

Columbia University and Slavery Research Paper:

**An Academic History of Frederick A.P. Barnard: His Fight for Coeducation as Columbia University's Tenth President and the Absence of an Equal Push for Racial Diversity among Columbia's Student Population**

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Historians have long focused on Frederick A.P. Barnard's reputation as the founder of Barnard College. This notion is arguably false, however, considering that Barnard College was founded after Frederick A.P. Barnard's death<sup>1</sup> - his name given to the college only after his family's reluctant acquiescence to its use.<sup>2</sup> Frederick A.P. Barnard's name was given to the college as a token of gratitude and as a public acknowledgement of his efforts "in behalf of the admission of women to the highest privileges of education."<sup>3</sup>

When Frederick A.P. Barnard was elected as the tenth president of Columbia College in 1864, his vast experience as an educator and a scholar of science were acknowledged and widely recognized throughout the nation.<sup>4</sup> A large part of his legacy stems from his advocacy for coeducation within Columbia College during his time as president. Until his death, he fought passionately for women to be given admittance to Columbia College. The same cannot be said for Frederick A.P. Barnard's willingness or lack thereof to include Black students to Columbia College during his twenty-five year presidency. This paper will explore the relationship - and apparent contradiction - between President Barnard's views on the admission of women and admission of Black students to Columbia College. Frederick A.P. Barnard owned slaves for much of his life yet he publicly repudiated the institution of slavery in an open letter to President Lincoln in 1863.<sup>5</sup> In question is the existence of a relationship between Frederick A.P. Barnard's commitment to women's education compared to his regard for the concept of education for Black students. Perhaps a relationship exists; perhaps it wasn't a concept that Frederick A.P.

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<sup>1</sup> Fulton, 422.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon, 603.

<sup>3</sup> Fulton, 422.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 339.

<sup>5</sup> A Refugee, 7.

Barnard conceived of during his lifetime. This paper consists of research obtained in an attempt to answer this question.

Frederick A.P. Barnard was born in Sheffield, Massachusetts in 1809 to Colonel Robert Foster Barnard and Augusta Porter Barnard.<sup>6</sup> His early education was given to him by his mother in their home, which contributed to his steady concept of morality in addition to a high level of mental acuity. Frederick A.P. Barnard didn't consider himself strongly educated as a young person. He didn't ever truly believe that he had ever been educated before attending traditional school in his teen years: "If by education is meant the result of influences exerted by other minds acting on and giving shape to my own, I should find it difficult to point out when, where, and to what extent such influences have produced such an effect on me. Not that I had not teachers enough; I had probably more than my share; but their personal relations to me, as I recall them, seem to have consisted chiefly in "setting" me lessons, in listening to my "recitation..."<sup>7</sup> As a child, Frederick A.P. Barnard was definitely not exposed to fellow Black students in his classroom since segregation wasn't outlawed in public schools until nearly 60 years after his death in 1954<sup>8</sup>. Because an individual's formative years are the basis of the concept of identity formulation, one may wonder if Frederick A.P. Barnard's lack of advocating for Black students to study alongside white students while he was President of Columbia College was not envisioned since he had never experienced this himself as a student.

In 1828, at nineteen-years old, Frederick A.P. Barnard graduated from Yale distinguishing himself as a high achiever from the beginning of his collegiate experience. Before the end of his sophomore year he was acknowledged for leading the entire college in Pure

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<sup>6</sup> Fulton, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>8</sup> History, 1.

Mathematics and the exact sciences.<sup>9</sup> Following his graduation, Frederick A.P. Barnard accepted a teaching position at the Hartford Grammar School in Hartford, CT, where he developed his skills as an educator and became an academic tutor at Yale College.<sup>10</sup> During this time, Frederick A.P. Barnard developed a condition that would create life-long challenges to his health and career: deafness. In his memoir, John Fulton and Mrs. Margaret Murray Barnard, recall: “The only incident of that year (1829) worth recording was his discovery of the slow approach of an infirmity which disconcerted all his plans and materially curtailed his powers of usefulness throughout his life. He found out that he was gradually becoming deaf.”<sup>11</sup> Frederick A.P. Barnard did not forgo his career ambitions due to this disability, however. In 1832, he was invited to join the corps group of teachers for the recently reorganized New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf.<sup>12</sup> Although this wasn’t Frederick A.P. Barnard’s dream job - he wished to hold a professorship at a university in the North - he accepted the position as a teacher at the New York Institution of the Deaf and remained there for five years until 1837.

Just after Frederick A.P. Barnard’s work at the New York Institution of the Deaf came to a close, Dr. Basil Manly, who had recently been elected to the presidency of the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, approached him and encouraged Frederick A.P. Barnard to send his testimonials to the university for a position as Chair of Mathematics or Natural Philosophy. Two months later he was elected to the Professorship of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy.<sup>13</sup> This was an usual move for Frederick A.P. Barnard since he had, for his entire professional career thus far, worked in the North. The North was what he knew, and with what

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<sup>9</sup> Fulton, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>13</sup> Fulton, 85.

he was most familiar. However, Barnard was remarkably ambitious, and with no offer for a professorship at Yale or another Northern university at the time, he accepted the offer in Tuscaloosa and moved to the South in March of 1838.<sup>14</sup>

Upon Barnard's move to the South, it is documented that he became a slaveholder. There is record of a lab assistant, named Sam<sup>15</sup>, who worked under Frederick A.P. Barnard. This decision of Frederick A.P. Barnard's to become a slaveholder may have been an attempt to assuage his Southern colleagues and to prove his loyalty to the university's values and to find acceptance as an equal despite his northern upbringing and assumed loyalty to the Union.

Frederick Barnard was connected to the University of Alabama in two professional capacities from the spring of 1838 to the autumn of 1854.<sup>16</sup> He held the chair of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy from 1838 to 1848, then transferred to the chair of Chemistry and Natural History, which he held until 1854 - his final year at the university.<sup>17</sup> During this period of Barnard's academic life, he was presented with an opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty to the Constitution and to the Union, to which he remained closely aligned despite his move to the South. On July 4, 1851, amid talk of secession, he gave a Pro-Union speech to the people of Tuscaloosa that addressed many of the questions that disgruntled Southerners' had regarding any rational purpose for preserving the Union. As Fulton put it: "Proceeding directly to the main point of his discourse, he showed that the alleged grievances of the South were partly misconceptions and partly fictions; and that, in their gravest aspect, they were the results of a misdirection of industry at the South, not of Northern aggression or of political inequality under

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>15</sup> Sellers, 38.

<sup>16</sup> Fulton, 87.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 88.

the Constitution of the Union. He showed that a diversity of industries is the indispensable condition of national wealth, which the people of the South had utterly neglected, while the people of the North had fulfilled it to the utmost. By presenting the elements of the question in the form of an ingenious hypothetical illustration, he showed that under any form of government this single difference between the industries of the two sections must inevitably have caused the economic inequalities of which the South most bitterly complained. He insisted that the remedy would be found, not in an abrogation of the Constitution, nor in a disruption of the Union, but in an intelligent and systematic effort to diversify the industries in Southern States by the introduction of manufactures for the supply, at least, of their own wants.”<sup>18</sup>

This speech was received with much admiration coming from both Union supporters and from southern advocates of disunion: “The friends of the Union were encouraged. The more thoughtful advocates of disunion sentiments were touched; and when the oration had been published and circulated, its influence in overcoming the spirit of disaffection was confessed on all hands to be both extensive and profound.”<sup>19</sup> It should be acknowledged that Barnard’s talents as an orator helped him tremendously during this period in American history of utter hatred between Union supporters and the majority of southerners who staunchly advocated for disunion. Without his unique ability to speak persuasively about his personal views regarding the North and the South, leading to acceptance and encouragement from both groups, southerners with whom he regularly interacted at his job and in his everyday encounters may not have wholly accepted him in the way that they categorically did. One of Frederick A.P. Barnard’s colleagues from Alabama spoke to these qualities that Frederick was blessed with and that added to his

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<sup>18</sup> Fulton, 109.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 111.

overall competence as a human being: “Admirable Frederick -- the best at whatever he attempted to do; he could turn the best sonnet, write the best love story, take the best daguerreotype picture, charm the most women, catch the most trout, and calculate the most undoubted almanac.”<sup>20</sup>

These personable qualities convinced Frederick A.P. Barnard’s friends, colleagues, admirers, and dissenters to listen to what he had to say about emotionally charged topics such as the state of the Union in 1851, ten years before the Civil War began.

After fourteen years in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Frederick Barnard was once again sought out for his academic prowess and reluctantly accepted a new title as Chair of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy at The University of Mississippi in 1854.<sup>21</sup> Barnard and his wife, Margaret, did not want to leave Alabama because they enjoyed their lives there but he had made a pledge to accept an appointment at The University of Mississippi and he could not go back on his word. This speaks to Barnard’s strong reputation of fulfilling professional commitments even if they did not align with his deepest values and passions such as co-education for women. He was the university’s first “chancellor” (the title was changed to President in 1858), and he was selected for this prominent position in 1856<sup>22</sup>. Barnard was President of The University of Mississippi until it closed its doors in 1861 at the beginning of the Civil War.<sup>23</sup>

The University of Mississippi, similarly to The University of Alabama, was so enmeshed with the institution of slavery that it is difficult to comprehend how Frederick A.P. Barnard could have continued his career in a part of the country with which he was politically misaligned.

Enslaved laborers built many of the buildings on The University of Mississippi’s campus and

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<sup>20</sup> McCoughey, 146.

<sup>21</sup> Fulton, 194.

<sup>22</sup> The University of Mississippi, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Mayfield, 1.

were expected to attend to students' rooms and their daily needs. During his seven years at The University of Mississippi, Barnard owned two female slaves.<sup>24</sup>

Towards the end of Barnard's chancellorship at The University of Mississippi, an incident occurred that publicly challenged his commitment as a citizen of the South.<sup>25</sup> This event proved itself to be unforgettable during Frederick A.P. Barnard's employment at The University of Mississippi because it demonstrated a confluence of empathy towards his female slave involved in the matter and his undeterred willingness to prove his loyalty to the South among his academic peers and friends. These two circumstances do not align. The facts of the event unfolded in 1859 as such: a reputedly disorderly student of The University of Mississippi broke into Frederick A.P. Barnard's home when he was away and grievously assaulted one of his female slaves. When Barnard discovered what had taken place, he personally wrote a letter to the student formally accused him of the offence and told him to withdraw from the University. The student insisted on exercising his right to a trial before the Faculty.<sup>26</sup> The student pleaded Not Guilty even though he acknowledged that he committed the assault arguing that he had not committed the assault during the specific time stated in the charge.

The biggest challenge that Frederick A.P. Barnard faced in successfully winning his case against the guilty student was that the student was white and his brutalized enslaved person was black: "A majority of the Faculty felt that they were not at liberty to convict a student on evidence which the State did not admit in courts of justice, that is to say, on "negro evidence,"<sup>27</sup> and on that only at second hand without direct examination and cross-examination of the actual

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<sup>24</sup> Loepere, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Fulton, 246.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 247-260.

<sup>27</sup> Fulton, 247.



witnesses.”<sup>28</sup> Frederick A.P Barnard voted against allowing the University of Mississippi student to remain on campus - in effect defending his black servant over a white student. When the proceedings surrounding this case were made public, it became common knowledge that Chancellor Barnard had tried to convict a student on “negro evidence” and he was accused of being opposed to southern institutions.<sup>29</sup> This was not well received by other members of The University of Mississippi Board, in particular one Dr. Branham. Frederick A.P. Barnard was tremendously offended by these accusations and called for a thorough investigation into the entire incident. The investigation was exhaustive and resulted in Frederick A.P. Barnard’s name being fully cleared against all of the charges that were brought against him by Dr. Branham - the first two charges stating that “Barnard was unsound on the slavery question and that he had advocated the taking of negro testimony against a student.”<sup>30</sup>

This entire incident calls into question Frederick Barnard’s real beliefs on the institution of slavery and the extent of enslaved peoples’ worth. In his memoir, he offers the view that there is no evidence revealing any strong feelings he may have had on the subject: “Yet even in his youth, he perceived the full force of the argument that property in slaves was recognized in the Constitution of the United States, and held that the Federal Government was bound by the Constitution to protect slave property according to the terms of that instrument.”<sup>31</sup> Research proves that Frederick A.P. Barnard owned slaves, so in this regard he supported the institution simply by engaging in its continuance. In a letter to his wife in 1861, Frederick A.P. Barnard

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<sup>28</sup> Fulton, 247.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 249.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 249.

<sup>31</sup> Fulton, 252.

wrote that he was preparing for a trip and regarding his packing process, “Carrie knows better probably where is my coat than I do.”<sup>32</sup>

Despite his claim of being in complete alignment with the Union and its values since his birth in the North, Frederick A.P. Barnard went to extenuating lengths during the Branham investigation to prove his public support of Southern institutions ever since he moved to the South. Even though, in 1861, the majority of Northerners supported abolition, Frederick A.P. Barnard wasn't employed in the North and he was entirely committed to preserving his reputation in the South. He presented to the Board of Trustees “documentary testimony of unimpeachable authority, and reaching back to 1837, that he was a ‘warm supporter of Southern institutions,’ ‘and that on all important questions which might agitate the North against the South, his actions and feelings would be truly Southern.’”<sup>33</sup> It leads one to speculate if Frederick A.P. Barnard publicly sided with whomever he was employed by at the time. His lengthy refute to Branham's accusation that he was ‘unsound on the slavery question’ almost appears as over-justification regarding his views to prove he could be accepted by his peers. Frederick A.P. Barnard defended himself to the Board of Trustees with these words: “As to my sentiments on the subject of slavery, my record is clear for my whole life. As for that early period of it when I resided in New York, and before I ever thought of becoming a citizen of the South, I submit extracts from letters written by Southern men in 1837....As to my nearly seventeen years of residence in Alabama, the testimony of Judge Ormond and President Garland, obtained without my knowledge, has been presented. Of the sentiments I have consistently professed since I came here, enough has been said by others. I was born at the North. That I cannot help. I was not

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<sup>32</sup> Barnard Family Papers, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Fulton, 253.

consulted in the matter. I am a slaveholder, and, if I know myself, I am “sound on the slavery question.”<sup>34</sup>

According to his memoir, however, which was co-written by his wife Margaret: “On the subject of the Union, Barnard was quite as consistent as on the subject of slavery. He was a Union man. Whatever political influence he had was always exerted in fostering a spirit of loyalty to the Union.”<sup>35</sup> This acknowledgement of Frederick A.P. Barnard’s loyalty to the Union directly refutes his speech to the Board of Trustees at The University of Mississippi. It should not be surprising then, that two years after Frederick A.P. Barnard had moved back to the North with his wife in 1863, he penned a public letter to President Lincoln in which he adamantly took a stand against the institution of slavery. At this moment in his professional life, Frederick A.P. Barnard was looking for work at a Northern university. With his decision to make public his opposition to slavery, he put himself in a favorable position to be considered for an appointment at a Northern university, many of which supported abolition.

Frederick A.P. Barnard’s letter to President Lincoln admonished the institution of slavery to such an extent - with the wording of his disgust towards slavery articulated in immense detail - it reads as if all of the fine work that Barnard did in academia until this point aided him in formulating his argument that could be read as prose: “...to fasten upon a great and free people the ineffable, indelible, and damning disgrace of deliberately and intentionally engrafting upon their political institutions that relic of primeval barbarism, that loathsome monument of the brutality and ferocity of the ages of darkness, that monster injustice - cursed of all Christian men and hated of God - domestic slavery.”<sup>36</sup> For someone who owned slaves for much of his life, this

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<sup>34</sup> Fulton, 253.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 253.

<sup>36</sup> Lincoln letter, 23.

about-face rebuttal of slavery made public seems out of character when observing the trajectory of Frederick A.P. Barnard's life up until this moment in 1863.

In response to his letter to President Lincoln, Union general William T. Sherman wrote a personal letter to Frederick A.P. Barnard. General Sherman's letter was one of gratitude and it emphasized the importance of a Union victory more than it acknowledged the country's moral obligation to end slavery. Towards the end of his letter General Sherman writes: "We must succeed, for 'tis not possible that the beautiful fabric of government erected by our forefathers should tumble into anarchy or be rent by schism."<sup>37</sup> The priority of winning the Civil War, according to General Sherman, was preserving the Union, with no mention of the atrocities of slavery that Frederick A.P. Barnard alluded to in his letter to President Lincoln. Based on Frederick A.P. Barnard's at certain times private - while living in the South - political alignment with the North, those on the battle lines such as General Sherman considered Frederick A.P. Barnard an ally. He placed himself in an excellent light during the Civil War to become one of the Union's most loyal representatives and supporters. When Columbia College in New York needed a new leader in 1864, there was no one more strategically positioned to take over the university than one Frederick A.P. Barnard.

Columbia College called Frederick A.P. Barnard to the Presidency when he was fifty-five years old in 1864. He was universally distinguished as an educator and a scientific intellectual. He had a reputation for "maturity of judgment, which could only be attained by original thought and a large and varied experience."<sup>38</sup> Frederick A.P. Barnard worked diligently during his twenty-five year presidency at Columbia College to elevate the reputation of the university by

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<sup>37</sup> Fulton, 309.

<sup>38</sup> Fulton, 339.

increasing student enrollment and to enable it to become one of the top universities in the country. He achieved this, to a degree, and much of his legacy as President of Columbia College speaks to his staunch advocacy to admit women to the college. Around ten years into his presidency, Frederick A.P. Barnard made a concrete effort to fight for an equal opportunity for women at the college level: "...he began to ask himself why the benefits of such an education as Columbia was endeavoring to afford should be confined to one-half of the youth of the country. After long reflection, he reached a settled and unalterable conviction that colleges ought to be freely opened to women as well as to men, and from 1879-1881, he urgently pressed upon the Board of Trustees the expediency of admitting women to all the departments of Columbia."<sup>39</sup>

There is no record indicating that Frederick A.P. Barnard fought for black students' equal opportunity of admittance to Columbia during this time or at any time during his presidency from 1864-1889 at the time of his death. It may not have been a possibility in Barnard's mind when he considered his push for co-education at Columbia, which further reveals the discrepancy in equality between white females and Black students at that time. Women, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, were considered inferior to men as citizens. But according to Frederick A.P. Barnard's fight to include women at Columbia College, this same opportunity could not be extended to Black students for reasons never publicly articulated.

Frederick A.P. Barnard's main wish to open Columbia College's doors to women was never fulfilled during his lifetime. In October of 1889, after his death, the Annex (Barnard College's previous name since 1883<sup>40</sup>) was opened under the name of Barnard College with a freshman class consisting of seven members. This Annex was not the vision of Frederick A.P.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 407.

<sup>40</sup> Fulton, 422.

Barnard. He believed the creation of the Annex to be a compromise - only satisfying in the acknowledgement that this was a move in the “right direction.”<sup>41</sup> The person who deserves credit for the founding of the Annex, which then became Barnard College, is Annie Nathan Meyer. She believed that the Annex could be like Harvard’s Radcliffe College, which was founded in 1879.<sup>42</sup> Though she has not been given proper credit for her commitment to the origination of the Annex, research shows that she oversaw Barnard College’s move uptown to Morningside Heights in 1897 and for the construction of its own campus across the street from Columbia College. Meyer served as Trustee of Barnard College from its opening until her death in 1951.<sup>43</sup>

Nearly thirty-five years after Frederick A.P. Barnard’s death, in 1922, there was another issue surrounding enrollment numbers at Columbia College that offers a possible theory as to why Black students were still not granted admission to the school. At this time, there was a growing feeling of anti-Semitism present on university campuses especially within the administration of elite universities. In particular in 1922, Harvard’s President A. Lawrence Lowell, tried to set up a formal quota system for Jews.<sup>44</sup> “Selective admissions to achieve “geographic diversity” became the new rationale employed at Columbia, Harvard, Yale, and elsewhere to increase Protestant enrollment, and hold down the number of Jewish students...”<sup>45</sup> In addition to racism shown towards Black individuals on college campuses, so too was the existence of racism against Jewish students on college campuses. It is plausible that since white minority groups like the Jews faced notable discrimination in terms of their education, it was inconceivable to members of the administration to open their doors to Black students. Jewish

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 422.

<sup>42</sup> Gordon, 504.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 505.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 515.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 515.

students encountered a quota system that sought to limit the number of Jewish students and increase the number of Protestant students: “The evidence recently uncovered by Harold Wechsler, Marcia Graham Synnott, and Dan Oren indicates that anti-Semitism was at the root of the desire for “geographic diversity,” and that quotas were implicitly and secretly employed at many colleges in the twentieth century.”<sup>46</sup> Under these circumstances, it could be argued that anti-Semitism took more of a focus during this time when universities attempted to achieve “geographic diversity” by adhering to a quota system for admissions. Evidently, administering a quota for Black students in addition to other minorities was not even imagined.

Frederick A.P. Barnard’s lack of advocacy of equal opportunity to education for Black students compared to the work that he did to allow women admission to Columbia College appears to be symptomatic of the time in which he lived. Sadly, it may not have been conceivable to him that Black students deserved the same educational opportunities offered to white students during his lifetime. Perhaps he was so singularly focused on his emphasis to open Columbia College’s doors to women that he didn’t or couldn’t envision a completely equal educational opportunity for all due to his tunnel vision. Frederick A.P. Barnard owned enslaved people for much of his life and was commonly in the presence of enslaved people while working at The University of Alabama and The University of Mississippi where together he spent twenty-three years of his academic career. In his letter to President Lincoln, Frederick A.P. Barnard lambasted the institution of slavery and its existence in this country. Despite his eventual public condemnation of slavery, however, he was either incapable or unwilling to go a step further to fight for the educational rights of the formerly enslaved population.

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<sup>46</sup> Gordon, 515.

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