Rush Nutt and the Mind of the South

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Abstract

This paper examines the intellectual activities of Rush Nutt (1781-1837), a Mississippi physician and planter. Nutt’s life is worth scrutinizing because (1) he provides an example of the vibrant intellectual culture of the Natchez area during the early nineteenth century, (2) he allows for a consideration of a thinker who lived during the transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism, and (3) he developed a rather pessimistic theory about the inevitable decline of the human species. Drawing on Nutt’s unpublished essays, the paper looks at four themes of his thought: race, the active intellectual life, water management on the Mississippi, and the theory of the inevitable decline of the human race.