LEGACY OF THE LAND: RETHINKING JUSTIN MORRILL AND THE 1890 LAND-GRANT INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The American higher education history focuses on the same three years: 1787, 1862 and 1944. In each of these years, legislation was passed that made education more accessible in the United States. However, another key year is left out: 1890, when the second Land-grant Act was passed. This act created a system of schools for the newly freed African American community in Southern states and is major mark in both American educational and black history. But the 1890s land-grant schools are ever hardly discussed, and I wanted to know, why?

To learn more about the 1890s, I examined documents related to the 1890 schools as well as the 1862 schools. Through analysis of the language, mission and memory in the museum exhibits and material provided by the land-grant universities, it is clear that the 1890 schools provided holistic, community oriented curriculums. To them, teaching was about more than vocational preparation but building the foundation for a stronger and better society. What did the 1862s focus on? Farming, a lot of farming. I also reviewed the speeches, letters and personal writings of Justin Morrill who is the “Father of the Land-Grant colleges.” His writings indicate that he saw education as a right of all Americans, and that everybody would benefit from the art of reading and writing. Morrill was deeply upset throughout his entire life that he could not go to college and wanted to save others from his suffering.
Despite the fact the 1862 land-grants were a little too agri-obsessed for Morrill’s taste, they became his legacy. The reason nobody sees this connection is due to the fact the 1890s are more commonly recognized as HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) than land-grants. In turn, their reputation has been limited to their racial identity and Morrill’s has been limited to 1862; both are victims of a careless and stubborn American higher education narrative that only has room for the mode ideologically democratic stories.
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INTRODUCTION
In 1825, the United States of America elected its 6th president, John Quincy Adams. Adams was an exceedingly smart and well educated man, travelling abroad to perfect his French and Dutch, studying in some of Europe’s finest institutions as well as receiving a degree from Harvard College in 1790. His education served him well as he made his way from lawyer to the highest office in the land. Yet while 1825 marked a year of great accomplishment for Adams, it marked a year of great disappointment for one young man in Vermont. While Adams had the privilege to attend college, a boys named Justin Smith Morrill learned, at the age of fifteen, that he would not get the same opportunity. Despite this disadvantage, Morrill would too make his way to Washington. During his time in Congress, he would get the opportunity to remedy the inequities in higher education through the bill, the Land-Grant Act of 1862.

This christened Morrill the “Father of land-grant colleges”, a set of federally funded schools which added instruction in agricultural and the industrial arts to the college curriculum. The thinking behind this was to make college more accessible to America’s working class. Justin would not let other fifteen-year-old boys suffer without school like he did. His bill single-handedly democratized higher education in the United States and has guaranteed his place in history.

As I read more about Morrill and the Land-Grant Act of 1862 and learned there was actually a second bill, the Land-Grant Act of 1890. This bill not only established the extension of the first act into the southern states, but it also created separate institutions for the newly freed African Americans. This is another major milestone in American history or at least one would think so, right? It doesn’t appear to be since there is hardly any information available on the historically
black 1890 land-grant colleges. This stopped me in my tracks because how could something so significant in both African American and education history get so little attention while the 1862 Land-Grant Act is everywhere? This only made me want to learn more about them and figure out why they were discussed so little. Trying to fill in the holes meant reading as much as possible about all things land-grant, especially about the “Father of Land-Grant colleges”, Justin Morrill. The more I learned about Morrill, who did write both bills, the more it seemed like the 1890s had gotten it right; his vision for education was alive in the 1890 historically black schools. In fact, I his ideas much stronger with them than with the 1862 schools. The problem I discovered was that the 1890 land-grants were only known as HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities), not as land-grants. A little more digging and my research led me to argue that the 1890 historically black land-grant colleges embody Justin Morrill’s education vision because of their attention to a comprehensive and community oriented college education while the 1862 land-grant colleges have been too vocationally focused. The flawed land-grant narrative is because the legacies of the 1890 schools and Justin Morrill have both been oversimplified to serve the larger narrative on democracy in American higher education.

I reached this conclusion by conducting most of my research from primary sources. I utilized these over secondary sources so that I could fill in and/or correct the mainstream land-grant narrative. If I avoided relying on secondary sources, I thought I had a better change to not make the same generalizations and simplifications they contained. For the land-grant schools, I tried and often succeeded in finding parallel sources for each set of schools. By having similar documents for both the 1862 and 1890 land-grant schools I believed I could produce a fair assessment of them. My courses were often not academic and untraditional, the sort of sources
because part of my approach was understanding the image of the land-grant schools as the average American, not a scholar.

One of the first sets of sources I began with was the history pages provided by the official websites of the land-grant institutions. There were three things I kept in mind as I looked at them: 1) What is the school’s history? 2) How do they discuss and/or portray their foundations and missions? And 3) what is their image today? By giving the schools the opportunity to tell their story and respective history, they were able to fill in the mission pieces from other sources. It also made it much easier and fairer to draw comparisons amongst them. I quickly noticed that the 1862 schools were much quicker to highlight their land-grant identity; not just their land-grant identity but also their agricultural one. On the other hand, the 1890 schools were largely fixated on their historically black identity. This trend showed me that my focus should be on reputation and identity when approaching the following sources.

Luckily enough, the Smithsonian Institution has hosted exhibits on both the 1862 land-grant schools as well as the 1890 land-grant schools. The 1890 exhibit actually came first in 1990, for the 100th anniversary of the 1890 bill while the 1862 display was for the 150th anniversary of the 1862 bill in 2012. The patterns in emphasis that I saw from the schools’ websites continued throughout these exhibits. For the 1862s, this attention to agriculture and industry was immediately evident in the 1862 titles. *Campus and Community: The USDA and Land-Grant Colleges: Public Land-Grant Universities and the USDA at 150* was the title of the 1862 land-grant exhibit at the 2012 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. This title instantaneously characterizes by the 1862s as agriculture colleges because they are literally sharing exhibit space with the United States Department of Agriculture. Further research, which was all available online,
reflected an exhibit that focused on the farming technology of the schools, further confirmation of my hypothesis that 1862 land-grant schools emphasize the agricultural and industrial fields over the liberal arts.

Meanwhile, the 1890 exhibit affirmed my belief that they focus on their black identity more than their land-grant roots. In 1990, the Smithsonian Museum of American History hosted a temporary exhibit entitled *Go Forth and Serve: Black Land-Grant Colleges in Their Second Century*. While they do mention their land-grant status in the title, the exhibit is really about being a historically black land-grant, which is very different than just a land-grant. Delving into the exhibit, which required going to the Smithsonian archives, I experienced the 1890 schools as holistic environments, that were concerned with preparing their students for the many walks of life; this often meant community involvement and social justice even.

One source that featured both schools was the 150th Celebration of the Land-grant Act held at the Library of Congress. This event, which I was able to watch online on C-SPAN’s website, is noteworthy because the event had a panel of land-grant university presidents: specifically, three from the 1862 schools and one from an 1890 school. The 1862 presidents mostly discussed statistics and technology, presenting education solely for the limited purpose of vocational preparation. Despite being outnumbered, the 1890 president, Mary Evans Sias of Kentucky State University, was able to hold the attention of the audience. She did this by delivering a very personal speech that communicated the numerous ways the 1890 schools have transformed the lives the African American community. Her emphasis on education as the path to self-betterment reflected the sentiments of Justin Morrill I was seeing in his writings.
As Justin Morrill lobbied for both the 1862 and the 1890 bills, he gave two speeches before Congress. In 1857, Morrill gave a speech before the House of Representatives in support of what would become the Land-Grant Act of 1862. In 1876, he gave a speech before the Senate to promote what would become the Land-Grant Act of 1890. These speeches vastly differed in focus as well as rhetoric, and served as a crucial example of the vision shared between Morrill and the 1890 schools as well as the disconnect between the 1862s and Morrill. With these speeches in mind, I was able look at the connections between Morrill and the 1890s in other sources.

There are two biographies written on Justin Morrill; I utilized both for my research. The *Life and Public Services of Justin Smith Morrill* by William Belmont Parker was published in 1924, while *Justin Smith Morrill: Father of Land-grant Colleges* by Coy F. Cross II was published in 1999, a needed update to the first biography says Cross. These sources provided not only background information on Morrill, but the vital context to prove that he had a very personal investment in these colleges. He had an unwavering faith that anyone could benefit from a liberal arts education in the United States. Although these are secondary accounts of Morrill’s life, they include crucial primary documents from Morrill. These personal documents combined with two congressional speeches Morrill made specifically about the Land-Grant Acts were crucial to the part of my argument on Morrill’s mission. Combining these speeches, this biography and his personal writings, I feel confident that I understand what Morrill hoped to see in higher education.

My argument is laid out in four chapters along with a conclusion. They are arranged chronologically, first focusing on Justin Morrill solely and the second focuses on the disconnect
between Morrill and the schools from the Land-Grant Act of 1862. The third chapter switches to
Morrill and the 1890s, demonstrating the similarities between the two. The last chapter looks at
why the 1890s have been left out of the land-grant narrative and the conclusion ends with an
argument that Morrill’s legacy has been minimized to 1862 to better serve the democratic
American higher education narrative.

The first chapter is an introduction to Justin Morrill personally, informing the reader on his
childhood and why his lack of schooling rattled him his entire life. This is to give the reader an
idea of who this man was so they can better understand his motivation for creating the land-grant
colleges. It goes in depth on what led to his time in Congress, and utilizes many key documents
to set up the framework for him as a man who fought for the proliferation of the liberal arts in the
United States.

The second chapter focuses on the 1862 land-grant schools and begins to compare
Morrill’s own mission with the schools’ missions. This is where the websites, Smithsonian
exhibit, and Morrill’s congressional speeches are heavily utilized along with his personal
writings. Through a lot of analysis, it explains that the 1862 schools have always been a little too
focused on vocational studies and overlook the importance of liberal arts curriculum that Morrill
so desperately desired.

Using documents parallel to those in chapter two, the third chapter is where Morrill and
the 1890s are finally united. It is the first of two that focuses on the 1890 colleges, because it is
supposed to fill in the scarceness of documents connecting Morrill to this group of schools. The
1876 speech he made in the Senate is heavily used as well as the Smithsonian exhibit; When they
are analyzed together, the schools express Morrill’s conviction that education is about shaping a
person, not just training him for a job. It fixes the gap in information on the 1890 schools and begins to illustrate their grandiose mission was closely related to Morrill’s own hopes.

The fourth chapter is the second on the 1890 colleges, meant to provide extensive background on them and explain why they have been left out of the land-grant narrative. This chapter explains that the 1890 land-grant colleges have been left out of the land-grant narrative because of their prominent racial identity. It focuses on their connection to the larger network of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) rather than the land-grant system.

In regards to other scholarly sources on the land-grant colleges, not many people have questioned the land-grant narrative. The biggest related sources I have consulted are the narratives on American higher education. *The American College & University: A History* by Frederick Rudolph is described as “Rudolph’s groundbreaking study. *The American College and University*, remains one of the most useful and significant works on the history of higher education in America”. When Rudolph mentions the Land-Grant Act of 1890, he mentions in one sentence which says that the separate schools were created “on the basis of race” and then swiftly goes back to discussing the finances of the bill.\(^1\) The fact this is a book praised by the *New York Times* and has highly rated reviews on Amazon reflects the popularity of this higher education history that excludes the 1890 historically black land-grant colleges.

Another higher education survey book I consulted was *A History of American Higher Education* written by John Thelin in 2004. Thelin gives more information than Rudolph on the 1890 land-grant schools, but he only focuses on the disadvantages and inequities the schools faced when they were founded. The one positive he focuses on are their extension services,

he gives no insight as to how these schools transformed African American communities for generations.²

He also fails to provide any background on Justin Morrill as to why he wrote the land-grant bills in the first place.³ Other books like Derek Bok’s Higher Education in America continued to provide little information on the 1890 land-grant schools and Justin Morrill. On the other hand, the biographies on Justin Morrill I consulted were plentiful in information on him but yet again discussed the second set of land-grant institutions very little. The Life and Public Services of Justin Smith Morrill by William Belmont Parker was published in 1924 which meant that he could not be as large of a resource on the 1890 schools simply because of how much has changed since then and how little information was probably available then. Justin Smith Morrill: Father of Land-Grant Colleges was an update to Parker’s book. This one was published in 1999 by Coy F. Cross II, and provided a significant amount more information on the historical circumstances of Morrill’s time in Congress as well as provided the huge connection between Justin Morrill and Frederick Douglass. Though much improved from the first biography, Cross was still limited in showing a relationship between Morrill and the 1890 schools.

What I generally found in education books was a narrative on the democratization of higher education that is focused around three events: 1) the Northwest Ordinance in 1787; 2) the Land-grant Act of 1862; and 3) the GI Bill in 1944. The Northwest Ordinances of 1787 set the precedent for federal involvement in higher education by requiring a public university in the Ohio territory (eventually state). Seventy-five years later came the Land-Grant Act of 1862,

³Thelin, History, 135-136.
which established a system of public, federal funded colleges throughout the country with the
new incorporation of the agricultural education and mechanical arts in the curriculum. Last came
the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the G.I. bill. A stipulation of this bill
was providing funds to veterans so they could receive a college education. This provided me
with the framework for the American Higher Education and showed me where the holes were,
specifically the hole around 1890.

It was in efforts to be as unbiased as possible that I tried to find parallel sources between
the 1862 and the 1890 schools. This has two purposes; one so that I would not spend all my time
on the 1890 schools and thus have lopsided research. Second, by not having lopsided research, I
was able to keep the playing field relatively level, which was a concern since there is a huge
disproportion in materials written/available on each set of schools.

Hopefully this thesis will at minimum make a dent in these topics. The American higher
education system is as unique and complex as the people it educates, thus it should have a
narrative that matches it.
CHAPTER ONE: Hi, My Name is Justin Morrill

Congressman Morrill revolutionized American higher education when his bill, the Land-Grant Act of 1862, was passed and created a new system of federally funded schools in the United States. He is affectionately remembered as the father of land-grant schools despite the schools turned out very differently from what he envisioned. Justin Morrill saw the disadvantages of limited educational opportunities in his own life and community, therefore he wanted to make college accessible to more than America’s elite.

Justin Smith Morrill was born on April 10th 1810 in Strafford, Vermont to Nathaniel Smith and Mary Hunt. The eldest son of the couple, Justin was born into a typical working class family, one that came from a long lineage of blacksmiths. The Morrill family was typical of Strafford, a small town where most people supported themselves through labor intensive occupations such as farming. This labor background is a significant part of Morrill’s character, as

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it gave him appreciation for those who had to win their bread by labor instead of through soft handed occupations.

Like any small village, Strafford had a small school which Morrill attended. This town had one single schoolhouse, where Morrill went as long as he could before going to the Academy at Thetford which was ten miles from his home and then onto Randolph Academy. During his time in school, he learned basic subjects like spelling, writing, and grammar. Unfortunately, these schools were less than stellar, and Morrill gained little exposure to French, German, and the other subjects of a classical curriculum. Even worse for Morrill, when he had exhausted the offerings at these schools, his education hit a wall.

At the young age of 15, Justin Morrill learned that his school days were over. Though Morrill expressed an ardent desire to attend college, the fact of the matter was that his father could not afford it. Specifically, he could not afford to send all his sons to college and felt it was unfair to give only Justin the opportunity. At this time Justin had already started working as a clerk for a man named Judge Harris. He discussed a college education with Harris, who said that though Morrill could work his way through college, if he instead became a merchant, he would have more independence. Morrill accepted the role and thus his formal schooling ended as he officially entered the workforce.

\[5\] Parker, *Life and Public Services*, 23.

\[6\] Parker, *Life and Public Services*, 23.

\[7\] Parker, *Life and Public Services*, 24.
He worked for Judge Harris for many years, eventually becoming partners in the firm, Harris and Morrill. Morrill gained a second father in Harris, and a great mentor; he was well respected in Strafford and looked at as an intelligent, level headed individual.  

He was actually something of a Renaissance man and a jack of all trades, a man who liked to read as much as he liked to farm. While Morrill found great success with the judge, he remained unsatisfied with his meager education.

As previously stated, Justin Morrill was not the typical teenage boy who was happy to avoid college. He was rather bitter that he could not go and that it was because of his working class background. Even though he could not attend college, he so strongly desired to learn that he taught himself in his spare time. As one would imagine, it was very difficult to work full time and still find the strength and energy to learn. Morrill lamented that:

> It has cost me many evenings, Sundays after church, and scraps of time that could be devoted to it, involving far more labor than it would have necessitated if I could have been sent to proper institutions of learning to have acquired a liberal education.

He had no time to relax because he was either working or studying at the age when other boys put all their focus on their studies. The “Sabbath days (save hours at church) and evenings with a tallow candle were early and late devoted either to study or general reading” for the young

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Vermont.\textsuperscript{10} Though Morrill’s family could not fund his education, they fully supported him in his endeavors.

One of the sweetest ways Morrill’s parents showed their support was through the very name they gave him. In the biography \textit{The Life and Public Services of Justin Morrill}, the author William Belmont Parker, focuses on Justin’s name. He learned that Morrill’s mother chose to name him after “a learned and capable physician” named Justin Smith.\textsuperscript{11} Her decision to choose Justin over a traditional biblical name demonstrated the “touch of maternal ambition” she had for her eldest son.\textsuperscript{12} On the other hand, his father felt the same sting from his dismal education that his son did. Just because they could not afford an elite education did not mean that the Morrill family did not see its value. Some of the ambition from his mother must have translated to Morrill, who sought out books wherever he could; and luckily for Morrill, his boss was as a great reading resource.

Judge Harris was a man who had similar limitations to Justin. Despite having even less education than Morrill, Harris was an avid reader, becoming proficient in a variety of topics including finance and politics. Through these endeavors he created quite an impressive personal library that he shared with Morrill. In his library Morrill had access to the poetry of Lord Byron, \textit{The Federalist} and more.\textsuperscript{13} His exposure to such works was vital to his entrance into politics, as

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[12] Parker, \textit{Life and Public Services}, 9.
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his views and morals began to take form with these works. He was extremely mindful to expose himself to a diverse range of topics, unlike many of those he saw in the Strafford community.

At this period in history, there was one book with which all Americans were familiar: The Bible. At a library opening in Strafford in 1883, Morrill recalls how his grandfather and other town elders spent their time discussing the Bible but in the most limited ways. Morrill believed these men did not appreciate “the history and sublimity of its great chapters and the beauty and force of the English language displayed” in it but instead enjoyed it as a source of “humorous cranks and quiddities”. He supported the old proverb “beware of the man of one book” and sought hard to make sure that this was not him.

As Morrill tried to fill in his brain with books, he was also gaining real world experience that would greatly shape his future in civil service. Nathaniel Morrill and Judge Harris served as Justin’s greatest mentors; they were men that would shape his principles and give him the vision necessary for the Land-Grant Act. Through Judge Harris, Morrill learned about more than just running a store. Along with his store, Judge Harris was county court judge, a member of the constitutional Convention of 1814, and held a variety of other public offices; He had an immaculate reputation in the community for his public service. In 1831 when he retired and left the store to Morrill, it was not for politics but for his first love: farming. The fact Judge


15 Cross, Justin Smith Morrill, 6.

16 Cross, Justin Smith Morrill, 9.
Harris was shopkeeper, a civil servant and then spent the last 30 years of his life farming is a crucial fact when it comes to understanding Justin Morrill and the Land-grant Act. Harris served as proof to Morrill that all men deserved an education despite their lot in life because they could use it in a variety of capacities. What Morrill’s father taught him was the importance of accessibility.

Equal opportunity was an idea exercised for Justin at a young age, but unfortunately not in his favor. His father exemplified the principle of fairness, opting not to send Justin to school since he could not afford to send all sons. Morrill displayed no bitterness towards his father over this, but rather focused on how unfair it was that he was denied education because of his socio-economic class. Morrill, who lived in the wake of the Declaration of Independence where “all men are created equal”, felt the disparities in American education went against the very tenets of the young country.

When Justin Morrill was born, the United States was only 34 years old and there was a strong sentiment of nationality in America during his childhood.\(^1\) This pride translated to an individual level, with Americans pulling up their boot straps as they attempted to improve their situations. One way they did this was through the opportunities provided by the Industrial Revolution. Though this applies more to the second half of Morrill’s life, he was already very immersed in the industrial arts as the son of a blacksmith. And when industrialization progressed faster in Europe than in the United States, Morrill started to see ways that education and labor could be combined. He saw his country falling behind, with an economy that largely relied upon

\(^1\) Parker, *Life and Public Services*, 11.
agriculture. This was something he worried about and held with him as he continued to work, educate himself, and rise in the Vermont political sphere.

Also while this was happening, American higher education was growing. Between the time Morrill was born (in 1810) and he first proposed the Land-grant Act in 1857, higher education was rapidly changing in the United States. Many of the most prominent schools in the country today were only just starting in the early 1800s, like Amherst College founded in 1821 or the University of Notre Dame in 1842. As the number of schools expanded, so did the arguments about what they should teach. When Morrill was 18, the infamous Yale Report of 1828 was published. The faculty at Yale University were fighting back against the trend in college curriculums moving away from the classic curriculum. Other universities, like rival Harvard, had been edging towards a course load based on electives. While Yale won the argument and kept the classical curriculum secure for several more decades, it was evident that American colleges were heading in a different direction already. One such school was Thomas Jefferson’s own University of Virginia.

When Morrill borrowed many books from Judge Harris’ library, one worthy of note was Thomas Jefferson’s famous Notes on Virginia. Though written in 1785 and mostly focusing on the actual state of Virginia, there is one section in Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia that is prevalent to Morrill and his future in land-grant colleges. One section of the book is called “Colleges, buildings and roads”, which largely focuses on the actual buildings and infrastructure at the College of William and Mary, Jefferson’s alma mater. But in it, he shows displeasure at the...
development of William and Mary, where the curriculum had to slow down to teach younger, less prepared students; He also wished that the science and math had a larger role in the curriculum.\textsuperscript{19} His emphasis on these subjects is something that appears in Morrill’s own work on land-grant schools and an important note to keep in mind.

This leads into Jefferson’s \textit{Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia} in 1818, where he lays out what sounds similar to Morrill’s land-grant colleges. Two of the most interesting and familiar learning goals are as follows:

To harmonize and promote the interests of agriculture, manufactures and commerce, and by well informed views of political economy to give a free scope to the public industry;

To develop the reasoning faculties of our youth, enlarge their minds, cultivate their morals, and instill into them the precepts of virtue and order. \textsuperscript{20}

Heading into the next chapter where the focus is on Morrill’s Land-Grant Act and the 1862 schools, these goals come off as very similar. In fact, in the biography on Morrill by Coy F. Cross II, he immediately links Morrill to Jefferson saying “Morrill had a vision of education that was articulated in part by Thomas Jefferson”.\textsuperscript{21} Jefferson believed in education as essential to America’s success story and just looking through his letters there are dozens of eloquent quotes to explain his belief in the proliferation of education for all. Whether he is determining that “the field of knowledge is the common property of all mankind” or already bragging that in America


\textsuperscript{21} Cross \textit{Justin Smith Morrill}, ix.
“ours are the only farmers who can read Homer”, the value he places on accessible education is strongly present in Morrill’s writings as well.22

Education was a defining part of Justin Morrill’s life long before the Land-grant Act of 1862. Even after his great success in Washington, the feeling he was robbed of an education never dissipated. At the ripe age of 80 in a speech before college students Morrill said:

I know it was a great disadvantage to me that I could not go to school, for I never have been to school since I was fifteen years of age. To obtain the little education I have, it has cost me many evenings, Sundays after church, and scraps of time that could be devoted to it, involving far more labor than it would have necessitated if I could have been sent to proper institutions of learning to have acquired a liberal education.23

For Morrill, his successes did not prove to him that education was unnecessary or frivolous. Education was about more than job security to him, it was about equality and opportunity for all Americans. Understanding Morrill’s personal story in education is critical to looking at the Land-grant Act of 1862 and questioning if it embodies his beliefs. His dedication to education took up the majority of his 43 years in Congress, yet he is remembered mostly for the Land-Grant Act of 1862, a bill that may be his legacy but not his dream.


23 Morrill, “Speech before College Students.” (1890), quoted in Life and Public Services, 10. xviii
CHAPTER TWO: The Land-grant Act of 1862, A Real View

Understanding Justin Morrill as a young, educationally deprived man is essential to understand Justin Morrill as a politician and author of the Land-Grant Act of 1862. The Land-Grant of Act has become both Morrill’s claim to fame in American history as well as an essential stopping point in the timeline of American higher education history. To be clear, this paper does not seek to totally dethrone the Land-Grant of Act of 1862 from its rightful place in history. Instead, it seeks to look at what is actually a smaller picture than that, one of Justin Morrill and what he personally envisioned for his land-grant colleges. By looking at the formation of the schools, along with their development and current legacy today, it will become evident that the 1862 land-grant schools do not reflect Morrill’s belief in a diverse curriculum to produce holistic and community oriented graduates.

In the year 1876, five and half million Americans could not write. Four million could not read. Any political party’s majority in an election was illiterate.24 These facts did not come from a census, but rather from a frustrated Senator, the man from Vermont who had helped establish a new system of colleges nearly 15 years prior. Although Justin Morrill had technically succeeded

in establishing the land-grant colleges in 1862, they were not blossoming the way he had hoped. Morrill spoke of education as that “which inspires manly efforts, and fills and fructifies youthful minds.” 25 The closest thing to “fructifying minds” were discussions on actual fruit as the 1862 land-grant colleges were quickly becoming labelled as “agriculture schools.” 26 Before looking at the bill and the 1862 schools, some further background information on Morrill’s election to Congress is necessary.

As one might guess from the last chapter, Justin Morrill’s arrival in Washington was rather unconventional. When Vermont’s Second Congressional District Representative declined to run for a second term in 1854, local Whig party leaders chose to nominate Morrill. Though he was shocked and humbled by the nomination it was not a total shock. Morrill had also become quite well versed in politics thanks to Judge Harris and had risen to prominence in the Vermont Whig party.27 In fact, he adored the Capitol after a trip to Congress where he says he saw the “Wisdom of the Nation”.28 Though he had previously declined roles in government, he spent a great deal of time educating himself on political issues, realizing the “public question must have a little more serious study”29. Ultimately his nomination resulted from the reputation he built for himself in the local Whig community through attention to friendships and compromise. He


27 Cross, Justin Morrill, 20.

28 Morrill, “Personal Documents” (1841), quoted in William Belmont Parker, the Life and Public Services of Justin Morrill (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press) 1924,38.

29 Parker, Life and Public Services, 47-48.
would continue to “favor compromise and reason over division and confrontation” as he represented Vermont in the House of Representatives.\textsuperscript{30}

Congress experienced a big change the same year Morrill arrived because the same year Morrill was elected as a Whig party candidate, the Republican party was born. It was actually sometime in-between his election and his swearing in that the northern Whigs, Free-Soilers, northern Democrats and other anti-slavery groups had joined forces as Republicans.\textsuperscript{31} This reflected the larger political storm that was brewing in the nation, as expansion into new territories had brought the issue of slavery front and center. In 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed, completely toppling the precariously placed Missouri Compromise of 1820. Thus the gridlock in Congress that Morrill was walking into meant that he had no time to ease in, and largely he followed his new political party’s direction.\textsuperscript{32} However, despite his freshman status, it only took two years into his congressional career for Morrill to introduce the bill that would become the defining event of his time in politics.

Morrill first brought the Land-Grant Act to the House Floor in 1857, a time when the only people attending college in the United States were affluent, white males. In the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the traditional colleges, as they were called, were beginning to receive criticism for failure to evolve out of the classical curriculum which was not applicable to the majority of Americans. There was a strong desire for more democracy in higher education, in both the students who attended and their course of study. This was a reason Morrill’s bill was appealing,

\textsuperscript{30} Cross, \textit{Justin Smith Morrill}, 21.

\textsuperscript{31} Cross, \textit{Justin Smith Morrill}, 26.

\textsuperscript{32} Cross, \textit{Justin Morrill}, 27.
because it “forced education to fit the changing social and economic patterns of an expanding nation”, opening up and reinventing higher education to more Americans.\(^{33}\)

Morrill first got the bill passed in Congress in 1859 but then it was vetoed by President James Buchanan. Reasons for objection to the bill included simple things like cost and whether or not they had the constitutional authority to do such a thing. Other reasons however were about the place of agriculture in education and how this would adversely affect the already existing colleges. \(^{34}\) But even Buchanan declared that “it would be impossible to sustain [the schools] without…a provision” for the “scientific and classical studies”.\(^{35}\) Buchanan, who stopped this bill from becoming the Land-Grant Act of 1859, saw that an encompassing curriculum was vital to the schools. The reason to point this out is because this is a part of the bill that people often overlook, the part which stipulates that all types of education are to be provided and valued equally.

In the midst of the Civil War, Morrill got the bill passed again and President Abraham Lincoln signed it into law in 1862. The bill largely focuses on the lands that would be sold, how each college would require an annual report, and other technicalities.\(^{36}\) For the purposes of this argument, the most important section of this bill is the following:

\[\text{Cross, Justin Smith Morrill, 88.}\]


\[\text{Buchanan, Veto.}\]

\[\text{Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862, US Code 7 (1862) § 301 et seq.} \]
The leading object shall be, without exclusion other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.\textsuperscript{37}

This section of the bill is an indicator that the land-grant schools should construct a comprehensive curriculum. At the same time, it put the emphasis on an agriculturally and industrially concentrated curriculum, thought it does lobby for the inclusion of the liberal arts. This section provides the launching pad to question how much the Land-Grant Act of 1862 actually reflected Morrill’s personal vision for democratizing higher education. Broadly speaking, yes it made education more accessible, but what kind of education was it?

Analyzing a note where Morrill chronicled his thought process behind the first land-grant bill, it is evident that the bill deviates from his personal goals. As discussed in the first chapter, Justin Morrill spent his whole life trying to make up for his own lack of education; he held schooling near and dear to his heart. His identity as the son of a blacksmith and a native of Vermont made him keenly aware that all regions of the United States were not created equal when it came to education. When he saw how cheap the public lands were and how they were “being rapidly dissipated by donations to merely local and private objects”, he saw an opportunity for the states to benefit at the “expense of the property of the Union.”\textsuperscript{38}

Morrill writes that the idea for land-grant schools first came to him around 1856; in this note, he refers to the readily available lands and already established agriculture schools in

\textsuperscript{37} Morrill Act of 1862.

\textsuperscript{38} Justin Morrill, “Personal Papers.” (1874), quoted in William Belmont Parker, \textit{the Life and Public Services of Justin Morrill} (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1924), 262.
Europe.\textsuperscript{39} In his papers, Morrill shares his rationale behind the Land-Grant Act by first discussing the existing agriculture colleges in Europe. He liked this system of schools supported by the government but did not like that “they were confined exclusively to agriculture”, as this “appeared to [him] unnecessarily limited.”\textsuperscript{40} Confined and limited are key words to focus on, as restrictions and limitations in 1862 land-grant colleges are what frustrated Morrill the most. This is easy to understand why when reading Morrill’s detailed reasons for the Land-Grant Act.

In 1874, Morrill put pen to paper to explain the thought process behind the Land-Grant Act. In his first point, Morrill’s Vermont roots immediately shine through. He thought it was a waste the “public lands of most value were being rapidly dissipated by donations to merely local and private objects” when at least “one State…might be benefited at the expense of the property of the Union”.\textsuperscript{41} A later point will expand on this, but as a Vermont native, Morrill was keenly aware that certain states received less resources and benefits than other states. He thought instead of private gain, the lands could could have a greater impact on the public. Next, Morrill discussed how the lands would get damaged through short private occupants, and that the soil would better be tended to by those dedicated to its study. Although Morrill did have personal aspirations involving a more traditional education, he also listened to the rationality of science-and hopes a school would teach others to as well. It is in his next three reasons where he shifts to discuss education more specifically and in multiple forms.

\textsuperscript{39} Parker, \textit{Life and Public Services}, 262.

\textsuperscript{40} Morrill, “Personal Papers”, quoted in Parker, \textit{Life and Public Services}, 262.

\textsuperscript{41} Morrill, “Personal Papers”, quoted in Parker, \textit{Life and Public Services}, 262.
In his second set of points where Morrill focused on the real driving force of the bill: education. After reading these three reasons, it is hard to believe that agriculture was the only thing on Morrill’s mind. This part is much more personal than that, and where he discusses his father and the monopoly of education perpetrated by America’s upper class.\footnote{Morrill, “Personal Papers”, quoted in Parker, Life and Public Services, 263.} His father felt the same deprivation his son did from his basically non-existent education. Therefore, Morrill felt the urgency for an expansive education system, which would combine industrial classes (a new concept) along with agriculture AND traditional, liberal arts courses. From a 21\textsuperscript{st} century perspective, it is easy to lump agricultural and industrial studies together, but back then, it was a novel concept to create curriculums that focused on the mechanical arts. It was not only the makeup of education that Morrill wanted to expand but also the type of college students.

After sharing his own story, Morrill expressed his feelings about the current state of higher education in the United States. In the mid 19\textsuperscript{th} century, there were a fairly limited number of colleges in the United States and those who could attend were a small, well-off part of the population. “Those only destined to the so-called learned professions” were privileged to participation in the “monopoly of education.”\footnote{Morrill, “Personal Papers”, quoted in Parker, Life and Public Services, 262.} He strongly believed that by denying laborers an education was “inconsistent with the welfare and completely prosperity of American institutions.”\footnote{Parker, Life and Public Services, 263.} Expansive education meant more than changing the content of college, it also meant filling the classrooms with more than the affluent elite. The working class desired to go to
college too and Morrill said they should not miss out because they “must win their bread by labor”.

In his fifth and final argument, Morrill turned to the issue of state resources. He pointed out that “many of the States were deficient [in educational resources] and likely so to remain unless aided by the common fund of the proceeds of the public lands.” The federal government had to get involved if education was going to move away from its image as a private status symbol. Strafford, Vermont was not a bastion of wealth or knowledge and there were no signs this would change unless something big like the federal government’s involvement happened. Morrill saw the land-grant schools as a way to expand education, both in terms of access and curriculum, so that the future sons of blacksmiths in Vermont would not share in his deprivation.

These were the arguments Morrill laid own for his on personal use, not necessarily to be seen by any others. This is essential to understanding Morrill’s mission on a personal level as opposed to a legislative level, because his most sincere hopes and desires can be exposed here in a way they cannot be in Congress. In arguing that Morrill’s views strayed from the actual 1862 land-grant colleges, his personal desire for a proper education is so hugely important.

While the previous section explains Morrill’s motivations for a land-grant university system, it does not give the full picture. The idea for land-grant schools may have come to Morrill around 1856, but neither he nor anybody else claims he was the one to have created the concept. He cited the European agricultural schools as inspiration and never tried to say he

45 Morrill, “Personal Papers”, quoted in Parker, Life and Public Services, 263.

46 Morrill, “Personal Papers”, quoted in Parker, Life and Public Services, 262.
invented the idea of the agricultural college. However, he found the European agriculture schools to be an imperfect model, and much too narrow in concept.\footnote{Morrill, “Personal Papers”, quoted in Parker, \textit{Life and Public Services}, 262.} He valued the classics, and saw a place for all types of education in the land-grant colleges, not just vocational studies. The opportunity to take education to the national stage through the sale of public lands and the idea of agricultural and industrial schools “was so congenial to his own views, it responded so closely to a need which he had experienced, that he embraced it with conviction.”\footnote{Parker, \textit{Life and Public Services}, 276.} This statement both expresses Morrill’s enthusiasm for the land-grant model but gently hints that it was not his first and foremost choice. He had to work with what was available and what he could get his congressional colleagues to support. A look at the historical circumstances surrounding the land-grant bill provides a sober look at its passage.

As stated, it was not passed until 1862 when President Abraham Lincoln signed and approved the bill. What is the first thing that comes to mind when one thinks of Abraham Lincoln? The American Civil War. Yes, Morrill got this bill, a bill aimed at improving industry and agriculture, passed during a war where the country’s agricultural core and industrial nucleus were separated. Whether the Confederacy would be completely lost or returned to the Union, the American system of agriculture was about to get a drastic makeover.\footnote{Jack Temple Kirby, “The American Civil War: An Environmental View”, \textit{National Humanities Center}, (Revised July 2001), accessed April 16, 2016, http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nattrans/ntuseland/essays/amcward.htm} If the Confederacy returned to the Union, slave labor would no longer be the majority of labor in the fields in the south, and new laborers would be necessary to replace them. If the Confederacy did secede,
farming and industry in the north had better start thinking about how to make up for all the crops and lands they had lost. With either outcome, it was agriculture and industry that made this bill so appealing to Congress, not education and equal opportunity.

Morrill knew his chances of getting the bill passed were not high. Thus he began talking to other members of the House and Senate to assess interest levels. He utilized the President of the Agricultural College of Michigan for an account of the usefulness of this school and the European schools, and another member of Congress used this for his speech before the House. He explains in detail other maneuvers and deals he had to make to get the bill through Congress, all of which focuses on agriculture and public lands, while education and equality coming up almost never. As noted by William Belmont Parker, Morrill did have an “art in the conduct of legislation.” This is not meant to criticize Morrill for playing politics or suggest he did not have high expectations for the land-grant schools, on the contrary, it is only to advise that his ideology may have not been as present in the 1862 bill due to these limitations.

As the previously mentioned Agricultural College of Michigan indicates, there were agriculture schools in the United States prior to the passage of the Land-Grant Act of 1862. This means that many of the land-grant schools were not starting from scratch; many were agriculture schools finding compromise and funding with Morrill’s Land-grant bill. This is a reason many 1862 land-grant schools focused on agricultural education.

50 Parker, Life and Public Services, 265.

51 Parker, Life and Public Services, 262.
Many of what are now 1862 land-grant schools have stories and missions which predate Morrill’s bill. Michigan State University often battles with Pennsylvania State University about who is the oldest land-grant institution. The Agricultural College of the State of Michigan was founded in 1855; the Michigan State Constitution of 1850’s call for an “agricultural school”. Pennsylvania State University was founded the same year, as the Farmers’ High School of Pennsylvania, becoming the Agricultural College of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania’s sole land-grant university. There was also the University of Georgia, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (which still holds partial land-grant status) and more. All these schools proudly tout founding dates prior to 1862, which is important to know because it reflects a founding mission unlike Morrill’s own.

The all-encompassing curriculum Morrill intended was not always apparent in the 1862 land-grant institutions. Since many of the schools started as farming high schools, the Land-Grant Act was supposed to force an expansion into the industrial and liberal arts. When Pennsylvania State University was granted land-grant status in 1862, it took them actually until the 1880s to “expand its curriculum to match the Land-Grant Act’s broad mandate” meaning for 20 or so years they were receiving land-grant funding despite still operating on an agricultural design. Although Ohio State University was founded in 1870, a direct result of the Land-Grant Act of 1862, the university says it took them some years of dispute about whether to implement


\[\text{“Our History”, Pennsylvania State University, accessed April 17, 2016, http://www.psu.edu/this-is-pennstate/our-history.}\]

\[\text{“Our History”, Penn State.}\]
an agriculture education or a broader, classical education too.\(^{55}\) On their school website currently, Michigan State University shares that it was not until the school was granted land-grant status that this “formidable mission: to democratize higher education and expand its opportunities based on merit, not social class…to make public service an essential part of higher education’s mandate” became part of the Michigan State University mission.\(^{56}\) A lot of these schools struggled with this broad curriculum idea that Morrill really pushed for, and many got stuck on vocational training and strict mechanic/agricultural courses without seeing the benefits of adding liberal arts offerings. It reflects an agricultural identity for the 1862 schools, further proven by examining the past names of 1862 schools.

Analyzing the name changes of the 1862 institutions demonstrates that their curriculums heavily favored agricultural and vocational studies as opposed to the liberal arts. For example, in its 161 years of existence, Michigan State has had six different names:

1855 – Agricultural College of the State of Michigan  
1861 – State Agricultural College  
1909 – Michigan Agricultural College  
1925 – Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Science  
1955 – Michigan State University of Agriculture and Applied Science  
1964 – Michigan State University\(^{57}\)

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\(^{57}\) “History”, Michigan State.
As shown, five of the six names contain the word “agriculture”. In fact, it was not until 1964 that the word agriculture officially left the university’s name to become the Michigan State University we recognize it as today. Many other schools also had agriculturally related jargon in their name too, like Pennsylvania State University which was founded as the Farmer’s High School in 1855, then becoming the Agricultural College of Pennsylvania in 1862 and then Pennsylvania State College in 1874. 58 Virginia Tech (officially known today as Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University) started out as Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and held onto its agricultural and mechanical label until 1944.59 In Texas, the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas was founded in 1871, which is known as Texas A&M University today. 60 For the case of Illinois, it was not agriculture that dominated but the mechanical arts.

When the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign opened its doors, it was called the Illinois Industrial University.61 While Morrill was very supportive of the industrial arts in higher education, as it was a huge part of his motivation in these schools, he did not place a higher value on it than agriculture or the liberal arts. Morrill wanted to house industrial arts, agriculture and

58 “Our History”, Penn State.


60 “History of the University”, Texas A&M University, accessed April 19, 2016, https://www.tamu.edu/about/history.html.

the liberal arts all under one educational roof and to emphasize no single field more than another. Therefore, this still reflects a limited mission in the founding days at the University of Illinois.

The reason to knit pick at all these names is because they sent a message to prospective students, that it was there one could learn about labor and science but it did not really highlight the (however limited) liberal arts they were also supposed to provide. For the first decades of the schools, they would largely attract those who wanted to advance in farming or the industrial arts, which frustrated Morrill.

In a congressional speech made after the 1862 Land-Grant Act, Morrill’s discontent with the 1862 land-grant schools appears. The points described above are the very things he took issue with: the agricultural character of the 1862s, their narrow curriculums and thus narrow aspirations of their graduates. In the speech Morrill makes in 1876 for an expansion of the land-grant college system, he dedicates one section of his speech to discuss the shortcomings of the current land-grant schools. “What the National Colleges Have Done” is a section where Morrill says though it is too early to call the schools a failure, there are still issues to deal with like the schools’ reputations. He is extremely frustrated that “agricultural colleges” were the reputations of the schools, making them sound narrower in makeup than he intended.

Unfortunately, the schools actually were narrower than he intended, specifically in terms of their curriculum. He reminded his colleagues that “the charter is broad, covering no sham, no inferior work, and if it had been made narrower, these colleges would…have been less useful”.

He also exhibited concern that people expected the schools to only produce agriculturists, and urged that graduates “have the right to do that or anything else they choose; to be artists,

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mechanics, surveyors, merchants, teachers, lawyers, doctors, or ministers.”

Through and through, Morrill is advocating for an open curriculum and open ended education, with students understanding all opportunities a land-grant college degree could give them. He ends this section with an eloquent phrase:

The pursuit of money-getting alone—all pervading as the passion may be—is unsatisfactory, and those who furnish food for the whole body of mankind may reasonably demand some share of mental sustenance or at least may demand the crumbs which drop from the tables of the learned.

How can the laborers who provide all physical nourishment to the learned men not receive a return of knowledge? In the eyes of Morrill, money cannot truly provide the sustenance Americans need. He is not asking that working class all receive Harvard degrees, but he does not think their status is a reason to be completely robbed of any higher knowledge.

While the 1862 land-grant schools did expand their course offerings as time progressed, they never became a full realization of Morrill’s vision. The 1862s stick to their agricultural status today, as most evident 2012 Smithsonian Folk Life Festival exhibit entitled *Campus and Community: Public Land-Grant Universities and the USDA at 150*. While the word agricultural is not immediately apparent in the title, look at the other institution in the exhibit: the USDA. USDA stands for the United States Department of Agriculture, and if the USDA is sharing exhibit space with the land-grant schools, it is pretty clear that agriculture is going to be the focus of it. Already the schools have been labelled as the “agriculture schools” Morrill so hoped they would not be called. In fact, *Campus and Community* focuses mostly on innovations in farming.

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64 Morrill, “Educational Fund Speech,” 15.
technology which only furthers this public image of the land-grant schools as less “broad” and “narrower” than Morrill intended. Delving into the specifics of the exhibit, it is clear the public imagination of land-grants is stuck on this incomplete version.

The exhibit spends a large part of the exhibit focused on two themes: “Reinventing Agriculture” and “Sustainable Solutions, where they focus largely on technology, like the University of Tennessee’s solar house or the water engineering project done by Oregon State University. While these are testaments to the power of education in agriculture and other industries, it is only highlighting a fraction of the work done at these schools. For instance, the tsunami simulator provided by Oregon State University for the exhibit is not just from OSU. Over the simulator is a banner which reads the Oregon State University’s College of Engineering, showing the factions present at the school. Even if the exhibit has themes meant to look at the traditions of these colleges and their impact on their communities, they still show little to no evidence of the college’s work in the liberal arts or social sciences. This is a key point to keep in mind for the next chapter on the 1890 Land-grant schools and their own Smithsonian exhibit.


68 “Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Campus and Community.”xxxiv
The real issue of this exhibit is that it is not displaying the wide capabilities of land-grant institutions. Today, many 1862 land-grant institutions still come off as very agriculturally and technologically oriented. For instance, while many schools have lost the word agriculture from their titles, other words like “technology” or “polytechnic” have replaced them. In turn, they may give prospective students a limited perception of the school. If a student hopes to pursue an English or History degree, she might not think to look at schools like Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology based solely on their names, unaware of the fact they may have great programs in the humanities.

Overall, it seems appropriate the 1862 land-grant schools were originally labelled agriculture schools because that has been their focus since they were born. They have made great strides to open higher education to more Americans, and expanded the very definition of a college curriculum. For this Justin Morrill should be exceedingly proud. Yet, it still seems as if his visions of a comprehensive college education, where a student could go from an industrial class to a literature class, has failed to become reality. That is, until 1890.
CHAPTER THREE: Dreams Come True in 1890

My job this morning is to continue this story and talk about the impact Morrill Act on the 1890 land-grant development. This is a story that is a little bit different, and you may not be as familiar with it as you are with the 1862s... there was a major problem when the 1862 legislation was enacted. You might ask, what was that? Slavery still existed in the United States.- Mary Evans Sias, President of Kentucky State University.69

As discussed in the first two chapters, Justin Morrill sought to elevate the level of attention paid to education in the United States. Not only did he want educational accessibility to

expand, he wanted it to encompass everything from farming to French. Morrill knew that most Americans were like his family which mean they had to support themselves through physically laborious jobs, not through soft handed posts like that of a lawyer or minister. He wanted a college comparable to that of those in the American upper class, an institution that would educate them past their vocations and give them pride not only as a worker but as an informed member of society too. However, the 1862 schools got caught up in the vocational aspects and did not necessarily share Morrill’s esteem for the liberal arts, nor saw what it could do for the average working American. While the 1862 land-grant universities did not value education like Morrill hoped, this later set of land-grant universities would.

In the act, the Land-grant Act of 1890, a special set of schools were established for the newly liberated African American populations in the former Confederate states. The 1890 land-grant schools shared Justin Morrill’s value of education and emphasized the liberal arts right along side the agricultural and industrial arts. When putting Morrill’s own speeches and letters into conversation with documents surrounding the 1890 institutions, one can see they both value a holistic and a community oriented curriculum in higher education.

Since the Land-grant Act of 1890 is given such little attention in contemporary education narratives, it has a lesser known history. The last chapter discussed some of the issues with the first land-grant bill, like funding problems and limited curriculums. Another major issue was that the bill did not extend to the southern states, who were back from rebellion but still denied the benefits of the first Morrill Act. These were all things that required Justin Morrill to start rallying support for additions to the bill but there was also a new part of society in need of education: African Americans. Thus, in the 1890 bill, the following stipulation was made:
No money shall be paid out under this subchapter to any State or Territory for the support or maintenance of a college where a distinction of race or color is made in the admission of students, but the establishment and maintenance of such colleges separately for white and colored students shall be held to be a compliance with the provisions of said sections if the funds received in such State or Territory be equitably divided as hereinafter set forth.\(^{70}\)

Despite this clause saying no one could be denied from these public schools because of discrimination, there was an allotment for a separate but equal (though often not) black schools in the southern states. Due to all the historically black colleges founded under the 1890 Land-grant Act, they have come to be known as the “1890s.” Though the 1890s have been largely separated from Justin Morrill, they are a greater testament to his vision than any 1862 school. Both Morrill and the African American community believed education was necessary for all Americans and not something that should be left to only those who could afford it. Morrill truly wanted access for all people, and lobbied specifically for the education of the African American population.

In the speech he gave before the Educational Fund in 1876, he included a specific section on the need for educational opportunities in African American communities. In a short paragraphed called “The Colored Race”, Senator Morrill (elected to the Senate in 1867) argues why African Americans specifically need educational institutions. He asks “are we to praise freedom and shirk the duty of making it better than slavery?\(^{71}\)” Morrill did not see the government’s duty end with emancipation, because freedmen deserved to be more than “cumberers of the ground” and it was surely wrong to “grant liberty and then refuse it all

\(^{70}\) Morrill Act of 1890, *US Statutes at Large* 417 (1890), codified *US Code* 7 § 321 et seq.

\(^{71}\) Morrill, “Educational Fund Speech”, 9-10.
nourishment”. Nourishment is the same word Morrill used to argue for the white working class to receive an education. He equates the depravation of former slaves to that of white laborers, because to him, it is just as cruel to let someone go thirsty as it is to let them go uneducated.

The inclusion of the section “The Colored Race” reflects great significance and discernment by Morrill. In his book The Life and Public Services of Justin Smith Morrill, author William Belmont Parker includes a chapter called “Literary Work” where he analyzes Morrill’s writing style. Parker does not praise him as a gifted speech deliverer, but rather “a modest literary talent…[whose] speech set no crowds aflame…but they were both listened to and read with a grave and quiet satisfaction by intelligent people.” Morrill shared this opinion, as he responded to a constituent’s praise of his speeches by saying “they are consequently embroidered more with facts than with rhetoric.” This means that he did not throw the words “liberty” and “nourishment” around just to sound flashy, but that he honestly believed these were the God-given rights of the African American race.

The timing of this section as well as the speech’s position in history both further the argument that Morrill held a strong belief in educational opportunities for freed blacks. This speech is twenty-two pages long, with twenty pages of actual text. Even if 19th century politicians had longer attention spans than millennials today, it is still a lot to listen to or read. The most important parts of the speech should be in the beginning or at the end, when most


73 Parker, Life and Public Services, 328.

attention is garnered. Not only is the section “The Colored Race” in the first third of the speech, Morrill actually first touches upon them at the beginning of the second page when he says; “among all of the four or five million of colored population only 180,372 attend school or hardly enough to furnish a silver lining to a cloud so dark.”\(^\text{75}\) He also connected the educational deficiencies of African Americans to white workers by using the same language for both groups throughout his speech. Remember, it is only 1876 at this point- less than ten years after the end of the Civil War. Most 1862 land-grant institutions were not technically segregated, as no college “where a distinction of race or color is made in the admission of students” can receive funding.\(^\text{76}\) However, racism ran rampant at this time, and therefore many students did not feel comfortable attending them.\(^\text{77}\)

While there are many things at play in this speech, Morrill’s care to have a section where he visibly supports the education of newly freed African Americans should not be underappreciated. When he gave this speech in 1876, Morrill faced a vastly different Congress than he had in 1853. 1876 was the first time Morrill had to face a democratic majority and watch his former allies removed from control of the congressional committees.\(^\text{78}\) That same year was a heated presidential election, one where voter fraud ran rampant and blacks were being bullied/threatened from the polls. This led to the election of Rutherford B. Hayes, and one of the first

\(^\text{75}\) Morrill, “Educational Fund Speech”, 4.

\(^\text{76}\) Morrill Act of 1890, \textit{US Statutes at Large} 417 (1890), codified \textit{US Code} 7 § 321 et seq.

\(^\text{77}\) Cross, \textit{Justin Smith Morrill}, 86.

\(^\text{78}\) Parker, \textit{Life and Public Services}, 285.
things he did when he took office in 1877 was withdraw the last of the federal troops from the southern states, which is considered the emphatic end to the Reconstruction Era.\textsuperscript{79} It was nearly as violent and volatile as it was during the Civil War, and yet again, amidst it all, Justin Morrill was fighting for higher education. This is a bit of a detour from the point of this chapter, but it is meant to drive home the point that Morrill was very passionate about the land-grant schools on a very specific level.

Morrill’s vision in the 1890 land-grant colleges is visible when looking at how their curriculums were constructed. The constant tension between the liberal arts and vocational studies was something with which all land-grant colleges struggled. Due to the problems at the 1862 schools, Morrill was able to better articulate what he strived for in these institutions, something from which the 1890 institutions benefitted.

In the last chapter, Morrill’s disappointment with the 1862 schools was vehemently expressed. He says that while agricultural courses should be included and valued, “the charter is broad, covering no sham, no inferior work, and if it had been made narrower, these colleges would…have been less useful.”\textsuperscript{80} Morrill’s emphasis on the equality between all forms of education is something mirrored by some of the earliest 1890 schools. One of the three stipulations set for Lincoln University states “its fundamental idea shall be to combine study and labor.”\textsuperscript{81} The word “combine” implies all field of study are equal and necessary. Another small


\textsuperscript{80} Morrill, “Educational Fund Speech”, 13.

example of this at an 1890 school is South Carolina State University who lists the “sciences, literature and history” in one fell swoop as a part of a curriculum that taught the mechanical arts at the same time it trained teachers.\textsuperscript{82} The 1890 schools all proudly share their diverse curriculums and they do not prioritize any sector of study over another; the benefits of all are recognized. Morrill was so focused on education that he set his sights on more than just land-grant colleges, but primary and secondary education as well.

Despite that his bill only providing the funds for a national higher education system, Justin Morrill hoped to spur an overall increase in the American education system. He concerned himself with elevating the importance of all vocations, and one that has not been mentioned until now is that of the teacher. At this time in history, it seemed all too easy to call oneself a teacher without the actual education to back it up. For example Morrill deplored the fact that in 1874, of the 15,003 people to receive a teaching certificate in the state of Pennsylvania only 374 actually possessed the necessary skills and educations.\textsuperscript{83} This was a total disgrace and he assumed if this was a problem in the northern states then surely it was in southern states too. Consequently he argued that “if there were no other work for national colleges” that producing educators would be reason enough.\textsuperscript{84} Those in charge of the 1890 land-grant institutions felt the same.

The 1890 land-grant schools took seriously their duty to not only educate themselves but the rest of the black community. When reading the past names of current 1890 schools, another


\textsuperscript{83} Morrill, “Educational Fund Speech”, 20.

\textsuperscript{84} Morrill, “Educational Fund Speech”, 20.
word besides “negroes” keep popping up: normal. For those unfamiliar with what a normal college is, it is a school where high school graduates can be trained to become teachers themselves, most often for elementary, middle or high school. Right from the beginning, the 1890s schools valued learning so much that they wanted to use their own education to teach others. Education was not a short term issue but a long term solution for the African American community. As Justin Morrill said, “elevate the whole class and there will arise an esprit de corps that will permanently protect its own reputation.”

He worried about the large gap between secondary education and higher education. “The ladders by which boys climb from common schools to a college education should not be placed beyond the reach of the common people” he said. This was an issue that was even more severe in the black community, and in many of the 1890 land-grant schools. The schools hoped to extend this pride across generations by offering education to their communities in as many ways as possible.

At the Library of Congress celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Land-Grant Act of 1862, the then President of Kentucky State University, shared the story of her mother-in law. Sias explains that her mother-in-law grew up in Mississippi, at a time where she could not receive an education past eighth grade. She was barred the same way Justin Morrill was but luckily for her, Alcorn State University (then Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College) was there to save the

day. Her mother-in-law “finished eighth grade and her father got her to Alcorn. Like many 1890 schools at the time, they had high schools. She went to high school there, finished, went on to college…and graduated.”

Sias goes on to explain that this single university completely changed the trajectory of not only her mother-in-law’s life, but descending generations of her family who have gone on to receive PhDs, masters and other graduate degrees. This one 1890 land-grant university was able to break the very “monopoly of education” that Justin Morrill sought to break from the very beginning. Although not every family had the same experience as Sias family, the 1890 land-grant institutions expanded the accessibility to education in a variety of ways.

As the previous examples demonstrate, the individual communities that surrounded 1890 land-grant schools were where the schools could make the most difference. This was something Morrill was very conscious of, his hometown roots never far from his mind. Even with all his success on a national level, he still chose to open a library in his hometown, so that anyone with “youthful ambition and hopes” would not be “denied” just because he had been “taken perhaps by his parents reluctantly from the schoolhouse…at the age of fifteen.” He held community outreach close to his own heart, and thus would be so pleased to know that public service is how the 1890 schools chose to define themselves. The Smithsonian Exhibit Go Forth and Serve:

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88 “Morrill”, American History TV, C-SPAN.

89 “Morrill”, American History TV, C-SPAN.

90 Morrill, “Personal Papers” Quoted in Parker, Life and Public Services, 263.

91 Parker, Life and Services, 38.
Black Land-grant Colleges Entering Their Second Century is a testament to a school system motivated to not only educate but serve its community.

Go Forth and Serve was an exhibit that highlighted the service-oriented nature of the 1890 land-grant universities. While the details supplied by the exhibit are very telling, the story behind the birth of the exhibit necessitates attention as well. As the 100th anniversary of the Second Morrill Act approached in 1990, a group of presidents of the historically black land-grant colleges approached the Smithsonian about doing an exhibit on the 1890s. They did this because there was little information available on the 1890 schools and they were hoping to educate the American community at large about these institutions.

It is intriguing that the exhibit was held at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC; just like Justin Morrill always called Vermont home despite leaving it for the nation’s capital, the Smithsonian exhibit’s transition from Smithsonian to travelling exhibit reflected the 1890s schools’ attentiveness to their roots. In proposal documents for a travelling version of the successful Smithsonian exhibit, they argue that the educational value of the exhibit was the main reason it should receive funding:

The Land-Grant College imprint on communities large and small broadens the educational potential of GO FORTH AND SERVE. It is a backdrop for community involvement, encouraging people to become more familiar with fellow residents affiliated with the schools, to identify with historical information, to spotlight individual accomplishments and, in the process, take on a kind of “ownership of the exhibit itself.”

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93 Special Exhibition Fund Face Sheet for Go Forth and Serve: Black Land-grant Colleges Entering Their Second Century, February 28, 1991, Smithsonian Institution Travelling Exhibit Service, Archives, Box 10 of Accession 00-069, 2-3.
Community is vital to this exhibit; it is the very essence of these institutions. Both the 1890s and Justin Morrill thought education should be more than an independent pursuit. Morrill not only provided a library but created a book sharing community when he was growing up in Strafford. Spreading and sharing knowledge has always been a key tenet of education for Morrill and it translated to the 1890s. Both understood that education was a resource, a tool for more than just the workforce. Despite his immense political success, Justin Morrill always felt somewhat inferior to his Capitol Hill colleagues since most of them had more formal education than he did. Knowledge and education are important symbols of in American society and to hold a degree was a huge source of pride, both in the eyes of Morrill and those at the 1890s institutions. If it is not clear yet, the 1890 institutions were about more than agriculture and industry, they were about “encourag[ing] students to develop self-confidence, heighten their awareness of their culture and history, tap their leadership potential and develop a sense of social responsibility”. Community is at the core of the 1890 land-grant institutions, which is further explained in the actual exhibit.

The general theme of the exhibit proposal documents is community, whether it be involving the 1890 university communities themselves in the exhibit or highlighting the work they have already done in their respective towns. Those constructing the exhibit cited the variety of ways the 1890 land-grant institutions “continue to enrich community life in areas located near

95 Edited Exhibits Script for Go Forth and Serve: Black Land-grant Colleges Entering Their Second Century, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Box 10 of Accession 00-069, 10.
Land-Grant schools.”  

This reflects the very hopes Morrill had for the second set of land-grant institutions.

One thoroughly educated man exerts an influence over an entire neighborhood, sometimes throughout the state and nation; but the influence of a well-directed college is much more extensive and much more permanent.”

By “extensive” Morrill means that knowledge is not an individual gift; those who are educated have a duty to extend themselves to their society, and improve the lives of their community. At the 1890 schools, they did this most through extension services.

In the early years of the schools, these “programs brought the latest information to rural residents” and they covered a variety of topics, such as “farming practices, health issues and homemaking techniques”. While these schools may not send out newsletters on how to clean woodwork any longer, service is still a vital part of their mission. In fact, in the schools’ mission statements phrases like a “commitment to service” show this core theme is still alive and well today.

Though a lot of credit has been given to the 1890 Land-grant universities, they were of course not perfect and faced similar struggles to their 1862 counterparts. In the exhibit Go Forth and Serve, there is a section entitled “Liberal Arts vs. Industrial Education”, which discussed the

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96 Special Exhibition Fund, Go Forth and Serve, Smithsonian Institution Archives, 2.


98 Edited Exhibits Script, Go Forth and Serve, Smithsonian Institution Archives, 16.

99 Edited Exhibits Script, Go Forth and Serve, Smithsonian Institution Archives, 17.

struggle the 1890 institutions faced over how to construct their curriculums. One institution is of particular interest, not only because it is one of the better known 1890 institutions, but because at first glance it appears to be in direct defiance of Justin Morrill’s educational mission. Tuskegee University has evolved and changed throughout the years, carrying out the values of a land-grant institution in surprising ways.

Prior to discussing Tuskegee University, a look at the discussions around African American education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is beneficial. W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington are two of the most famous figures of the African American community in this time period. They are also remembered for their starkly different views on what freed blacks should accept in American society at the time.101 Booker T. Washington was very focused on vocational and industrial education, not the humanities or liberal arts. On the other hand, W.E.B. Du Bois thought this limited education meant an acceptance of white oppression, and was dead set on education as the way for social change in American race relations.102 This tension can be seen at play in many historically black colleges, such as Tuskegee University.

Tuskegee University, through struggle and disagreement, has carried out the ideals of a wholesome education. When Tuskegee University was in its early years, its president, Booker T. Washington, emphasized industrial education.103 His aversion to the liberal arts at first feels in conflict with Morrill. At the same time though, Morrill does not discourage any type of


102 “Booker T. & W.E.B.”, PBS.

103 Edited Exhibits Script, Go Forth and Serve, Smithsonian Institution Archives, 7. xlviii
What Morrill sees as important is that everything in life has an educational aspect, and understanding this was key to a successful higher education institution. For the example of farming, he states “if the number of college students proposing to be farmers is less than it should be, so much the more need is there of creating and cultivating a taste in that direction.” Tuskegee has been doing just that, showing the power of education in the work place so that it is more appealing rather than laborious. In turn, they have also expanded their curriculum over time to become “comprehensive”, with a college of arts and sciences that offers degrees in things like English and the performing arts. Today Tuskegee University proudly describes its performing arts departments as one that enables their students to become “global-minded citizens who are truly prepared to apply their talents” in unique yet realistic ways.

The 1890s have said themselves they share the same beliefs of their founder. On the website for the network of 1890 universities, not only do they include a history section exclusively on Justin Morrill, they discuss the “Morrill Vision.” Here they credit Morrill as a


“magnanimous leader…and his vision all about education, opportunity and national prosperity.”

At the 1890 land-grant schools, it has never been simply about learning new farming techniques or writing dozens upon dozens of papers. It is about educating and forming the whole person, just liked Justin Morrill tried to do himself. While this chapter hopes to have convinced readers of the close connection between Justin Morrill and the 1890s land-grant institutions, it does not fully explain why the 1890s are not more widely discussed in the land-grant narrative.

CHAPTER FOUR: Where Have You Been, 1890?

When I first discovered the story of the 1890s, I started discussing it with my colleagues. Speaking with my adviser who holds a PhD in American higher education and another student who specialized in African American studies, it was surprising that both knew little to no information about the 1890 historically black land-grant institutions. While this is only a small sample, it reflected the little literature I found on the 1890 land-grant institutions in my research. Going directly to the source, (the 1890s historically black land-grant institutions), it became

110 “Morrill Acts”, 1890 Land-Grant Universities.
apparent quickly that the 1890s are not widely known as land-grants because they are much more focused on their original mission: to educate the underserved African American population.

As explained in the last chapter, the 1862 schools targeted the white working class, but the 1890 schools were meant to serve the entire African American population since there were no other options at the time. The African American community saw education as more than a path to a job, but a means of self-betterment and mobility. W.E.B. Du Bois stated that “education is that whole system of human training within and without the school house walls, which molds and develops men.” The mentality of the 1890s was just this, developing and molding a new generation of freed African Americans. Their historical identity and position in society is what drove and defined them, not their land-grant funding. The 1890 historically black land-grant colleges have been left out of the land-grant narrative due to their racially focused identity instead of their relationship with Justin Morrill and their land-grant identity.

1890 land-grant universities are acutely aware of their marginalized role in the American land-grant narrative. At the Library of Congress for the 150th anniversary of the Land-grant Act of 1862. At the event, there was a panel featuring university presidents from the land-grant schools. It included three 1862 school presidents and one 1890 school president. The 1862 presidents spoke first, and all focused on their advancements in agriculture and technology. Then followed the President of Kentucky State University, who gave a much more memorable speech despite being outnumbered by 1862s. She opened her speech with the following:

There was a major problem when the 1862 legislation was enacted. What was that, you might ask? Slavery still existed in the United States…So even at the close of the Civil War in 1865, it was still considered a criminal offense for blacks to be educated…blacks

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were prohibited from going to 1862 schools…There was a realization black citizens had to be educated.\textsuperscript{112}

This quote, implies that the 1890s have been left out of the land-grant narrative similar to the way they were left out of the first Land-Grant Act. As she goes on to explain their roots in a post Civil War era, it is impossible not to focus on their African American identity. They are the entire reason for the creation of these schools. The realization black citizens had to be educated was already quite strong in southern African American communities prior the 1890 bill. In fact, many 1890 land-grant schools have earlier roots than the bill, similar to the 1862 schools that were founded before the first bill was passed. Out of today’s nineteen certified 1890 land-grant institutions, twelve of them tout founding dates prior to 1890. For the 1862s it was usually the schools that were founded before the bill that were most often obsessed with agriculture. It is a similar story with the 1890 schools, except instead of agriculture, they are stuck on race.

Some of these schools resulted from state legislatures and one even received land-grant status from the 1862 act but these separate roots are also why the 1890s are not as closely associated with Justin Morrill. Although he may have been the father of land-grant colleges, he was not necessarily the father of the 1890s simply because many of these schools had a jump start on him (despite the fact he tried to get to this second bill passed as early as 1876). These schools, out of no disrespect to Justin Morrill, are just focused on their very humble and romantic beginnings.

Many 1890 schools attribute their birth to the very communities they sought to educate.

\textsuperscript{112} “Morrill”, American History TV, C-SPAN.
One school with this kind of story is Lincoln University in Missouri. Founded in 1866, Lincoln was started by the 62nd United States Colored Infantry in Missouri. 1866 means this was 44 years prior to the 1890 bill’s passage and six years before Morrill even introduced the second bill. This kind of vision alone is astounding, but considering that no land-grant bill also meant no government funding makes it even more impressive. The 62nd Infantry donated $5,000 and the 65th Colored Infantry of Missouri donated $1,400 to start what was then called the Lincoln Institute. They opened their doors on September 17, 1866 and operated the school independently until they began to receive aid from the Missouri state government in 1870. In 1909, the Tennessee State General Assembly created the Agricultural and Industrial Normal School. This would eventually become Tennessee State University and though founded after 1890, the university did not receive full land-grant status until 1958. Kentucky State University, Alabama A&M University and more were funded through local efforts originally instead of land-grant funding. It took a long time with some schools, most recently in 2014 with Central State University in Ohio, to receive land-grant funding. And while these schools embraced the curriculum and funding that comes with land-grant status, their origins outside the Land-Grant Act has given them more complex missions. They are not direct products of Justin Morrill’s legislation; both he and the 1890s have stories that joined one another well after the

113 Morrill, Life and Public Services, 272.

114 “Our History”, Lincoln University.


other began. There are also some 1890 schools that have their own founding fathers, like Tuskegee University.

An 1890 school founded prior to the act, Tuskegee University was built upon the tenet that education was vital to the newly freed African Americans in the former Confederate states. Created as the Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Teachers, the school was founded by Lewis Adams who is a perfect example of how 1890s have a strong identity outside their land-grant status, despite having very similar goals and beliefs to Justin Morrill.

Like Morrill used his political prowess to get the Land-Grant Acts passed, Lewis Adams used his own influence to create this school for African Americans in Alabama. The son of a slave woman and a white planter, Adams never had a formal education but was able to read and write (in five different languages) and was also a very knowledgeable blacksmith and shoemaker, similar to Morrill. Also similar to Morrill, Adams appreciated technical skills and taught them to other African Americans in the Macon County community but still believed a classical education was invaluable. He took it upon himself to teach Sunday schools where he drilled children in the rules of reading, writing and arithmetic along with religion.

Using his political prowess and prominent role in the African American community, Adams was able to get the Alabama State Senate to open an educational center for African

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118 Brenda Flanagan and Yussuf J. Simmonds, "THE LOS ANGELES SENTINEL'S LEGENDS of the PAST; Lewis Adams 'Tuskegee's Real Founder'," The Los Angeles Sentinel (Los Angeles, CA), October 2005, accessed April 20, 2016, ProQuest.
Americans. Thus Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute opened its doors in 1881 and has become one of the most famous historically black land-grant colleges.

Despite institutions like Tuskegee and Lincoln showing the accomplishments of 1890 schools, these stories often go unheard. One has to ask the question: why? One of the reasons the 1890 land-grant stories go unheard is because the 1890s are usually put under the larger umbrella of HBCUs: Historically Black Colleges and Universities. As of May 2015, there are 107 accredited historically black colleges in the United States. Only nineteen of these schools are 1890 land-grant institutions. This subgenre of schools is more concerned with this larger network which is evident in the way they discuss their history.

When visiting the “About/History” pages of the 1890 universities, they are much quicker to highlight their historically black status than their land-grant status. For example, on Langston University’s website page entitled “History of Langston University”, they mark the university in the first sentence as “Oklahoma’s only historically black college or university (HBCU).” It is not until three paragraphs later that they mention the school’s land-grant status only in one sentence that says “it was founded as a land-grant college through the Morrill Act of 1890.” Langston does not harp on its land-grant status; it presents it as a simple, financial fact. Note that this is coming from a school that would not have existed without the Land Grant Act. Lincoln University similarly takes multiple paragraphs on its page “History of Lincoln University” to


121 “History of Langston University”, Langston University.
divulge its land-grant status.122 Some schools swiftly cover all bases by introducing themselves as a “historically black land-grant university/college” but rarely as just a land-grant.

There are a few schools that do emphasize their land-grant status early on and with a great deal of pride. For instance, Alabama A&M University opens the page “AAMU-at-a-Glance” with the phrase “reflecting its heritage as a traditional 1890 land-grant institution” and then goes on to explain the university’s academic culture.123 Even still, their HBCU status dominates their history pages and forgets Justin Morrill.

Most literature on the 1890 universities does not make the connection to Justin Morrill. Reading more and more about the history of the 1890 schools (as they tell it), Justin Morrill rarely makes an appearance. It is not that the name Morrill is not present, but that it usually only appears in the term “the Second Morrill Act”, with little to no mention of Justin himself. Even in the Smithsonian exhibit on the 1890 historically black land-grant institutions, one of the most thorough sources on them, Justin Morrill is not mentioned outside the reference to the “Justin Smith Morrill Land-grant of 1890.”124 They do not explain who Justin Morrill is, a key missed opportunity to connect themselves to their founder.

By comparison, many 1862 schools do mention Justin Morrill in their history pages but even if they do not, they are so clear in their history as a land-grant university, it does not separate them from Morrill like it does with the 1890 schools. He is also readily present on the

122 “Our History” Lincoln University.


124 Edited Exhibits Script, Go Forth and Serve, Smithsonian Institution Archives, 1.
1862 campuses. At the University of Maryland’s College Park campus, Morrill Hall serves as the oldest continuously-used academic building.\(^{125}\) At Cornell University, Justin Morrill Hall is the oldest building on campus and a Morrill Hall also sits on the campus at the University of Idaho.\(^{126}\)\(^{127}\) It takes only a quick Google search to find many more examples of Morrill’s memory present on the 1862 campuses. There is simply not the same presence on the 1890 campuses, a small yet symbolic separation between Morrill and his land-grant institutions. There are also other names that further separate Morrill and the 1890 institutions, such as their past university titles.

Just like the 1862 schools, the 1890 land-grants have gone through a variety of name changes. Surveying the histories of the nineteen historically black land-grant colleges and universities, only a handful have had the same name since their founding year. Twelve schools at some point had a title that indicated they were a school specifically for African Americans; whether it was a school for “the colored race” or “Negroes”. Though most institutions had more explicit names like Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal University (Langston University), some were simply the State College for Colored Students.\(^{128}\) Though some schools dropped the words “colored” or “negro” not long after opening, others were racially labeled well

\(^{125}\) University of Maryland Timeline”, University of Maryland, accessed April 19, 2016, http://www.umd.edu/timeline/.


\(^{127}\) “Morrill Hall 1906-“, The University of Idaho Library’s Campus Photograph Collection, accessed April 19, 2016, http://www.lib.uidaho.edu/digital/campus/locations/MorrillHall.html#more.

\(^{128}\) “History of Langston University”, Langston University.
into the mid-20th century. Alabama A&M University was known as The State Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes while South Carolina State University was known as the Colored Normal Industrial Agricultural and Mechanical College of South Carolina until 1954. Remember the 1890 Land-grant schools were created so the other land-grant schools did not have to integrate. This was supported by the court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, which upheld the constitutionality of “separate but equal” institutions. With this in place until 1954, the 1890 schools were even further separated from Justin Morrill.

One key organization that kept the 1890s further away from Morrill and their land-grant status was the actual association for land-grant colleges. The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities likes to brag that it is North America’s oldest higher education association, founded in 1887. The association only had 1862 land-grant colleges as members until it merged with state universities in 1963. However, the association did not let the 1890 schools join until 1954, the same year *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision was reached, making racially segregated schools illegal. Before then they existed as a separate entity called the Conference of Presidents of Negro Land-grant Colleges.

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130 “History of SC State University”, South Carolina State University.

131 *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 US 537 (1896).


134 “History of APLU” Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities.
Since 1890 institutions were so separated from their 1862 brethren, it is no wonder Justin Morrill was too. What is unfortunate is that Morrill never explicitly said they had to be separate schools. In the section “the Colored Race” in his 1876 speech before the Senate, nowhere does Morrill mention separate institutions for African Americans. There is no mention of a “separate but equal institution” anywhere in his speech, and thus nothing indicates Morrill was advocating for separate schools. However, the bill had slightly more confusing language that presents a major question in the 1890 land-grant narrative, and is one of the main issues between the 1890s and Justin Morrill.

In the Smithsonian exhibit on the 1890 historically black land-grant colleges, the negatives of Justin Morrill’s bill are not forgotten. In the exhibit *Go Forth and Serve: Black Land-grant Colleges Entering Their Second Century*, there is discussion on both the positives and negatives of the Land-grant Act. The first section of text is a broad introduction to Justin Morrill, the Land-Grant Act of 1890 and the historically black land-grant colleges that the exhibit is focusing on. However, the exhibit quickly changes tone and questions the motivation behind the Second Morrill Act. The exhibit points out the “negative of Morrill act” by questioning the legitimacy of “separate but equal” when the black colleges received significantly less funding than the white schools at the time.¹³⁵ Whichever member of the exhibit staff wrote this sentence did not write it to sound ungrateful or cynical, but to paint an appropriate picture of what was happening at the time. In late 19ᵗʰ century America there was still rampant racism, so much that

¹³⁵ Edited Exhibits Script, *Go Forth and Serve*, Smithsonian Institution Archives, 3.
“on average Black colleges received only 20% of the funds generated under the Morrill Act.”

The curators of this exhibit did an excellent job of not sugar coating the realities behind the Morrill Act and shows the unique tension that the 1890s have with their land-grant status. It is undeniable that part of their foundation is owed to racism, and this created a complex relationship with their land-grant status.

Among other issues that separated Morrill from the 1890 schools is the fact he really did not get to see them take shape. The bill was passed only eight years before Morrill died. It took many years for the colleges to take shape, most of which Morrill did not get to see. It seems that he did not get to visit the schools or receive honorary degrees there like he did with some of the 1862 schools, though this is something I would have liked to research more if I had the resources. This also means he did not have a lot of writings or documents that could connect him to the 1890 institutions like those that exist for his 1862 land-grant institutions.

It is not all Morrill’s fault, because nobody else has really tried to bring him and the 1890s into conversation. For example, after researching these subjects for nearly nine months, only towards the end did I learn out that Frederick Douglass and Justin Morrill had any sort of relationship. Douglass, one of the most important figures in the American abolition movement, wrote to Morrill to encourage his advocacy of education for freed slaves. In 1880 he wrote to Morrill, “I see no great or happy future for my race or the Republic outside general education and it seems to me that you, dear sir, standing where you can do can do no better work for the

136 Edited Exhibts Script, Go Forth and Serve, Smithsonian Institution Archives, 4.
nation than to press this idea upon the nation’s mind and heart.” There is a sense of simultaneous familiarity and formality in Douglass’ words, that he trusts Morrill to help him. Further digging shows that he did not only trust Morrill but was highly complimentary of his work. In this letter from 1880 Douglass writes:

Allow me to thank you for your very able, comprehensive and timely speech, on the proposition to devote a part of the proceeds of the Public lands to educational purposes. I have read your speech carefully and with great satisfaction you have grappled with a living issue and have mapped out the true policy of the nation so plainly.

The fact this letter let alone this relationship only appears once reflects how poorly constructed the memories of Justin Morrill and the 1890 land-grant schools are. Douglass’ compliments on Morrill’s speech and policy offer a solid link between Morrill and the African American community, yet is goes unmentioned.

The 1890 land-grants have had the extra variable of race to deal with through their entire existence. These schools are not called historically black colleges for no reason, and while they are proud of their racial history, it has also been something that has kept from them national recognition. To begin with, the 1890 land-grants could not be the most outwardly active schools in their early years. They were in fact meant to be secure communities where black students could be educated and prepared before “their return to the much more hostile environment beyond the campus.”


138 Frederick Douglass to Justin Morrill, 1880.

139 Edited Exhibits Script, *Go Forth and Serve*, Smithsonian Institution Archives, 10.
socio-economic backgrounds but faced nothing close to the racial prejudice blacks faced at the
time. By making these campuses beacons of hope, they had to adopt a separatist attitude and one
out of synch with national attitudes. Understanding this explains why they are not a well-known
part of the higher education narrative.

Throughout this argument, Justin Morrill and the 1890s have been been put into
conversation with each other which is a rare occurrence. Despite having to force the two into the
same topic, they go together like peas in a pod. What has happened with the memory of the 1890
historically black land-grant institutions is one of the side effects of how memory and legacy are
spun in the United States. In the same ways the story of his 1890 land-grant schools have
suffered, so has the story of Justin Morrill and unlike the 1890s, he does not have the chance to
salvage this.

CONCLUSION

The Land-Grant Act of 1862 is not Justin Morrill’s sole achievement and it took a lot of
digging and research to come to this realization. The Land-Grant Act of 1862 dominates the
American higher education narrative because it is a key player in the story of the democratization
of higher education. Once again, this thesis does not seek to totally unravel this narrative, just fill
in some holes as well as point towards alternative stories happening at the same time. The 1862
land-grant schools are hugely important: they were first, they set the precedent for federal support of higher education and they showed the potential for an education system catered to the masses. But the 1890s proved the power and benefits of a diverse college curriculum. And though these schools have often appeared as entirely separate systems of education, they will always have one thing in common: Mr. Justin Smith Morrill.

A couple weeks ago during an exercise with other American Studies students, my classmate had to come up with a question regarding the purpose of my thesis, the “so what, why does this matter?” He jokingly asked me “who gives a s*** about Justin Morrill? Though speaking in jest, he had a good point. Justin Morrill may not be as famous as a Founding Father or Civil War Hero, but he has not been totally lost in the tides of history. He earned the title “Father of Land-Grant Colleges”, there are various pieces of legislation with his name in the title and he even has a Wikipedia page, the ultimate sign of relevancy in the 21st century. At the same time, his contributions as a public servant are not properly remembered, as his achievements have been swept up in this education narrative created to keep America’s democratic ideologies alive and vibrant. For the sake of American memory, Justin Morrill’s legacy has been oversimplified.

Justin Morrill served in Congress for 43 years and 299 days. When he died while still in office, he set the record for the longest serving Congressman and though since surpassed, today ranks nineteenth for longest service to Congress in United States history. And in that time he

140 This is a personal opinion of the author.


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did more than the author the Land-Grant Acts. The year before the first land-grant bill was passed, the Morrill Tariff was passed which raised rates so that industrial workers could receive better wages and still encourage the expansion of industry. Morrill would then get two more tariffs passed during the Civil War, to raise the much needed revenue for the Union army.\textsuperscript{142}

Another notable bill written by Morrill had nothing to do with industry like the land-grant or tariff bills, but instead polygamy. In 1862 the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act was passed to limit bigamy in the United States, mostly targeting the Church of Jesus Christ of Later-day Saints in the Utah territory.\textsuperscript{143} These are just small examples of the diverse political life Morrill led, and it might seem odd to include them after focusing on one bill so much. The reason to do this is to point out how easy it is to simplify a memory to one event, and then miss out on so much more.

One of the biggest disadvantages Morrill faces in his lack of agency over his own legacy is that it is intertwined with Abraham Lincoln’s. Obviously Abraham Lincoln is one of the most beloved and famous figures in American history, and is mostly associated with the events surrounding the American Civil War. But just like Morrill, he did other things while in office, one of which was sign into law the Land-Grant Act of 1862. He has received a great deal of credit for this event thought there is little writing connecting Lincoln to the land-grant schools. Morrill did the real work, but he has to share the spotlight with Lincoln. At Cornell University, not only is there the Morrill building but there is one named after Lincoln too.\textsuperscript{144} Even on the website for the Justin Smith Morrill Homestead, which is the historic home of Morrill, there is a

\textsuperscript{142} Cross, Justin Morrill, 45-50.

\textsuperscript{143} Cross, Justin Morrill, 36-37.

\textsuperscript{144} “Morrill Hall and Lincoln Hall”, Cornell University.
quote from President Dwight Eisenhower that forces Morrill to share the spotlight stage with Lincoln again, saying “his [Morrill] memory is better served by the thousands of men and women educated through his land-grant college act signed by Abraham Lincoln.”

The emphasis on Abraham Lincoln’s connection to the 1862 schools also damages the 1890s reputation. Lincoln’s signature is like Midas’ golden touch, since he signed the first Land-Grant Act, the 1862 schools’ credibility skyrocketed in American society. It adds to their reputation in a way that the President Benjamin Harrison, who signed the Land-Grant Act of 1890, simply does not. Yet despite the constantly referred to connection between Justin Morrill and Abraham Lincoln, there is little discussion of Morrill’s anti-slavery views.

Throughout this argument, there have been a lot of references to Morrill’s 1876 speech where he discusses the education of African Americans in a post Emancipation Proclamation world. However, anti-slavery sentiments were present in him long before this, and in fact was a key part of his election to Congress. The Free-Soil party in Vermont would not support Morrill until he had made his anti-slavery views transparent. Once he had secured his seat, he was faced with the discussion of emancipation and wrote emphatically that he was “willing to slay the men of the South and free their slaves”… and that he really “hope[d] and pray[ed] that the institution of slavery may receive its deathblow.” He had very strong beliefs on the absolute wrongness of slavery, and thought that the “these poor degraded Africans” were completely


146 Parker, *Life and Public Services*, 60.

147 Justin Morrill, “Personal Documents” (December 1862) quoted in William Belmont Parker’s *Life and Public Services of Justin Morrill* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press 1924), 127.
mistreated.\textsuperscript{148} This is a crucial point connecting him to his 1890 schools yet hardly anyone makes this link. There is much more to the man that is Morrill than is discussed, and even the accounts of his best known accomplishment in education do not paint the full picture.

For a man so concerned with the proliferation of education, it should be no surprise that Justin Morrill played a role in the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress was established under President John Adams in 1800 but it would take a lot of work over the years to turn it into the largest library collection in the world today. William Belmont Parker refers to the library as Morrill’s pet.\textsuperscript{149} In 1879 Morrill gave a speech where he said that “the higher education of our common country demands that the library shall not be crippled for lack of room” and thanks to the bill he worked on for fourteen years, the collection doubled in size and the funding also created the magnificent buildings home to the library collection today.\textsuperscript{150} A library is the symbol of a classic education; one that comes from books and reading, not mechanics and farming. Morrill wanted Washington to be a capital that served the public, not just the government and education was where he saw this possible. But again, not many people are aware that Morrill was very invested in the Library of Congress, so invested that he broke his usual decorum to “toss a kiss across the chamber to Senator Vorhees” when the bill was finally passed.\textsuperscript{151}

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The Library of Congress was also not the only library in his life. Towards the end of his life, Morrill opened a library back in Stafford, Vermont where he made a speech discussing the resources a library could offer:

It may be asked what will the town profit by a library?...Ask the boy, taken perhaps by his parents reluctantly from the schoolhouse to the field or the workshop at the age of fifteen, feeling, as I once felt, as though the youthful ambition and hopes had been nipped by an early frost and who now at least requests a chance to read the Life of Franklin, or of Columbus or of Andrew Jackson or of Abraham Lincoln: Ask him. Reject the Town Library, and his modest request may be denied. Behold as his hopes are postponed, the answer on his robust, face in the quivering lip.152

If more attention were paid to the libraries of Morrill’s life, maybe the 1862 land-grant schools would not dominate his legacy so much. It is unfair that a man who loved books so much has only a two biographies written on him, one in 1924 and one in 1999. There are also less materials on the 1890 schools; a continual frustration through this research was the plethora of books written on schools like Cornell and Ohio State while searches for Lincoln University came up blank. This leads into what my research has made me wish to explore further or see as a result of this thesis.

The biggest issue my research has shown me is the paucity of literature available on the 1890 historically black land-grant colleges. It took a lot of digging to get to the sources I had, and I had months to do so. Many other people may just be doing a quick search on their library catalogue and then they would likely only find references to the 1890 land-grant schools in agricultural journals. If someone had access to such results, it would be fascinating to compare them to similar documents on non-land-grant but still historically black colleges. One example

152 Justin Morrill, “Library Opening” (Year Unknown) quoted in William Belmont Parker’s Life and Public Services of Justin Smith Morrill (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1924), 38. lxvii
that would make for a particularly interesting case study would be Howard University, which was founded by a white civil war general named Oliver Otis Howard. What is Howard University’s relationship like with its founder? Is there anything similar to the 1890 schools’ relationship with Justin Morrill?

If someone had more time to go through historical newspapers to gain a strong grasp on the founding of the schools from a historical perspective instead of just a retrospective one, this could prove vital to a comprehensive understanding of the mission of the schools. The accounts I was able to find offered a glimpse into the economic circumstances and administrative issues the schools faced but not as much the social or political, which would be extremely beneficial to fill in this narrative. I also wish I had time to sift through all of Justin Morrill’s papers that are housed at the Library of Congress. There are so few primary documents written by him dated between 1890-1898, but he must have recorded his feelings about the passage of the second act; this could be huge to connecting him to the schools. The date range for documents should actually be extended all the way back to 1872 when he first introduced the second Land-Grant Act to see what he was thinking and maybe learn more about his views on slavery. Did he ever visit any of the 1890 schools in those last eight years of his life? I am dying to know.

Very specific things that could be explored would be a further in-depth look at the name changes of both the 1862 and the 1890 land-grant colleges. Exploring the historical, political, social and even economic factors that went into dropping “agriculture” or “Negro” from the title might further explain the missions of the schools as well as better explain their identities.

In general, any more literature that can connect Justin Morrill to his 1890 historically black land-grant colleges is not only desirable but necessary. Even if the literature is slow to
come or only appeals to those in academia, hopefully these will spread a new narrative on this
story because right now, if the typical American does her “research”, she will probably not make
it past Wikipedia. This is the opening sentence on Justin Morrill’s current Wikipedia page.

Justin Smith Morrill (April 14, 1810 – December 28, 1898) was a Representative (1855–
1867) and a Senator (1867–1898) from Vermont, most widely remembered today for the
Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act that established federal funding for establishing many
of the United States’ public colleges and universities.¹⁵³

This is a hugely missed opportunity to change the narrative, and instead it just continues to
distort this man. At least in the case of the land-grant colleges, they are here to defend
themselves. Justin Morrill died in 1898, leaving his legacy up to those who came after him.
While he is a noted part of American history, he is not a name most are familiar with today and
many people do not actually even know what a land-grant college is, so his lack of recognition is
understandable. There have been thousands of people in Congress, and hundreds who have done
notable things. It is hard to keep track. However, the architect of the Capitol must have done his
homework because Morrill has been granted immortality in the Capitol building. There today, in
2016, a portrait hangs of Justin Morrill with simply his name to identify him and nothing else.
But where specifically does this portrait live? Directly outside the Senate floor, where Morrill
created the 1890 land-grant institutions. Coincidence? I think not.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justin_Smith_Morrill

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Smithsonian Institution Archives. Box 10 of Accession 00-069. Edited Exhibits Script for Go Forth and Serve: Black Land-grant Colleges Entering Their Second Century.

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APPENDIX
The Portrait of Justin Morrill outside the Senate Floor in the United States Capitol Building.

Photo taken April 14th, 2016 by Emily B. Cyr.