suppression of the tradition of this wild and lawless frontier port was sufficient to meet the needs
of the latter myth between 1865 and 1900, the Myth of the Wild and Savage West required far more than simply to forget facts contrary to it. For Natchez Under-the-Hill to be truly a symbol of that myth required not only a failure to give significant notice to its economic function, but also exaggerated emphasis on its vice. Both requirements were met. The elements of the image of the landing early in the nineteenth century exactly paralleled those of the myth of the wild west: both the West in general and the landing in particular were unkempt and filthy and were inhabited by uncouth, irreligious, and immoral people. And in both did swearing, gambling, prostitution, and violence--especially the latter--flourish. Emphasis on the alleged violence of the landing was particularly significant because the most basic tenent of the western myth was that lawlessness and violence were so rampant that innocent victims were frequently robbed and murdered there. The accounts of Hamilton, Alexander, and Power, as well as the stories of the frontier humorists, indicate the landing had this reputation. Further, it is clear that, throughout the antebellum period, this image was widely known and accepted as a fact of Western life in the nation and in Europe. During these years it was natural that writers who described Natchez Under-the-Hill should use the metaphors of the Myth of the Wild and Savage West because it was one of the major cultural touchstones of the era.
This is not to suggest that the treatment of the landing by all of the traveler-journalists who contributed to the landing's image from c.1800 to 1835 was identical. Some said little or nothing of its vices and/or emphasized its economic role. Others remarked, if briefly, upon that economic function even while giving most of their attention to the social vices. Still others discussed only the vices. Nor was their treatment of these vices entirely uniform. Some were vague as to either where or which vices were practiced. The rest, while specifically identifying the landing as either the major or the sole locus of vice in Natchez, varied their treatment of it depending upon a number of factors, including what the writer saw while he was there; what he expected to see; what his motives were in writing his account; or, in some cases, what he thought would achieve the most sensational and entertaining result.

Still, three conclusions can be drawn from the evidence left by these travelers:

1) Most emphasized the social vices of Natchez landing over its economic function. Although the habit of passing over the role of the landing as a major trade center in the lower Mississippi Valley can be attributed to what James Flint observed was the tendency of unpleasant incidents to attract attention, this is nonetheless significant because the Myth of the Wild and Savage West portrayed the West as a society of hunters and squatters.
engaged primarily in a subsistence economy. Accurate portrayal of trade at the landing would have revealed a level of internal and international commerce which would have run counter to that myth.

2) All of the traveler-journalists were aware of and influenced by the myth. Some did not accept it and viewed the West in terms that differed from it. Even so, its effect upon them is evident. Audubon rejected it altogether; however, as when he denied that travelers were in any danger of murder in the West, it influenced his treatment of his subject. Baird did not accept the myth either, although he did accept the validity of some of the facts reported by critical observers. He simply interpreted them so as to put the West in a better light. Similarly, Timothy Flint generally thought the West had been unfairly maligned. Yet the myth exerted its pull on him when he remarked that the landing was "full of the refuse of the world," a metaphor frequently used by the myth's adherents. James Hall was another writer who was for the most part objective--at least he tried to explain the region's faults in terms other than simple moral depravity. But the myth's influence over him was clear when he reported that the lower Mississippi was thought in the East to be the "sink for the dregs of the more northern parts of the continent." Significantly, he did not deny that this was true. Bradbury and Hodgson, both Britons, though not accepting the myth, were forced by it to defend
the western character. While neither was favorably impressed by what he saw at the landing, rather than see it as a symbol of the wild West, Bradbury, at least, compared it to seaports the world over. Finally, Christian Schultz, who was as willing as any to treat the topics demanded by the myth, attributed the immorality he saw at the landing to the weaknesses of human nature generally rather than any particular failure of it unique to Natchez or to the West. However, he—as had several others discussed above—provided material which reinforced the myth in which he did not believe.

Others did accept the myth and marshalled their evidence to prove it true. Cuming, though he said little ill of the Natchez port, was one of these and condemned the Mississippi Territory as roundly as he had any of the rest of the regions through which he passed. Ker, an English-bred Puritan born in New England, described the landing's vices as harshly as any New England traveler of his day. Thomas Ashe, an English scoundrel and liar—as many of his contemporaries deemed him—penned one of the most sensational and distorted accounts of America and the West ever written. Ingraham and Martineau both addressed the issue of western barbarity and implicitly regarded Natchez Under-the-Hill as an example of it. Alexander, Power, and Hamilton, however, explicitly linked the vice and violence of the West as a whole with that of Natchez landing. Alexander did so by focusing on the knife wielding,
whiskey swilling backwoodsmen and squatters, examples of whom he found both along the river generally and at the landing. Power narrowed in on the gamblers of the Mississippi country but blamed all of the evils of western society on them and claimed that their brotherhood controlled Natchez' lower town. Hamilton's account presents perhaps the strongest evidence of the link between the western myth and the image of the Natchez port; he assumed, based solely upon what he saw at the landing during a brief visit, that the upper town was as profligate as he had heard. He could feel confident in doing so in print only because of the power of the Myth of the Wild and Savage West to influence both his own and his readers' thinking.

3) That power and the assumptions which lay behind it caused some journalists to exaggerate the vice of Natchez (whether or not specifically located at the landing). The earliest and perhaps most grotesque such distortion was the charge made by Ashe in 1806 that all of the inhabitants of Natchez suffered from venereal disease. Ashe drew this astounding conclusion from the sallow complexions he observed in them. What he failed to realize was that these sallow faces resulted from the fever which infected most newcomers to the Natchez country within a year of their arrival. This is not to deny that sexual promiscuity existed in Natchez or at its landing. The accounts of Schultz, Bradbury, Stuart, and Ingraham make it clear that at the landing at least, promiscuity and prostitution were indeed facts of
life. So were drunkenness and gambling. Ashe's charge, however, was based on prejudice and a desire to cultivate sensationalism and so exaggerated the truth as to be absurd. Such claims as that by Ker that every house under-the-hill was one of prostitution, or those by Alexander and Power that the gamblers routinely plied their victims with rum and plundered them at their tables, are equally suspect, because they reflect prejudice, sensationalism, and imbalance and because they conflict with the more generally reliable sources noted above.

But, due to the emphasis on violence against innocents in the myth of the wild West, it was the accounts of violence at the landing by Hamilton, Alexander, and Power that, prior to the emergence in print of the frontier tradition, had the greatest discernible impact on the reputation of Natchez Under-the-Hill. Leaving aside the tales of brawling there (which were no doubt true), the accounts in question center on robbery and murder. These are even less reliable than those of intemperance, prostitution, and gaming because they are, apparently, based entirely upon hearsay. Hamilton's claim that the risk of being robbed at the landing was considerable was plainly hearsay, while Alexander's charge that steamboat passengers were routinely and openly plundered there must have been so since he could not possibly have been personally aware of the fact. While Stuart's report of a pickpocketing
incident Under-the-Hill may seem to confirm the more extreme charges of Hamilton and Alexander, it can in itself prove nothing of the frequency of such crimes. Even if it confirmed Hamilton's charge, that of Alexander, of public and wholesale plunder of visitors remains incredible.

Much more damaging were the claims, primarily by Power, that murder was common at the landing. While Timothy Flint had written earlier that brawls, frequently ending in murder, often occurred there, his statement that such encounters seldom involved innocent bystanders suggests that, even if his characterization of them was correct, they did not represent the sort of violence embodied in the myth. Power, on the other hand, claimed that strangers at the landing "a very few years back" were in danger of being murdered. Not only was this just the kind of violence portrayed by the myth, it was also clearly hearsay. Power did report two specific cases of murder committed at the port, the only two ever reported in the travel literature. But one, the alleged murder of a supposed participant in a gambling dispute, was, again, hearsay; while the other consisted of an incident overheard by Power as he stood about a hundred feet overhead on the bluff. In the latter case, Power heard fighting, two shots, and a scream and assumed that a man had been murdered. He never considered the possibility that the shots may have been fired in self-defense or that they may have missed altogether. Because
of the power of the Myth of the Wild and Savage West and the long-standing reputation of Natchez Under-the-Hill as a symbol of that myth, Power simply assumed the worst and used the incident to bolster the stories he had heard of frequent murder there.

Since no significant body of reliable evidence has been offered to support the charges of Hamilton, Alexander, and Power, it must be concluded that they exaggerated conditions which may not have been good, from a moralist point of view, but which were never as bad as such people claimed.

That the most sensational travel accounts of Natchez Under-the-Hill were written by persons who visited the Mississippi Valley during the 1830's was no accident. Nor was it an accident that their accounts, far more than any of the earlier ones, were based largely on tales told to them by natives, for this was the decade in which the frontier tradition first burst into print in the nation's newspapers and journals. In fact, in one sense, these facts can be taken as evidence of the rapid fermentation of the oral tradition in that decade. The written tradition and the oral tradition reinforced one another. Westerners, grown confident in themselves and in their region following their victory under Jackson at New Orleans, both celebrated the virtues--democracy, individualism, perseverance, and generosity--they took to be uniquely western and began to laugh uproariously at those aspects widely perceived as faults. Since Natchez Under-the-Hill,
with its drunks, prostitutes, rowdy boatmen, and gamblers, had long symbolized many of the faults of the West, it was natural that western humorists should take it as a favorite theme. They had begun to do so, at least locally, with the publication of Andrew Haslett's lamentations over the eviction of the landing's "fair sisters" in early 1817. The naming of the Under-the-Hill street, "maiden lane," and Billy Longwhip's tale, published in 1829, indicate the budding influence of that tradition between 1817 and the early '30's.

By the '40's, however, following the expulsion of the gamblers from Vicksburg and Natchez in 1835 and the tornado of 1840, events which attracted the attention of the world, the manner in which the landing was treated in this literature changed. While earlier treatments had presented prostitutes, backwoodsmen, boatmen, and gamblers more or less as subjects of equal comic value, the latter now began to be singled-out as the principal villains and the deeds they committed became darker and more forbidding. This was due to a growing prejudice against gamblers who had become regarded as parasites living upon the productive and God-fearing elements of society. Power had reflected this feeling when he blamed all of the evils of the West on that one group. Ten to twenty years later such writers as Jonathan Green, William C. Hall, and Falconbridge exploited the same feelings by lampooning the rascally blacklegs in their stories. "My Grandmother's Trick"
was intended to illustrate the scheming dishonesty of the
gamblers; the game of the "Spanish Burial," their brutality. Two of the outstanding heroes of the genre, Jim
Girty and "Roarin'" Jack Russell both earned recognition
for having defeated gamblers. By the 1850's writers were
accusing the gamblers at the landing of being capable of
committing any act, however heinous, and of murdering un-
told numbers of innocent victims.

While we may today regard such subject matter as
unfit for humor—or at best fitted for a kind of black
comedy only, many of the stories written by these humorists
were unquestionably funny. The gambler was always the butt
of the joke, the half-witted villain, or the cowardly fall
guy. The harsh condemnation of the gamblers which accom-
panied these anecdotes were almost always just the didactic
justification for the story. That such bumbling and cowards
could be dangerous villains may be incongruous, but this
never seems to have occurred to these writers. Their pri-
mary interest was in a good story, not in social reform.
Their tradition, as Bernard DeVoto described it, was "em-
phatic, coarse, vivid, violent, uproarious... and bawdy."
That it distorted the realities of Natchez Under-the-Hill
was inevitable, for exaggeration for effect was the essen-
tial quality of the frontier tradition.

The legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill had evolved
during the antebellum years under the pervasive influence
of the Myth of the Wild and Savage West. If this myth had
influenced the observations of the traveler-journalist, it
had no less directed the barbs of the humorists who followed
them. The latter group merely removed the myth's sting
with humor. However, the post-Civil War generation, which
had experienced a plethora of violence and corruption from
1861 to the mid-1870's, rejected the harsh realities satir-
ized by the frontier tradition. They suppressed the myth of
the wild West, at least in the mainstream of the nation's
literature, and promoted instead a new tradition that ideal-
ized American life. This "genteel tradition," as Sinclair
Lewis termed it, celebrated a pure and successful America--
past and present--and ignored an often brutal and tawdry
reality. The new rules, enforced by powerful patrons and
institutions and supported by the literate public, combined
with reverence in the South for the vanquished social order
to create the Myth of the Old South. This myth, which
celebrated a peaceful, pastoral society ruled by a gra-
cious aristocracy and adorned by beautiful maidens and
gallant heroes, could not tolerate such blemishes as the
legend of Natchez Under-the-Hill would have revealed. So
it, too, was suppressed.

During the last four decades of the nineteenth
century few writers, either from Mississippi or elsewhere,
who had the opportunity to mention this subject did so.
There were exceptions, but even these help to illustrate
the power of the tradition they defied. John Griffing Jones
was an old Mississippi circuit preacher who had always enjoyed confronting the opposition of the sinners he sought to convert. He was never one to suppress the truth no matter who it offended. Mark Twain, whose literary roots were deeply embedded in the frontier tradition and who carried it to its highest attainment as art, was never accepted by the critics and academics who embodied the spirit of the genteel tradition. Horace Fulkerson, who was also steeped in the older tradition, consciously modified the stories he related to make them more acceptable to the public. And E.W. Gould, whose treatment of the landing was also relatively mild, erroneously claimed--as if to provide a fitting moral to the story--that after the tornado of 1840 destroyed it, Natchez Under-the-Hill was never rebuilt. Similarly, those historians of Mississippi and of Natchez who neglected the legend after 1860 clearly intended that its edifice should be destroyed forever.

Such was not to be. After the 1930's historians and popular writers alike resurrected the old, faded legend and renewed its vitality as a symbol of the romantic lawlessness and savagery of the cis-Mississippi frontier. The accounts of the traveler-journalists, the sketches and memoirs of the frontier humorists, and the writings of such iconoclasts as Jones, Twain, Fulkerson, and Gould became the basis of this renewal. These sources have long exerted an influence quite apart from their validity as part of the historical record. The traveler-journalists
helped to shape the contemporary image of Natchez Under-the-Hill and contributed to its evolution into a frontier legend. The western humorists exploited the image and, during the 1840's and '50's, built a legend which blackened it far more than the traveler-journalists ever had. The iconoclasts of the late nineteenth century, at least two of whom drew their inspiration from the frontier tradition, helped to keep the legend alive, despite the desires of those who would have left it neglected. Because of these writers both the contemporary image and the legend have remained indelible in our memories.

But historians and popular writers alike have used them uncritically and without realizing that they reflect not so much the objective reality of Natchez Under-the-Hill during its heyday as the Myth of the Wild and Savage West for which it was a symbol. They have not realized that many of the observations of the traveler-journalists and the stories of the frontier humorists are suspect due to their subservience to that myth. Nor have they realized that the accounts of some of the iconoclasts--notably Gould and Fulkerson--were shaped almost as much by the genteel tradition as by the tradition of frontier humor which had shaped the legend. Since most of these sources are too tainted by myth to be reliable, accurate accounts of the Port of Natchez must be based largely upon sources which have heretofore been neglected: newspapers, court records, letters and diaries not intended for publication, and the
like. The realities of Natchez Under-the-Hill, both economically and socially, were far more complex than either of the myths of the nineteenth century would allow.
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**Articles**


Unpublished Dissertations and Theses


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