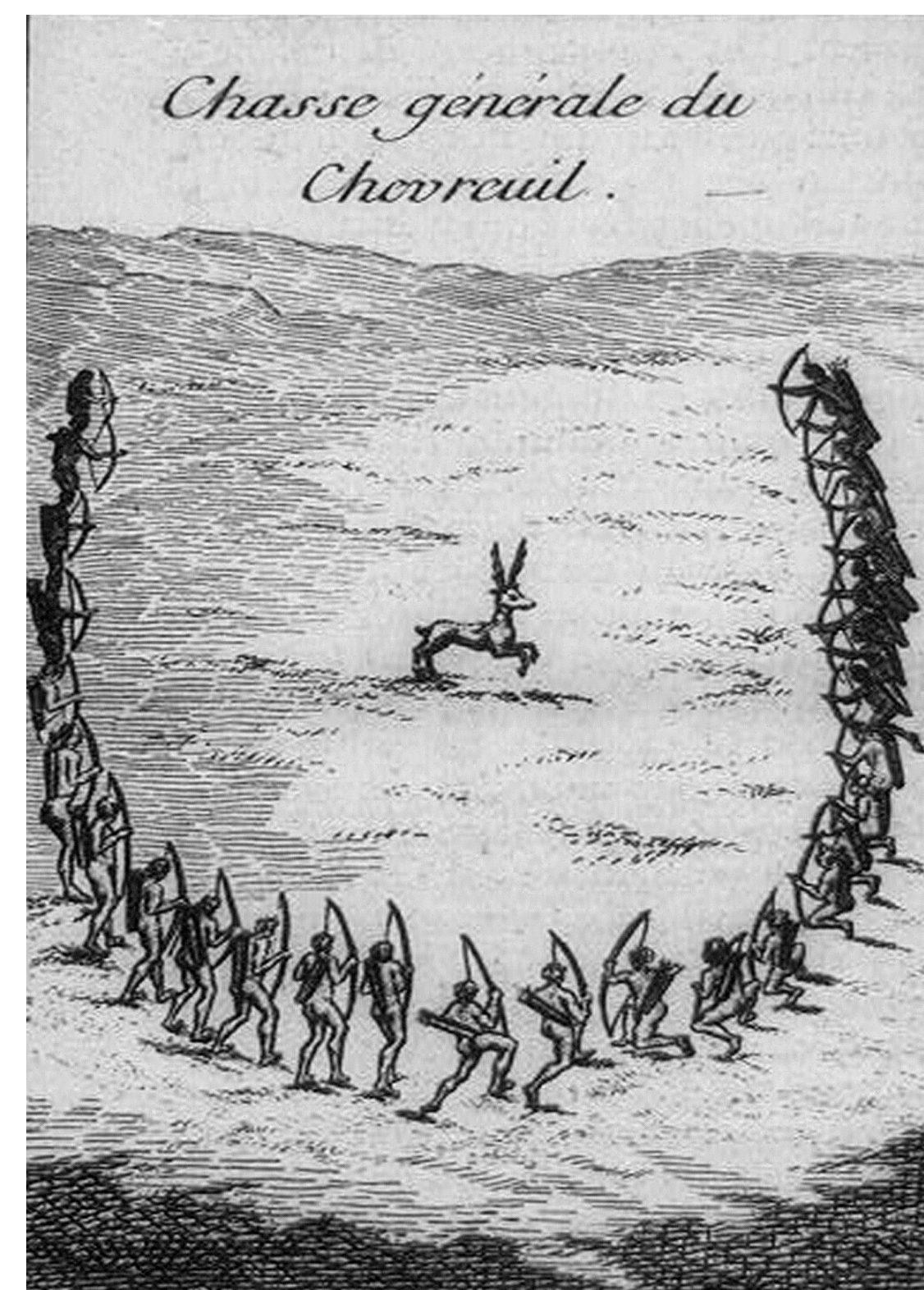
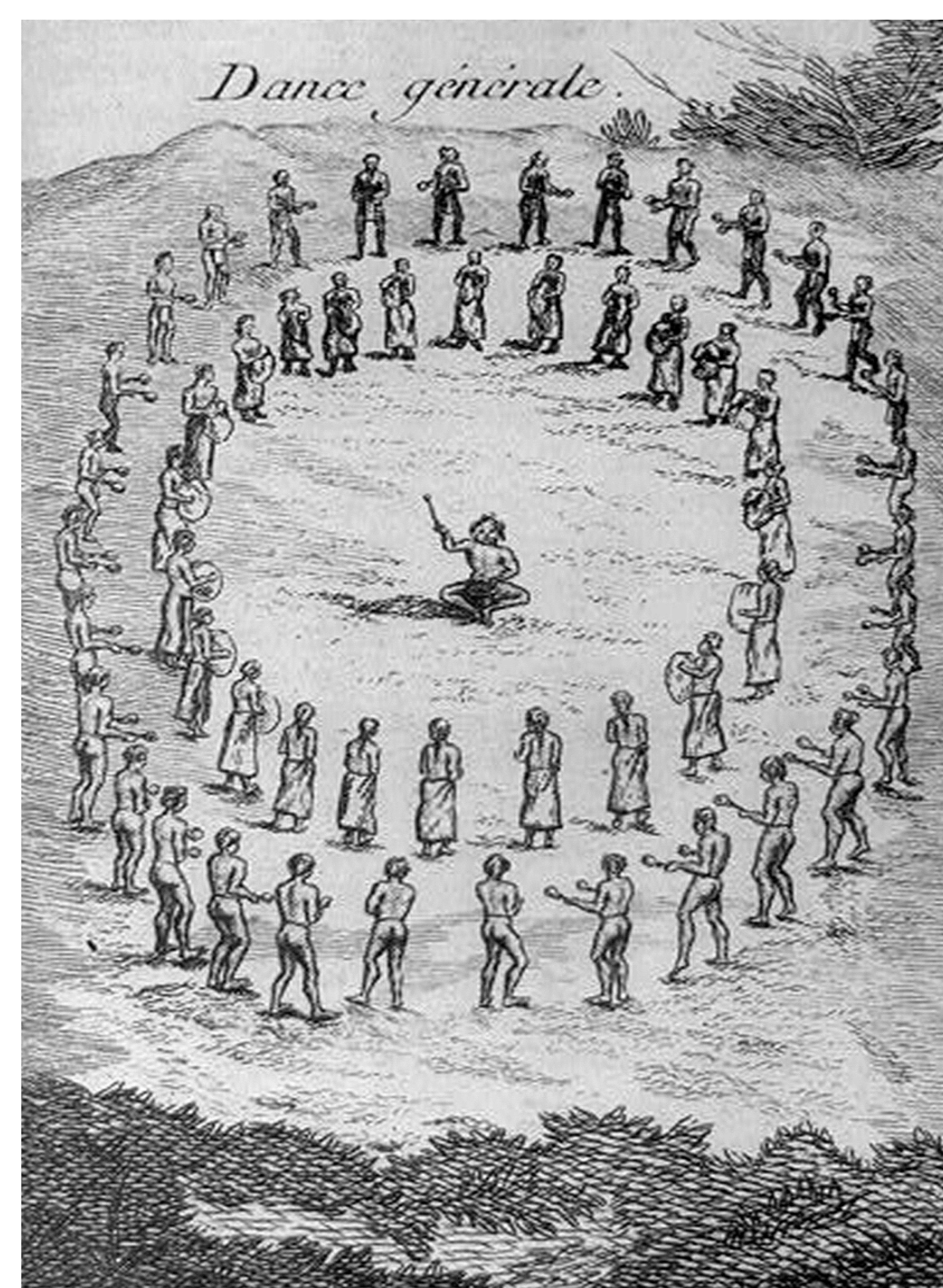




Modern flag of the Natchez Nation, representing the four sacred directions

Who are the Natchez?

The Natchez are a Native American group originally living near modern-day Natchez, Mississippi when the French first made contact in 1682. Initially, the Natchez and French maintained a mostly peaceful relationship for close to fifty years. However, in 1729, the Natchez attacked the French, disrupting the fragile diplomatic balance between the two groups. The French retaliated in 1731 and drove the Natchez away from their ancestral homelands.

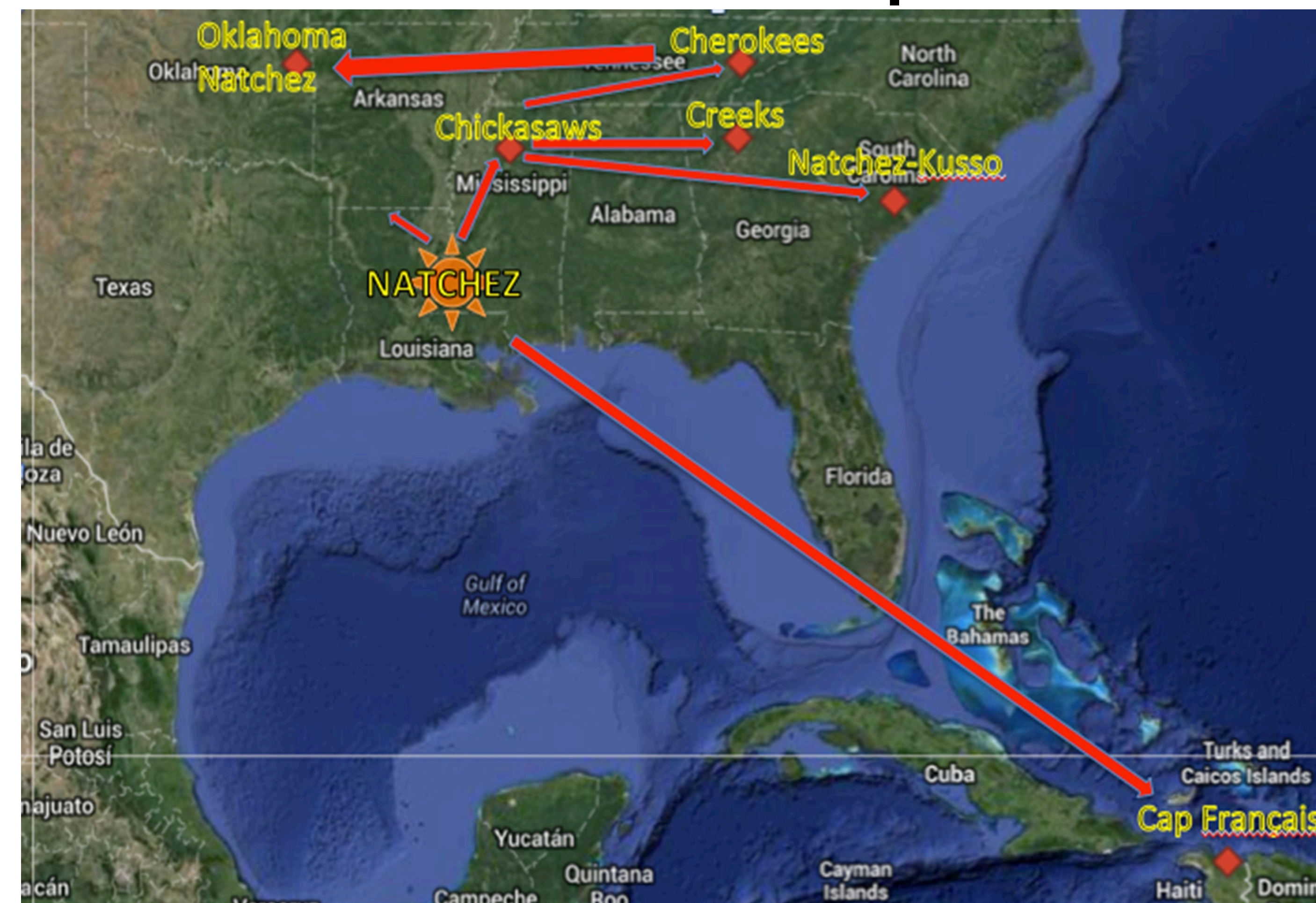


The images above come from Le Page du Pratz's *Histoire de la Louisiane* (1758). He lived with the Natchez for many years, illustrating a Natchez dance (left) and a Native American deer hunting expedition (right).

The End of the Natchez?

While the Natchez faced extreme adversity after their war with the French, their history did not end in 1731. However, most scholars have focused exclusively on Natchez history only up to the early 1730s. For over 250 years, the dominant narrative of Natchez history is one of "noble" Natchez resistance against French colonial aggression that ultimately resulted in the destruction of the Natchez as a people. Even in contemporary scholarship, many historians write as if the Natchez no longer exist, having "vanished" long ago. But the Natchez continue to exist in diasporic communities across the southeastern United States to the present.

The Natchez Diaspora



My dissertation follows the strands of the Natchez diaspora into the Caribbean and across the southeastern United States. The French army captured and enslaved over two hundred Natchez and sold them in Saint Domingue (modern-day Haiti). Some Natchez evaded capture and fled northwest to live with the Chickasaws. Others stayed in the area, appearing sporadically in French records when they attacked remote French communities. In the 1740s, the refugees who had settled among the Chickasaws moved again and established new communities among the Creek Confederacy, among the Cherokeees, and in colonial South Carolina. In the 1830s, the U.S. government again displaced most of the Natchez to "Indian Territory" (Oklahoma) during the tragic decade of the "Trail of Tears." Some evaded removal and remained in the South where they continue to live today.

Archival Research

Since the Natchez diaspora was on the move for most of the eighteenth century, they appear in the colonial records of France, England and Spain as well as the early national archives of the United States. In order to track the Natchez diaspora, I conducted research in a diverse array of archives in France, England, California, Pennsylvania, North and South Carolina, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.

Oral History and Collaboration

Since 2010, I have collaborated with the Natchez in Oklahoma. In return for sharing my archival notes and discoveries, the Natchez have provided me with information about the Natchez past that could not be gathered through the written archive alone. For example, I compiled Natchez names remembered in oral histories and borrowed from the work of contemporary Natchez genealogists to locate Natchez individuals formerly shrouded in eighteenth century documents. Natchez oral history and local knowledge, in addition to providing insight into contemporary Natchez understanding of their own history, are vital sources for uncovering Natchez history in the eighteenth century.

Conclusions

◆ Natchez Survival

Examining closely different Natchez communities over time, I explore how the Natchez diaspora survived multiple colonial displacements and how Natchez identities and community formation changed over time, in different locations, and in response to contact with different European and Native American populations. The diasporic Natchez communities reveal that Natchez culture and identity construction changed in multiple directions, not just in response to European colonists but in response to Creeks and Cherokeees as well. However, and perhaps remarkably, the effect of cultural change in most of the diasporic Natchez communities did not erase a sense of Natchez identity. Rather, this sense of Natchez-ness, while variously constructed in different contexts over time, remained important for most Natchez to distinguish themselves from Americans, Europeans, and other Native Americans.

◆ Native American Slaves in the Caribbean

The existence of thousands of Native American slaves, including the Natchez, in the Caribbean requires scholars to re-conceptualize the history of slavery in the early modern Caribbean to include, not only the history of Africans and Europeans, but Native Americans from North America as well.



A 1728 map of Cap Français, Saint Domingue (Haiti), the northern port where the French sold hundreds of Natchez slaves in 1731.

What now for the Natchez?

While Natchez people survived adversity and multiple displacements for over two hundred years, most European and American thinkers have clung to a narrative of Natchez disappearance that continues to impact Natchez people in negative ways. Contemporary Natchez struggles for State and Federal recognition face an uphill battle in arguing against centuries of misinformation. My dissertation attempts to rectify this legacy of misinformation and offers a version of the Natchez past that reveals, rather than erases, the history of the Natchez diaspora.



2011 Annual Edisto Indian Natchez-Kusso Powwow in Ridgeville, SC