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The University of Mississippi, the Board of Trustees, Students, and Slavery: 1848-1860

by *Elias J. Baker*

The ongoing public and scholarly discussions about many Americans' widespread ambivalence toward the nation's relationship to slavery and persistent racial discrimination have connected pundits and observers from an array of fields and institutions. As the authors of Brown University's report on slavery and justice suggest, however, there is an increasing recognition that universities and colleges must provide the leadership for efforts to increase understanding of the connections between state institutions of higher learning and slavery.¹ To participate in this vital process the University of Mississippi needs a foundation of research about the school's own participation in slavery and racial injustice. The visible legacies of the school's Confederate past are plenty, including monuments, statues, building names, and even a cemetery. The university's relationship to slavery, however, is much more subtle, scattered, and fragmented across the documentary record. Hidden within official records and private letters, buried in newspapers and meeting minutes, slavery on the University of Mississippi campus crystallizes into an unfamiliar narrative, one that highlights forgotten contributions and experiences of those held in bondage. A useful starting point for the university's effort to engage with its slave past is the recovery and reconstruction of the record of enslaved people's presence on campus, however incomplete such a portrait may be, and an account of their intersections with university officials and the student body.

Several themes emerge in the university's archives that help structure a study of the University of Mississippi's relationship to slavery. First,

¹ Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice, *Slavery and Justice: Report of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice* (October 2006), https://www.brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/documents/SlaveryAndJustice.pdf.

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though it may seem obvious, enslaved labor provided both physical construction on campus and continual economic return for the members of the faculty and the board of trustees. Notably, official policy dictated students would finance slave labor for most of the antebellum period through mandatory fees. Next, insofar as the records capture the experiences of enslaved people, the campus presented slaves a space for relationships with students and faculty, routine and predictable work patterns, negotiation and self-direction of labor, and some material benefits. The students' own relationship to slavery offers a third theme. The tension between students' racial prerogatives and their subordination to faculty and administrators produced ambiguous rules regulating their authority over the university's slaves. As the sectional crisis intensified students affirmed their racial mastery by inflicting violence and enforcing the subjugation of the university's enslaved people. Finally, centering slavery on campus encourages a re-evaluation of Chancellor Frederick Barnard's infamous trial before the board of trustees in March 1860, on charges of abolitionism and violation of racial laws. While most historians of the university insist the fracas was a personal feud between Barnard and disgruntled faculty and community members, the university's reliance on slavery and the context of rising racial violence on campus demands that one take seriously the ways Barnard's actions threatened students' own racial prerogatives and the security of the university's command of enslaved people.

Compared to many universities and colleges founded across the United States before the Civil War, the University of Mississippi benefited from slavery for but a brief period. Over those fifteen or so years, however, slavery was vital to the university's organizers, Oxford's community leaders, faculty members, and students. Slave labor not only placed the literal cornerstones of the institution's physical campus, but slavery also embodied the racial and economic order central to southern academia. An examination of prominent Oxford community slaveholders' roles in the establishment of the university, the extensive employment of enslaved labor during the school's early years and beyond, and the administration's financial policies toward slave labor highlights the essential place of slavery during the University of Mississippi's early years.

Lafayette County, like much of Mississippi, experienced rapid settlement during the first half of the nineteenth century. After President Andrew Jackson ended federal protection of Indian lands in the old Southwest, white settlement exploded as speculators and settlers, having

depleted farms and plantations in the Atlantic states, flooded the area in search of fertile land.² The founding families of Lafayette County were migrants from slaveholding areas, and though some made the journey with their slaves in tow, most settlers purchased their slaves from markets along the Mississippi River. Slavery was less important to the economy of Lafayette County because the thick forests of North Mississippi precluded the establishment of large cotton plantations characteristic of the Yazoo and Natchez regions.³ Still, the appetite for enslaved labor in Lafayette County was strong. While some white settlers resisted the importation of slaves and even succeeded in pressuring the state legislature to ban the trade, the hunger for slave labor across Mississippi eventually forced political leaders in Jackson to ignore their own constitutional ban on the interstate slave trade.⁴

Slavery steadily grew in importance and scale as Lafayette County prospered in the flush 1840s, and the demographic statistics reflect the white settlers' growing commitment to slave labor. The 1840 census reported that the county held 3,689 whites and 2,842 slaves, and within a decade the white population grew to 8,346, while the number of enslaved people increased to 5,719. By the eve of the Civil War, however, the county contained 8,989 whites and 7,129 slaves, indicating both an end to the county's rapid growth, as well as a sizable population of slaves.⁵ Though it is difficult to be precise about slave ownership, most historians agree slavery was concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of wealthy landowners and professionals. As John Cooper Hathorn calculated with mild astonishment, by 1860, roughly seven percent of Lafayette County's white population owned forty-four percent of the county's entire population.⁶

These slaveholders had a "tremendous vested interest in capital tied up in slaves" and held political as well as economic power in the burgeoning community.⁷ As they plotted Oxford's grid of streets and town square,

² John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1770-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 5-6.

³ John Cooper Hathorn, "A Period Study of Lafayette County from 1836 to 1860, with emphasis on population groups" (M.A. Thesis, University of Mississippi, 1939).

⁴ Lacy Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵ Statistics from Hathorn, Chapter 4. According to the 1840 census, there were only thirteen free blacks in Lafayette County; by 1850, there were only four.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷ *Ibid.*

these men anticipated their infant municipality would become a center of commercial and educational importance befitting their prestige and wealth and hoped the University of Mississippi in particular would cement the “foundation of Oxford’s identity as a cultural outpost in Mississippi.”⁸ After state legislators chose the town for the university’s location, they recruited an inaugural board of trustees, a “small assembly of remarkable men” including some of the state’s most influential slaveholders.⁹ Of the first trustees three lived in Lafayette County, and they exerted tremendous influence on the university throughout the antebellum period. Jacob Thompson, an early settler to the county and later a congressman and President James Buchanan’s Secretary of the Interior, owned 2,400 acres in 1850, valued at \$10,000. Ten years later, his capital had increased to \$50,000 with only 100 additional acres. A. H. Pegues owned 1,520 acres on Woodson’s Ridge in 1850 and increased his holdings to 5,000 acres within a decade. Their colleague James Howry became the university’s first proctor responsible for financing and managing the university’s slaves. Over the years these men worked closely with one of the largest landowners in Lafayette County, “Colonel” James Brown, an original settler who owned 2,400 acres in 1850.¹⁰ The trustees promptly elected Brown to the board in 1846.¹¹

The task before the board was exciting and daunting. According to the University of Mississippi’s charter, the board’s powers included limited discretion over the university’s allotted funds, a somewhat vague charge to “devise and adopt such a system of learning as in their judgment they may deem most advisable,” and the responsibility to appoint an architect to draft plans for the construction of the initial set of campus buildings.¹² All understood that the new university was to offer a safeguard against the intrusion of northern abolitionism, develop a vibrant southern intellectual tradition and pedagogy, and, hopefully, halt the migration

⁸ Don Doyle, *Faulkner’s County: The Historical Roots of Yoknapatawpha* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 4.

⁹ David Sansing, *The University of Mississippi: A Sesquicentennial History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 28-32. John Alexander Ventress was a major planter in Wilkinson County, for example, and trustee Alexander Clayton would go on to help L. Q. C. Lamar draft Mississippi’s Ordinance of Secession in 1861.

¹⁰ Hathorn, 50; Frances R. Huff, “The Relationship of Oxford and the University of Mississippi, 1848-1947” (M.A. thesis, University of Mississippi, 1947), 8.

¹¹ Sansing, 33.

¹² To access the university charter, I used the *Historical Catalogue of the University of Mississippi* (Nashville: Marshall and Burns Co., 1910), 6-7.

of intelligent young men out of Mississippi to the decadent, corrupting Yankee universities.¹³ The university was part of southern leaders' larger project to establish institutions across the region to educate elite white male students "under influence congenial to our own principles and institutions."¹⁴ With this mandate, the trustees set out to construct a southern academy, as Jacob Thompson put it, to "prove the pride and bulwark of our fellow citizens" and inculcate and establish "those eternal truths which were taught by him 'who spake as never man spake.'"¹⁵ As Thompson and others understood, these references to eternal truths and regional institutions functioned as appeals in defense of slavery and the accompanying racial caste system.

Before construction began the board carefully considered where slaves were to fit on campus. Tasked with the school's construction, the board settled on an initial plan of four buildings and decided that "special arrangements were needed for slave quarters."¹⁶ The board resolved in July of 1846 that the architect, an English immigrant named William Nichols, make an effort in his plans to carve out a basement in each building to provide a "servant's room" to lodge the expected complement of slaves. The basement would also contain storerooms, a dining room, a kitchen, and "at least two good rooms to accommodate a Professor's family."¹⁷ The board's inclination to house slaves and professors in such close proximity is perhaps surprising, but the decision reflects the realities of slavery. With space at a premium slaves could not be isolated from their place of work.¹⁸ Nonetheless, Jacob Thompson, exercising his authority and leadership, amended this initial design in April 1847 and instructed Nichols to devote the basement for student housing.¹⁹ This decision left the issue of slave housing somewhat uncertain. In practice, some of the university's slaves lived in the two duplexes Nichols designed for faculty

¹³ For more on southern educators' concern over cultural and intellectual dependence on the North before the Civil War, see Michael T. Bernath, *Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

¹⁴ *Arkansas State Gazette and Democrat*, August 3, 1855.

¹⁵ James Lloyd, *The University of Mississippi: The Formative Years, 1848-1906* (University, Miss: The University of Mississippi, 1979), 7.

¹⁶ Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 59.

¹⁷ For a record of the board meeting minutes, I have used Florence E. Campbell, "Journal of the minutes of the Board of Trustees of the University of Mississippi, 1845-1860" (M.A. thesis, University of Mississippi, 1939). See Campbell, 28.

¹⁸ Wade, 55-59.

¹⁹ Campbell, 40.

housing and in the kitchen, which had chambers for servants. Some also lodged with Oxford residents such as F. H. Reuff and John Davis, who were paid by the university to board slaves.²⁰

To furnish the labor required for construction, the board reached out to Lafayette County's slaveholders, including faculty and trustees such as Brown and Thompson, establishing a pattern that persisted throughout the antebellum period. In exchange for compensation local slaveholders proved eager to employ their slaves on campus projects. To ensure proper remuneration the board carefully noted any expenditure "as per vouchers filed." Typically, the expense reports recorded the type of contract work performed, but not by whom. Although the board commissioned Daniel Grayson of Panola County to build the Lyceum, and throughout 1847 he collected thousands of dollars for "Carpenter's work," the record does not indicate whether he employed slave labor.²¹ In early 1851, Thompson, Brown, and Pegues, the local trustees who oversaw the university's construction, began more detailed expense reports that indicate the university's use of slave labor. But again, they saw little need to explain that, for example, local resident H. Worley earned \$2,200 for "Carpenters work" and "brick work" performed by enslaved labor. So while the university's employment of slave labor often went undeclared, men like James Brown, whom the board's treasurer paid \$333.38 on July 15, 1852, "for services rendered in Superintending the building now being built at the University," used slave labor in their construction projects. Brown, for his part, collected thousands of dollars from the university throughout the antebellum period for maintenance and construction projects. He did not hesitate, as Chancellor Frederick Barnard observed, to "put a large force on."²²

The use of enslaved labor is more explicit when local slaveholders hired out their slaves to the university, which the board dutifully recorded. It appears that many prominent slaveholders in Oxford and Lafayette County collected revenues by leasing out their slaves. Robert Sheegog, an Oxford store proprietor who built William Faulkner's future home, Rowan Oak, hired out his slaves for \$200 in January of 1857 and

²⁰ Ibid., 364. Reuff received \$24 on 4/17/1858; John Davis received \$192.50, but he also provided the university with wood in addition to servant board. Ibid., 322.

²¹ Campbell, 71.

²² Ibid., 175, 181. Barnard to Hilgard, December 4, 1859. Eugene Hilgard collection, J. D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi (hereafter cited Hilgard papers).

again for \$600 the next year.²³ John Waddel, the first chair of “ancient and modern languages” from 1848 to 1856 and a future chancellor, filed vouchers for \$138.93 in 1856 and \$250 in 1857, both for “Servant Hire.”²⁴ Jacob Thompson collected \$200 in September of 1857 and leased his slaves out for another \$400 the next May.²⁵ Some slaveholders hired out their slaves for smaller fees, probably short-term. Local Oxonians J. E. Market and H. A. Barr collected \$33 and \$69.47 respectively for servant hire in 1856.²⁶ The University of Mississippi steadily demanded slave labor, and the board’s careful accounting reveals that small and large slaveholders profited from the university’s employment of slaves.

With a physical campus built, the university was prepared in the fall of 1848 to receive its first class of students. Before students arrived for the inaugural session the board of trustees addressed the issue of student fees and tuitions and decided to finance the school’s slave leases at least in part with students’ money. On October 16, 1848, less than a month before the first classes were set to begin, the board resolved that each student should pay several fees, including three dollars for “repairs and improvements,” ten dollars for “any damage to his room or other buildings that he may commit,” and also “the sum of four Dollars for servant hire.”²⁷ At a meeting the next day the board established the faculty position of proctor to receive these student fees and “disperse the same as required by the resolutions of the Board to hire servants for the University & to the students.”²⁸ In newspaper notices to prospective students and their families across the region, the university made clear that students would pay up front for service from the county’s enslaved people.

It fell to the proctor James M. Howry to account to his fellow trustees how much he spent to hire slaves for the university and students. For the first session, which began on November 6, 1848, and ended July 12, 1849, Howry reported that he had “hired a servant . . . for whose services and board he has paid one hundred and forty dollars. He also hired another servant for the year at one hundred and thirty five dollars

²³ Campbell, 325, 362.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 328, 364.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 325, 361.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 328.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 78. These fees increased steadily over time. While student fees and tuition amounted to only \$1,546.02 in 1852, by the tenth session in 1858 the proctor had \$7,268.33 in fees and tuition at his disposal.

besides board, and he has paid ten dollars for board.”²⁹ Howry performed his clerical tasks well, and the board duly entered into its minutes his scrupulous accounting of the university’s expenditures on slave labor. The summer following the university’s second session Howry reported paying a local man named A. G. Ellis \$83.25 “for servant hire,” plus an additional \$6.50 for slave clothing. That, he calculated, brought the full amount “for two servants as per contract for year 1850” to \$220.³⁰ The appearance of contractual language indicates some slaveholders hired out their slaves in long-term arrangements, underscoring the university’s continual demand for enslaved labor.³¹

The board of trustees early anticipated that slavery would be critical to the construction and operation of the university and developed a policy to partially finance slave labor through student fees. As these fees for “servant hire” flowed into the proctor’s coffers, many slaveholders within the community, including faculty and administrators, readily profited by hiring out their enslaved laborers whose earned wages “made significant contributions to the incomes” of their owners.³² Admittedly the university’s administrators did not always acknowledge the slave labor used by contractors under the school’s employ. But the board’s expenditure reports and the vouchers filed by Oxford and Lafayette County’s slaveholders underscore the economic importance of the university’s continual use of slave labor.

Documenting the university’s extensive use of slavery is a much easier task than uncovering enslaved experiences on campus. Simply put, and like other communities across the South, the university’s white population often did not consider the slaves on campus worthy of attention or study. A portrait of slavery at the university is possible, however, through the few observations of administrators and organizations such as the Phi Sigma Society that employed slave labor throughout the antebellum period. University officials, faculty, and students outlined their expectations for hired enslaved people, described slaves’ assigned tasks and duties, and at times carefully observed their actions as they pertained to the functioning of the university. Several key characteristics appear.

First, the university’s records indicate that slaves engaged in a variety of tasks in close contact with the campus’s free population, producing

²⁹ Campbell, 104.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

³² Moore, 257.

long-term personal bonds. Next, some of their tasks, while mundane and rote, were not particularly strenuous, suggesting physical benefits from university employment. Further, the records emphasize the importance of slave pay, and the evidence suggests that slaves pressed their student masters for compensation. Significantly, it also appears that some slaves either hired out their own time to the university as wage laborers or negotiated the terms of their labor with administrators. Finally, slaves under long-term lease found opportunities to collect personal property often unavailable under the watchful eye of the plantation owner. In many ways, the university offered slaves a limited degree of autonomy and self-determination in a system designed to degrade and dehumanize them.

The benefits of employment on campus would have been apparent to the slaves of Lafayette County, though without direct testimony of their experiences any interpreted benefits can only be suggestive. Still, scholars of non-plantation slavery persuasively argue for tangible benefits slaves encountered through the hiring-out system employed by the university, and the known experiences of slaves on campus tend to reinforce these conclusions.³³ Removal from the direct oversight of the master or overseer offered slaves a respite from scrutiny and arbitrary violence, however brief. Non-agricultural labor might offer the chance to exercise and develop skills marketable in a specialized labor market, or an opportunity for slaves to sell their own surplus labor for compensation. Finally, the physical act of moving from the plantation or farm to a space like the university exposed these hired slaves to others within the broader Lafayette County community, offering a chance to communicate, exchange goods or gossip, and keep track of familial or fraternal networks often torn asunder by slave sales. The records indicate the university's slaves enjoyed at least some of these benefits.

Historians have a general portrait of Lafayette County's enslaved peoples through the slave narratives captured by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. Lucindy Shaw, Polly Turner, Joanna Thompson Isom, and others all attested to the dehumanization, fear, physical exhaustion, and violence of slavery in north Mississippi. But historians have also observed in the journals and letters of late-antebellum Oxonians a "tendence . . . among many owners to give their slaves more freedom," including participation in the labor market and small monetary

³³ In particular, see Wade, especially Chapter 2.

allowances.³⁴ As Polly Turner indicated, her life as a slave on a plantation at Woodson's Ridge near Abbeville involved a limited degree of economic and physical freedom. During the 1850s her owner, William Turner, who filed construction vouchers with the university throughout 1857 and 1858, allowed her to raise chickens for sale at a local tavern, to pick cotton after hours by moonlight, and to sell chestnuts and hazelnuts in Memphis. Turner even let Polly and the other slaves keep the money they earned. Polly Turner's experiences help provide useful context for the slaves employed by the university.³⁵

While slaves on plantations within Lafayette County seized opportunities for extra mobility and money, Oxford's evangelical churches offered another institution that "tended to improve the treatment of plantation slaves generally."³⁶ For example, the deacons of College Hill Presbyterian Church, which included influential Oxonians like Alexander Shaw, James Quarles, and W. D. Pettis, admitted their slaves as full members of the congregation throughout the 1850s. In March of 1854 church officials met, they said, to "heartily approve [sic] and promise" support for the "oral & ministerial instruction of our slaves at College Church." Slaveholders' particular brand of evangelical Christianity insisted on the morality of slavery and demanded that slaves offer obedience and servitude to their master in accordance with divine instruction. To this end, the College Hill congregants even resolved to "make the effort by subscription [and] raise the means to build near College Church an African Church, where our slaves can be comfortably accommodated and instructed every Sabbath."³⁷ This African church evidently never materialized, but it is important that within certain spaces Lafayette County slaveholders extended paternalistic treatment and limited economic privileges to their slaves, a pattern that extended onto the University of Mississippi campus. Indeed, as Jacob Thompson affirmed, those who abused their slaves "would be despised by every

³⁴ Doyle, 141.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Moore, 85.

³⁷ College Hill Presbyterian Church minutes, March 18, 1854, Skipwith Historical and Genealogical Society, Oxford, MS.

man in Oxford.”³⁸

On campus, the university’s free population forged personal relationships with some slaves, reflecting the close proximity and frequent interactions that characterized slavery in many situations. A slave named George is perhaps the first enslaved individual mentioned by name in the university’s records, and his presence extended across the campus for several years. On July 12, 1849, the board of trustees resolved to pay George, the “college servant,” five dollars “as a present for the faithful manner in which he has performed his duties during the past session.”³⁹ A few months later the Phi Sigma Society, one of two literary societies that all students were required to join, also passed a resolution “that the Society give George (the college servant) \$1 [illegible] for attending to the hall.”⁴⁰ Whether the university leased George under a long-term contract or owned him outright is uncertain. It is not clear that the university owned any slaves at all. But George was a fixture on campus until at least July 1853, when the board of trustees charged the account of Professor Millington “for services of servant George as Janitor” while Millington was ill.⁴¹ For their part the Phi Sigma Society retained a slave named Simon in its employ for eight years. Not only did the society delegate Simon the ceremonial task of ringing the bell for each society meeting, but as the society prepared to close for the Civil War the students moved and carried a motion to “pay Simon,” one last time.⁴² These personal relationships opened opportunities for slaves like George and Simon to receive pecuniary benefits and preferential treatment by the university’s white population.

Most of the slave labor on campus was manual, deployed for construction projects. But students and faculty also expected slaves like George and Simon to perform routine tasks that probably contrasted favorably with the relentless agricultural labor of a plantation. The official

³⁸ Jacob Thompson also insisted that “No man strikes my negro that I do not hear his story. I will listen to my negro’s grievances. Before God and man I believe this to be my duty. No man has a right to touch him or her without my consent.” From the “Record of the Testimony and Proceedings, in the Matter of the Investigation, by the Trustees of the University of Mississippi, On the 1st and 2nd of March 1860, of the charges made by H. R. Branham, against the Chancellor of the University” (Jackson, MS: 1860), 28.

³⁹ Campbell, 110.

⁴⁰ Phi Sigma Society minutes ledger, September 29, 1849, Hermean/Phi Sigma societies collection, J. D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi (hereafter cited as Phi Sigma).

⁴¹ Campbell, 193.

⁴² Phi Sigma, March 5, 1859; April 27, 1861.

records of the board of trustees and the Phi Sigma Society illuminate these tasks in some detail. In 1849, after rewarding George with the one dollar gift, the society members further stipulated that George “be required to sweep the floor and clean the spittoons every week” and “sweep down the cobwebs, bring water, and make fires whenever necessary.”⁴³ A year later the board of trustees passed a resolution that the university’s slaves be “required to devote all the time not necessarily engaged in cleaning up the dormitories, and furnishing the same with necessary water, and making fires, to cleaning off the College grounds as the said Proctor & Faculty may direct.”⁴⁴ The tasks were not always explicitly defined, as the ambiguous language of the board’s resolution suggests. But often white observers recorded even minor jobs in their meeting minutes, notably with careful attention to the slaves’ pay. When the Phi Sigma Society presented George’s account in 1849 “for lighting up the room, & other services,” the club resolved that the treasurer be “ordered to collect the money and pay it as soon as possible.”⁴⁵ Again, at a meeting in November 1851, the Society’s treasurer “was instructed to pay the negro for cleaning up the Hall.”⁴⁶ The next fall, a student named Harris proposed “that the Treasurer be instructed to pay Simon for his services in removing the chairs from the Hermean Hall to the Phi Sigma,” a resolution that carried.⁴⁷ At times the young men of Phi Sigma appeared utterly unwilling to do any physical labor at all. In December 1859, one “Mr. Gage” presented a resolution that “a fire be made in the fire place and was appointed as a committee to see Simon about it.”⁴⁸ The menial but predictable tasks the university’s slaves performed on campus likely offered physical benefits for people like George and “old Simon.”

As these entries indicate, the society felt an impetus to promptly pay for slave labor, certainly reflecting the power of the large slaveholders who hired out their slaves. But the records also suggest the slaves played a part in pressing for compensation. A member of Phi Sigma in 1850 “reported the Society in debt to Isaac, for services” and requested that the Treasurer “inquire into the matter and pay the debt if just.”⁴⁹ The next

⁴³ Phi Sigma, September 29, 1849.

⁴⁴ Campbell, 129.

⁴⁵ Phi Sigma, May 26, 1849.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, November 1, 1851.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, September 26, 1852.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, December 3, 1859.

⁴⁹ Phi Sigma, May 11, 1850.

month the society reminded the students that “the servant’s time had expired and he demanded his pay.” Again the treasurer “was instructed to pay the amount due.”⁵⁰ The society even consulted Simon about his wages, ordering that a “committee be appointed to confer, with old Simon, with regard to his account.”⁵¹ Perhaps slaves’ wages were seldom deposited into their own pockets, and as Eugene Genovese has shown, payment for work was often “part of a wider system of social control ... designed to stimulate productivity.”⁵² Still, some of the university’s slaves evidently observed the terms of their leased labor and felt little compunction in “demanding” their pay.

While university employment offered slaves - or, more likely, their owners - wages in exchange for their coerced and leased labor, the school appears to have offered the area’s slaves an opportunity to hire out their own labor for pay, representing the closest engagement in a wage labor market that most slaves in the South were able to achieve.⁵³ The university’s constant demand for slave labor seems to have rewarded slaves “for work done during the time recognized as the slaves’ own.”⁵⁴ Indeed, one of the more intriguing entries in the official record, the board of trustees observed in 1856 that three slaves, Moses, John, and Squash, were each entitled to monetary compensation for “Repairs at University.”⁵⁵ Unlike all other entries that recorded slave hire, the treasurer entered these individual slaves’ names with no white owner affixed, suggesting that these men marketed their free and surplus labor to the university and received (at least on paper) monetary remuneration. It is important to note that, because the free black population of Lafayette County was always very small, Moses, John, and Squash likely remained the property of a local slaveholder. Further, it is doubtful their masters resisted their prerogative to take their slaves’ earnings. But these slaves’ presence alongside men like Jacob Thompson and James Brown in the official record attests not only to the importance of the university as a space of increased opportunity for enslaved people, but underscores slaves’ contributions to the university.

Even if the university’s faculty and students did not offer monetary

⁵⁰ Ibid., June 15, 1850.

⁵¹ Ibid., December 3, 1859.

⁵² Moore, 257. Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 313-314.

⁵³ Moore, 268.

⁵⁴ Genovese, 314.

⁵⁵ Campbell, 322 – 328.

compensation for slave work, other evidence suggests slaves were at times able to negotiate the terms of their labor, at least with certain members of the faculty. In a revealing letter to his young friend Eugene Hilgard, the state geologist and engineer of the "Hilgard Cut," Chancellor Frederick Barnard expressed a quandary over John, one of James Brown's slaves on lease to the university and perhaps the same John mentioned in the board's minutes. Barnard informed Brown that he needed slaves to work the grounds of the new observatory, which now houses the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, and Brown permitted John to enter the university's employ. The proctor, however, asked Barnard if John might work for him instead. Barnard consented only "if [John] was willing." Apparently John agreed to the change in labor and spent his time chopping wood and making fires. The proctor later complained, however, that John refused to work on Sunday, a matter Barnard considered "indispensable with University servants." "I had no right, that I knew of, to coerce him," Barnard explained to Hilgard, "even if he would obey me more readily than [the proctor]." Barnard advised that the proctor discharge John rather than force him to work, but by this time Barnard had no use for John, since over the course of this argument James Brown had arrived from Jackson to personally supervise observatory ground-clearing, deploying a "large force" of additional - presumably his own - slave laborers. "[John] seems to be too much of his own master to be of any use here," Barnard concluded. "The best I can do," he told Hilgard, is to "advise John to get work for himself and account to you."⁵⁶

Barnard's letter reveals precious insight into the complex arrangement among slaveholders, faculty, and slaves on campus grounds. On leasing John to the university Brown gave Barnard freedom to utilize John's labor however he saw fit. Barnard evidently had a congenial relationship with John since he refused to coerce the slave despite his confidence in John's compliance. The proctor's frustration with John's refusal to work on Sunday supports the evidence that plantation labor patterns, in which "Sunday was the slaves' day by custom as well as law," transferred to the university campus.⁵⁷ Finally, Barnard recognized John's self-mastery and ability to hire out his own labor, reflecting not only Barnard's ambivalence toward his own prerogatives but the ways the university offered John opportunities for

⁵⁶ Barnard to Hilgard, December 4, 1859, Hilgard papers.

⁵⁷ Genovese, 314.

self-direction, financial gain, and mobility.

The university also provided enslaved individuals opportunities to collect property outside the supervision characteristic of the plantation. In another brief letter to Hilgard, Barnard informed his friend of the recent death of Nathan, one of Barnard's domestic slaves. "My wife broke down as soon as Nathan died," Barnard lamented to his friend, though he quickly assured him that she was "better now." What was alarming to Barnard was not necessarily Nathan's death but what transpired the night of his funeral. That night, Barnard explained, "my cellar was feloniously entered, and [Nathan's] little hoard dug for, and I suppose removed, as it cannot be found." Until the theft, Barnard said, he did not know "where he had placed it." Barnard did not indicate to Hilgard whether Nathan's store was a collection of stolen or purchased items, money, or something else. Still, Barnard knew about and evidently pondered the location of Nathan's "little hoard." Perhaps another slave, one of Nathan's friends or enemies, dug the cache out shortly after Nathan's death. Regardless, this small drama reveals much about the abilities of university slaves like Nathan to collect possessions and, if only in life, keep them secure.⁵⁸

Reconstructing enslaved people's experiences on the campus of the University of Mississippi is difficult because the university's white administrators and students were generally unobservant and unreflective about the campus's slave population. There are few records that discuss slavery at all, and even fewer that might potentially capture the perspectives of enslaved people. Still, the evidence, such as it is, suggests that the slaves employed by the university enjoyed some tangible benefits from their positions. Close proximity to students and faculty brought some slaves like George and Simon into long-term personal relationships with white masters. Others seem to have enjoyed an additional degree of independence, exercised some leverage with respect to their labor, and accumulated possessions or money in ways difficult for isolated agricultural slaves. Despite the continual degradations of slavery, enslaved people likely viewed the university as a negotiated space where they could extract more from their labor than under the direct employment of their owner.

With slavery and enslaved people a constant and ubiquitous presence on campus, the university's student body engaged in extensive interactions, both intellectual and physical, with the peculiar institution.

⁵⁸ Barnard to Hilgard, January 18, 1860, Hilgard papers.

The antebellum administrators' persistent anxiety over student behavior, and students' own comments and observations toward slavery and slaves, creates a rich portrait of students' changing relationship to the university's enslaved population. Throughout the antebellum period the administration struggled to find a policy that could regulate and control students' interactions with slaves. Making the officials' task more difficult was the tension between the students' dual identity as master and pupil. By birthright these southern students understood themselves masters of black people because their views were legitimized by their own experiences, by traditions, and by the state's laws. As students, however, these young men were subordinate to university staff, subject to disciplinary action and oversight. While the faculty and administration ostensibly claimed full authority over the university's slaves, their vacillation on privileges regarding slave hire, and their ambiguous attitude about students' ability to direct and discipline enslaved people, created a climate that fostered violence and oppression on campus. As the sectional crisis intensified, students acted on their racial prerogatives and enforced their mastery over the campus's slave population. In the end, the faculty proved hesitant to assert their own authority and to deny the students their perceived role as masters of the university's slaves.

While the students' opinions and attitudes toward slavery were not officially or systematically recorded, there is evidence that most students welcomed debate and discussion of the institution, especially as the sectional crisis deepened in 1859 and 1860. On March 21, 1857, the Phi Sigma Society heard propositions for their weekly debate topic and selected the following: "Will African slavery be perpetuated in the United States?" The society president decided the advantage lay with those arguing in the negative.⁵⁹ As university historian David Sansing observed in his reading of the *Mississippi University Magazine*, first published in 1857 and written by members of the two literary societies, student contributors both praised Professor Albert Bledsoe's railings against abolitionism and "blasted the board of trustees for rejecting popular textbooks critical of slavery."⁶⁰ "If the institution of slavery is wrong, we ought to be willing for the wrong to be exposed," one student wrote, and besides, textbooks with antislavery chapters were toothless if "slavery is tolerable on the principle of morality and religion, which we believe."⁶¹ The Phi Sigma

⁵⁹ Phi Sigma, March 21, 1857.

⁶⁰ Sansing, 64.

⁶¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 64.

Society even introduced a motion as late as February 1861 to reconsider a proposal “to burn an abolition book.” The society carried the motion, “Whereupon the book was restored to the library.”⁶² Two days later, however, Francis Fentress, who would drop out of the university at the outbreak of war to fight for the Confederacy, “moved that two abolition books in [the] library be burnt.” The motion carried.⁶³

The presence of slaves on campus, and the university’s reliance on enslaved labor, demanded a set of rules and guidelines regarding their employment. The essential issue for administrators was authority. The board recognized the need to explicitly define who had the power to direct and discipline the university’s slaves, but the administrators equivocated on the students’ own authority as they experimented with policies designed to safeguard both efficient use of slave labor and the security of the slaveholders’ human investments on lease to the school. The resulting confusion helped engender conflicts over authority between the faculty and students.

It was imperative for the large slaveholders, who leased their slaves to the university, to establish some ground rules for slave labor, particularly on a campus of young men known for rambunctious and rowdy behavior. The members of the faculty presented their attempt to clarify questions of authority in March 1850, resolving that “the College servants all be employed under the direction of the President.”⁶⁴ But it was not until trustee James Brown proposed to the board a set of rules on July 9, 1850, that the administration codified regulations regarding students and slave labor. In accordance with Brown’s proposal the board agreed that “the servants employed about the College, be under the control & direction of the Proctor and Faculty.” The board outlined the slaves’ responsibilities (making fires, fetching water, maintaining the campus grounds) and stipulated that the university’s slaves, like the students, were “not allowed to leave the College grounds without permission of the Faculty.”⁶⁵ With this resolution the board established the parameters of authority, defined the slaves’ tasks, and restricted their physical mobility. Until 1852, it was university policy that the authority to direct and discipline slaves was shared among the administration, the proctor, and the faculty, and explicitly denied to students. With his many vouchers for campus

⁶² Phi Sigma, February 29, 1861.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, March 2, 1861.

⁶⁴ Minutes of the faculty of the University of Mississippi, March 20, 1850.

⁶⁵ Campbell, 129.

construction projects, Brown probably proposed these rules to protect his slave property and limit abuse or misuse by students. It is unclear, though, whether Brown was responding to an existing problem or pattern of abuse on the part of the students. Still, his resolution affirmed that while the slave was under contract with the university the sole authority over his or her labor lay with the faculty and administration. Despite the compulsory servant hire fee, students were prohibited from exercising their authority over the university's slaves.⁶⁶

Whether this restriction on students' authority prompted opposition remains unclear. Nonetheless, on July 14, 1852, the board rescinded the mandatory four-dollar servant hire fee. Instead, the Board established that students could "hire or not their own servants as they may deem most advisable."⁶⁷ Presumably, authority to direct and discipline personal slaves transferred to the students, while slaves used for construction and maintenance remained under administrative control. Despite the policy shift the official *Rules and Regulations* handbook reminded students that "the Faculty shall at all times, have the power to dismiss any servant for misconduct."⁶⁸ This change in policy also proved temporary.

On July 18, 1856, four years after adopting the optional policy, and under the recommendation of the new university president Frederick Barnard, the board reversed itself again. The trustees resolved that "the privilege now extended to the Students of hiring Servants be abolished, and that each Student and Tutor occupying the Dormitories, be required, when paying the other College Fees, to pay or deposit with the Treasurer the Sum of Five Dollars each to cover Servant hire." Not only did the board increase the fee for slave hire, it reaffirmed the proctor's responsibility "in hiring and superintending Servants for the use of the college, providing wood, keeping up the necessary repairs of the buildings, cisterns, wells, and improving and beautifying the College grounds, and in auditing

⁶⁶ Brown, of course, did not intend to cede all authority from himself, for as both slaveholder and member of the board he retained the right to direct his slaves' labor. Several years after the resolution Barnard wrote Hilgard and lamented that construction and maintenance of the campus was delayed because Brown had appropriated his laborers for other projects. Barnard explained that the construction of a particular cistern, already behind schedule, would not be completed for the foreseeable future because Brown had "borrowed the cement" and the laborers. "Nothing is going ahead," Barnard complained, and for projects around campus "progress is stopped." See Barnard to Hilgard, October 8, 1856, Hilgard papers.

⁶⁷ Campbell, 177.

⁶⁸ "Rules and Regulations of the University of Mississippi" (Holly Springs: "Miss. Times" Cheap Book and Job Office, Print., 1854), Chapter 8, Section 2.

the accounts of the Students, for their relative assessments for repairs and Servants hire.”⁶⁹ The next year, according to the new university regulations, undergraduates were additionally forbidden from keeping slaves (or horses) on campus or in the vicinity of the university.⁷⁰ Again, the reasons for the equivocations are unclear, but Barnard’s termination of a policy that acknowledged students’ authority over slaves on campus was likely part of his wider efforts to improve student discipline.

Overall the students’ relationship to slavery and university’s slaves was characterized by this tension between the students’ perceived rights of mastery and their subjection, as pupils, to disciplinary action and even expulsion for exercising that right. The students never fully relinquished their entitlement to control slaves. Within the learned halls of Phi Sigma, where students were “free from the tutelage of their professors,” students regularly directed the labor of slaves like George, Isaac, and Simon.⁷¹ Administrators apparently accepted this compromise and reserved their right to full authority. But this unstable balance tipped as sectional conflict appeared increasingly likely. One student, Mr. Gage of Phi Sigma, who in 1859 had instructed “old Simon” to ring the bell for each meeting, appeared before the faculty in May the next year on charges of “having severely beaten one of the college negroes, and as having acknowledged the act.” The faculty instructed Barnard to “converse” with Gage and recommend disciplinary action only if Gage failed to show a “proper spirit in relation to the occurrence.”⁷² There is no record if Gage exhibited such a spirit, and Barnard likely admonished the student with no official punishment.

Indeed, according to the observations of the faculty in their meeting minutes, as civil war approached the incidents of student violence against slaves dramatically increased. Of course, student violence against slaves was nothing new. The university had expelled one student early in the first session for “getting drunk, stabbing a negro man, and absconding from College without leave,” and cited another several years later for causing an enslaved woman to break a basket of glassware.⁷³ But the record is surprisingly silent on student violence until 1860. Then, in

⁶⁹ Campbell, 295-296.

⁷⁰ Sansing, 54.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷² Minutes of the faculty, May 7, 1860. This Mr. Gage almost certainly refers to Jeremiah Gage, a member of the University Greys killed at Gettysburg.

⁷³ Minutes of the faculty, November 28, 1848; December 5, 1853.

quick succession, the faculty heard numerous cases of student violence in flagrant violation of the official regulations regarding the faculty and administration's reserved authority to discipline the university's slaves.

On October 16, 1860, the anniversary of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, the proctor warned the faculty "of whipping, beating, and other maltreatment of the College negroes, by a self-constituted 'Vigilance Committee of Students.'" Apparently, some students had found "an ounce or two of powder" in a slave's room and "proposed to apprehend a general 'negro insurrection.'" Professor Moore resolved, with unanimous commendation by the faculty, that "all attempts to discipline the college negroes without authority from the Proctor" would result in disciplinary action against the students. Barnard then communicated this resolution to the students. Fear of insurrection had gripped Oxford a decade before, but in the context of heightened sectional antagonism, and with the memory of John Brown fresh in their minds, the students seized the initiative to control the local slave population.⁷⁴

Less than a month later the faculty called a special meeting after the proctor reported that one of the university's slaves had been "brutally and severally burned on the cheek by a Student, and without provocation." The faculty present agreed the incident was "worthy of notice" and reconvened the next morning to investigate. Under questioning one "Mr. Wright" confessed to burning the slave with his cigar. The faculty seemed undecided as to a course of action. A vote for indefinite suspension first lost to a tie (Barnard, with memories of his own ordeal before the board fresh on his mind, refused to cast a deciding vote), and then it passed by majority the next day.⁷⁵

Barely two weeks passed before the faculty summoned a junior named "Mr. Rice" on suspicion of beating a college slave. "After some hesitation" Rice admitted he "whipped the negro but denied that he had treated him brutally," citing a "personal insult" from the slave as provocation. After some deliberation, the faculty decided to require Rice to sign a pledge that he would never again "take the law in his own hands in such a case," and instead report all "misdemeanors" by the university's slaves to the

⁷⁴ Minutes of the faculty, October 16, 1860. On fear of insurrection, see Doyle, 140. Three days before, on October 13, 1860, the Phi Sigma Society debated whether "the influences which tend to dissolve the Union [were] greater than those which tend to perpetuate it." The president decided in favor of the affirmative.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, November 5, 6, 7, 1860. Mr. Wright, after "expressing sorrow for his act," was readmitted on November 26, 1860.

administration and faculty. In distinguishing his chastisement from brutality, Rice skillfully negotiated his violation of university rules by affirming the paternalistic intent of his actions. Nor was Rice the only student to justify violence against slaves. After “Mr. Melton” pled guilty to beating one of the university’s slaves in January 1861, he “succeeded in justifying the act” to the faculty’s satisfaction and was “no further punished than by the imposition of 25 demerit marks.” Like Rice, Melton pledged to “never again attempt to chastise one of the College Negroes.”⁷⁶ Despite earlier resolutions that “no person connected with the University shall in any manner interfere with the negroes or give them any orders,” the faculty and board appeared unwilling to restrict the students’ violent interference with and abuse of the university’s slaves.⁷⁷

The students of the University of Mississippi during the antebellum years were in an awkward position. The laws and traditions of the South afforded them certain privileges over slaves, but the rules and regulations of the university officially restricted those privileges for students. The administration’s equivocation regarding the students’ right to hire their own slaves bred confusion, though in practice students never fully relinquished their right to direct slave labor. As the sectional crisis grew, and students became increasingly convinced of insurrectionary plots or threats to the institution of slavery, violence against the university’s enslaved population increased. Despite rules designed to protect the property on lease from the county’s large slaveholders, including the university’s trustees, the faculty and administration yielded more and more to the students’ exercise of their physical mastery over enslaved people.

Finally, the university’s commitment to slavery and its dependence on slave labor provides new context for the “Branham Affair,” the infamous 1860 trial of Chancellor Frederick Barnard by the board of trustees on charges of tacit abolitionism. The fervor surrounding Barnard’s expulsion of the student offender on the basis of slave testimony assumes a more complex response in the context of heightened racial violence and increased sectional tensions on the eve of the Civil War. Rather than simply a personal feud between irritated parties, the trial reflects instead the central place of slavery at the University of Mississippi, the necessity of consensus, and the fears and anxieties surrounding perceived threats to the South’s racial and legal order.

⁷⁶ Minutes of the faculty, January 14, 1861.

⁷⁷ Campbell, 374-375.

Sexual violence against slaves by students is not well represented in the documentary record. In December of 1853 the faculty investigated a student named Williamson on charges of visiting Oxford “after 9 PM” to commit a “most flagitious outrage upon a servant girl,” which Williamson emphatically denied.⁷⁸ Nearly the entire free population on campus was young men, and unlike the slave population of Lafayette County, northern Mississippi in general was disproportionately male.⁷⁹ But still the record is mostly silent. It is likely that students’ sexual encounters with slaves went unreported or were handled delicately without official intervention. Whatever the reasons for this lacuna in the records, the proximity, familiarity, and continual presence of slaves on the all-male campus ensured the probability of sexual relationships between students and other residents of Lafayette County and Oxford, including slaves.

The details of Samuel Humphreys’s assault on an enslaved woman named Jane in May of 1859 were well known due to Chancellor Barnard’s intervention and because, facing charges of antislavery sentiment, he demanded the publication of the official record of his trial. On May 12, 1859, Humphreys and another student broke into faculty housing where Humphreys raped and beat the twenty-nine-year-old Jane, leaving her injured but able to recognize her assailant. Though Jane testified that Humphreys was the perpetrator, in general the faculty’s handling of the case was marked by the same ambivalence and equivocation that characterized most student violations in the late antebellum period. While the faculty were “morally convinced” of Humphreys’s “shameful designs” upon Jane, and equally convinced of his guilt in “inflicting severe personal injury” that left Jane “for some days incapacitated for labor,” Jane had no legal standing in Mississippi law and thus could not testify against Humphreys.⁸⁰ Barnard encouraged Humphreys’s parents to withdraw him for the semester, and they did so that spring without incident. It was only when Barnard categorically denied Humphreys’s application for readmission the following semester that grumblings emerged from some faculty members and the rumors of Barnard’s abolitionist sympathies spread.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Minutes of the faculty, December 5, 1853.

⁷⁹ Hathorn, 77.

⁸⁰ These proceedings were not recorded until charges against Barnard had been filed. See the Minutes of the faculty, February 2, 1860.

⁸¹ David Sansing details these events in *A Sesquicentennial History*, 97.

Historians of the university often argue that the charges brought by H. R. Branham, an Oxford physician, and his co-conspirators were a bluff, as one of Barnard's biographers put it, a "personal antagonism in which the enemies of Barnard sought to use the prejudices of the moment and locality to destroy Barnard professionally once and for all."⁸² A recent historian of the university agrees that Barnard's bold plans to reorganize the university and increase admission standards, reform curriculum, and strengthen student discipline left some faculty disgruntled. In this reading, the controversy surrounding Humphreys's suspension and Jane's testimony was little more than a convenient *casus belli*, the product of personal feuds designed to "challenge Barnard's soundness on slavery and states' rights" by manipulating his northern pedigree and the latent sectionalism within the faculty.⁸³ Some have even suggested Branham's religious faith motivated his attack, citing his connection to students in the "Mystic Seven," a fraternity that "seemed to be oriented more in its symbolism to the Hebrew tradition."⁸⁴ These historians tend to agree the board's eventual, and unequivocal, absolution of Barnard reflects the flimsy nature of Branham's political attack.

But Branham articulated his own reasons for bringing charges on Barnard that capture his preoccupation with the perceived threat posed by Barnard's apparent unsoundness on the slavery question. In a rambling defensive pamphlet, published "against the advice of [his] nearest and dearest friends," Branham insisted that he had no ulterior motive to bring charges against Barnard, and indeed, at the time of the Humphreys incident he and Barnard were on "the most friendly terms." When word reached him that Barnard had introduced "the statement of a negro, as evidence against a student," Branham felt compelled to correct this "gross injustice." In bringing formal charges Branham sought to raise the issue of Jane's testimony, which, he pointed out, Barnard himself admitted was "not legal testimony," before the faculty and trustees to both exculpate Humphreys and confirm Barnard's long-suspected abolitionist proclivities. For Branham, Barnard's actions

⁸² William Chute, "The Life of F. A. P. Barnard to his Election as President of Columbia College in 1864" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1951), 317. Chute's published version of this dissertation is entitled *Damn Yankee!*

⁸³ Sansing, 97. In this interpretation, Sansing draws heavily from Allen Cabaniss's interpretation. See Allen Cabaniss, *A History of the University of Mississippi* (University, Miss: University of Mississippi, 1949), 46.

⁸⁴ *The Heritage of Lafayette County, Mississippi* (Oxford: Skipwith Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc., 1986), 88.

proved that “he is as high in the confidence of the worst of abolitionists as he is of the best Southerner.”⁸⁵

In fact, Barnard was often dismayed over what he considered the backward desolation of the benighted southern people, famously blaming the “misery of the situation in Mississippi” on the “destructive tendencies of the people.”⁸⁶ Recounting his advice to a colleague’s son at the outset of his own academic career, Barnard admitted he could hardly “bid godspeed to a young man bent on the insane and suicidal (suicidal so far as happiness is concerned certainly) pursuit of a professorship in a southern college.”⁸⁷ It is not surprising then that historians attribute the controversy over Humphreys’s rape and assault on Jane as an extension of widespread antipathy toward Barnard’s “Yankee” sentiments and anti-Southern prejudices, but it is not enough to argue that Humphreys’s expulsion “probably wouldn’t have mattered much” but for Barnard’s powerful enemies within Oxford and the faculty.⁸⁸ By factoring Jane’s own account of her assault into his considerations for disciplinary action, Barnard violated Humphreys’s racially-grounded legal rights and, more damningly, the South’s entire social, economic, and political order. At a moment when slavery seemed under threat across the South, Branham’s charges reflected another expression of fear and anxiety over internal dissension on the region’s peculiar institution.

The University of Mississippi’s relationship to slavery represents an important, if uncomfortable, alternative narrative to the school’s celebrated past. While “Ole Miss” attempts to address its role as antagonist during the Civil Rights movement, its complicity in slavery hides in plain sight in buildings built with coerced labor and places named for local slaveholders. Buried within the official records, private correspondences, and informal/off-hand observations by students and faculty, this alternative narrative emerges. The university’s extensive use of slave labor offered financial return for the community’s slaveholders, including those within the faculty and administration. The slaves themselves likely found increased opportunities for mobility, financial reward, self-direction, and autonomy through employment on campus. Students struggled to balance their dual identities as racial masters and obedient pupils, and despite official

⁸⁵ H. R. Branham, “A Review of the Action of the Trustees in the Trial of Chancellor F. A. P. Barnard, and a Defence [*sic*] of the Prosecutor,” (Oxford: 1860), 1-8.

⁸⁶ Barnard to Hilgard, November 6, 1858, Hilgard papers.

⁸⁷ Barnard to Hilgard, November 11, 1856, Hilgard papers.

⁸⁸ *The Heritage of Lafayette County*, 90.

policies barring their right to direct and discipline the university's slaves, the administration proved unwilling to restrict students' violent efforts to assert their own racial prerogatives. Slavery's crucial importance to the university makes the urgency of the "Branham affair" more explicable.

Institutions of higher learning are well positioned to lead national discussions of slavery and race in America. Due to the University of Mississippi's extensive participation in the enslavement of others, and its history of racial discrimination and violence more generally, the school has the opportunity to address this past and join the ranks of other colleges and universities nation-wide. With more research a fuller and more complex depiction of slavery on campus should appear, one that will help uncover more completely the experiences of Lafayette County's enslaved people and the university's deep, twisting, and fascinating relationship to race long before James Meredith set foot on campus. George, Simon, Isaac, and Jane helped build the university too, and the school will benefit from the inclusion of their stories.

