

A Just and Equitable Division

125 years of the Second Morrill Act of 1890

By Eric Tegler

Prior to the mid 19th century, higher education in America was generally reserved for a few. People with the wherewithal – and the resulting social standing – went to college for education primarily rooted in classical studies and the arts. But for decades, there had been calls for extending higher education to a wider segment of the American public.

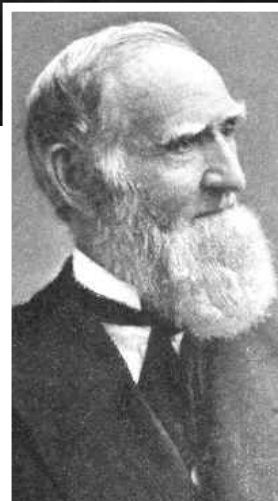
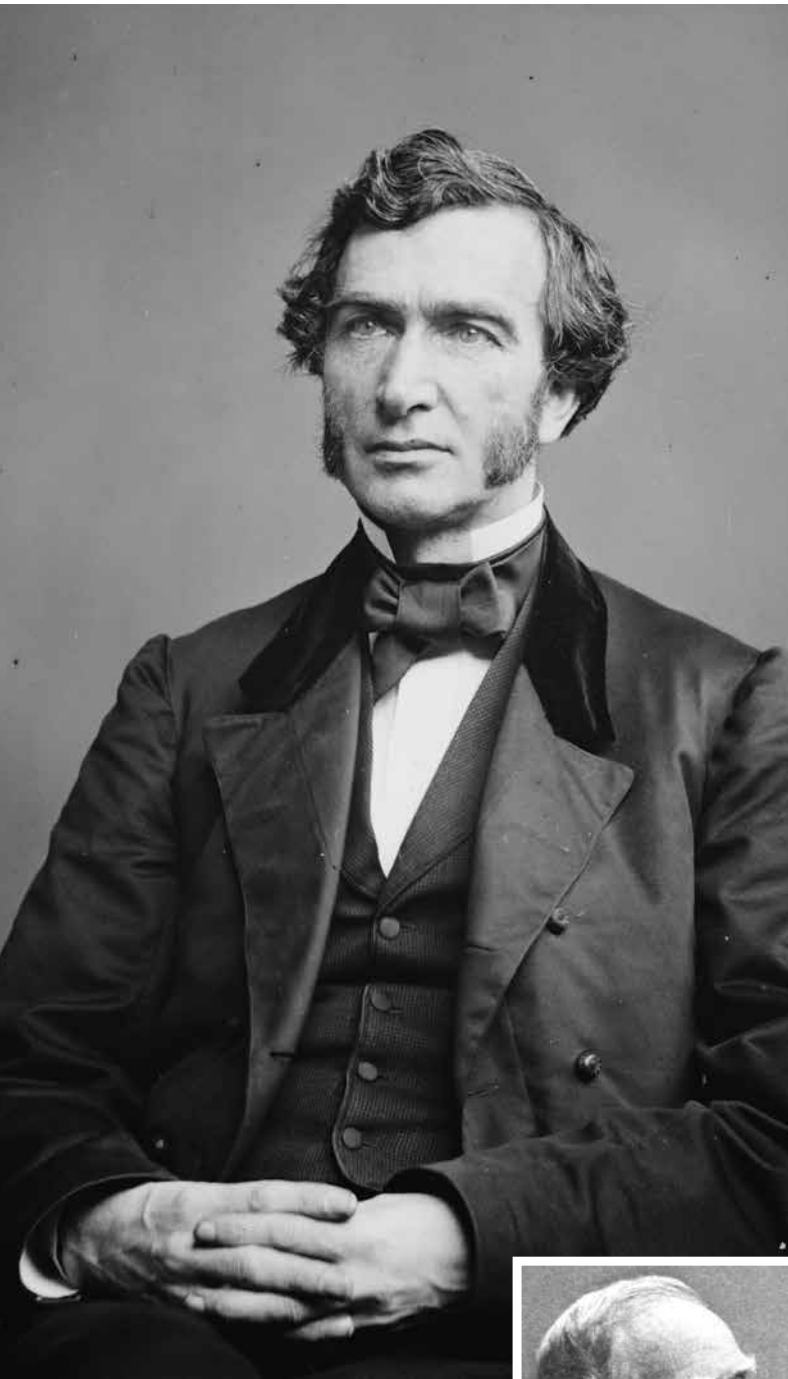
The notion of making higher education more accessible was surely altruistic, but it was also practical. Science was changing the nature of agriculture and industry with implications for America’s economy, society, and international standing. Justin Smith Morrill and Jonathan Baldwin Turner understood the potential benefits of enabling more Americans to apply advanced education to agriculture and industry and sought to close the gap between the reality of a small, educated elite and the possibility of prosperous educated masses.

Morrill was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Vermont’s 2nd District (and later a senator), a founder of the Republican Party, and an abolitionist. Turner was a professor at Illinois College, an agricultural researcher, activist, and abolitionist.

Turner had argued for higher education reform since the 1820s while studying at Yale. In 1851, he presented a plan for the development of “industrial universities,” which was published in the “United States Patent Office Report.” The plan was discussed at the national agricultural society’s meeting the following year. After founding an industrial league in 1853, Turner and others urged Congress to launch new industrial universities through the use of federal lands.

Despite Turner’s passion, there was no real groundswell, no grassroots movement for the establishment of universities for the industrial class. However, Morrill had been thinking about higher education in largely the same terms as Turner, though he claimed not to have known of Turner’s work.

In 1858, Morrill gave a speech before Congress on the idea of land-grant universities, noting that agricultural productivity was declining while population was increasing and that Europe was ahead of the United States in both agricultural practices and the extension of agricultural



Justin Smith Morrill (above) and Jonathan Baldwin Turner (right) both proposed the creation of land-grant universities. Eventually Morrill’s plan for establishment of the schools was passed as the 1862 Morrill Act. In the Second Morrill Act, passed in 1890, specific provisions were made to include African-Americans in the land-grant university higher education system.

George Washington Carver at work in September 1938 at Tuskegee University, one of the 1890 land-grant universities. Carver was an American scientist, botanist, inventor, and educator at Tuskegee University, and is best known for his research into alternative crops to cotton, such as peanuts, soybeans, and sweet potatoes, which he wanted poor farmers to grow to aid in the nutrition of farm families and to provide another source of cash income to improve the farmers' quality of life. The 1890 universities were – and remain – a vital link between African-Americans and higher education.

education. The speech and subsequent efforts would lead to the Morrill Act of 1862.

Ironically, Morrill never attended college, though he was widely read. His standing as an Eastern representative from an old-line state was important. But he was not the first to introduce legislation aimed at establishing a land-grant system.

The Michigan Constitution of 1850 actually called for the creation of an agricultural school, and in 1855, America's first agriculture college, the Agricultural College of the State of Michigan, known today as Michigan State University, was established.

Meanwhile, in 1853, Turner drafted a resolution calling for the Illinois congressional delegation to work to enact a land-grant bill to fund a system of industrial colleges, one in each state. The Illinois legislature adopted the resolution and work began. However, it was felt that such legislation would have a better chance of passage if introduced by an Eastern congressman.

Two months later, Morrill introduced his bill. The language was strikingly similar to that expressed by Turner. Both plans granted land for the use of new universities, but Turner's provided for equal grants to each state while the number of senators and representatives each state had in Congress determined land allocations in Morrill's.

The Morrill Act is often characterized as legislation providing for the practical education of a broader section of the public – the act itself specifies the “Liberal and practical education for the industrial classes in the several pursuits of life” – but neither Turner nor Morrill argued for a narrow technical education. Teaching of the liberal arts was part of their vision too.

Following its passage by Congress in 1859, President James Buchanan vetoed the legislation. Morrill resubmitted the act in 1861 with the stipulation that new land-grant institutions would teach military tactics in addition to engineering and agriculture. Though many Southern states didn't support the plans, their secession with the opening of the Civil War facilitated passage of the Morrill Act, which was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on July 2, 1862.

Once the war had been decided, the new “land grants” (or “1862s” as they're often called) were established via allocation of some 17,400,000 acres of land, sold for a collective endowment of \$7.55 million. Despite their stated mission and their founding impetus, few farmers actually attended them initially. Those who did tended to become professors,



developing the scientific and practical literature of agricultural higher education.

Land-grant universities broadened their offerings in the following decades but did not enlarge access as widely as hoped. While the land-grant system was extended to the Southern states that returned to the Union after the war, most barred African-Americans from attending.

In 1865, about 4 million largely illiterate blacks were released from slavery. Morrill declared, “They are members of the American family, and their advancement concerns us all.” Thus, he introduced the Second Morrill Act of 1890, which specifically included provisions for colored students.

Congress passed the Second Morrill Act, which, instead of land, granted funding for the establishment of additional land-grant universities. It included the stipulation that African-Americans were to be included in the U.S. land-grant university higher education system. Still, the 17 Southern and border states would not consent to their admission. As a work-around, the act provided that these 17 states could found separate land-grant institutions for African-Americans to be funded by



James H. Hill, 1890 land-grant liaison with the Fort Valley State University (FVSU) Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Program, part of FVSU's Cooperative Extension Program, takes farmers through the ins and outs of "How to Write a Winning Proposal & Identify Potential Grant Sources for Producers" during the "Virginia State University (VSU), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Virginia Farmers Working Together" outreach workshop at VSU on March 7, 2013. Farmers shared and learned new ways to do more with USDA services, and how to apply for programs that will help grow their business. The 1890 universities all have agricultural extension services that are generally quite active in working with small farmers.

a "just and equitable division" of the federal grant. Section 4 of the Morrill Act of 1890 made it clear:

... a just and equitable division of the fund to be received under this act between one college for white students and one institution for colored students established as aforesaid which shall be divided into two parts and paid accordingly, and thereupon such institution for colored students shall be entitled to the benefits of this act and subject to its provisions, as much as it would have been if it had been included under the act of eighteen hundred and sixty-two, and the fulfillment of the foregoing provisions shall be taken as a compliance with the provision in reference to separate colleges for white and colored students.

The original 1890 universities, many of which became known as historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), remain a vital link between African-Americans and higher education. Though they represent approximately 3 percent of colleges in the United States, they enroll 12 percent of all

African-American college students, produce 23 percent of all African-American college graduates, and confer 60 percent of all engineering degrees earned by African-American students. HBCUs also educate half of the country's African-American teachers and 40 percent of all African-American health professionals.

Like their 1862 counterparts, the 1890s also maintain one of the central tenets of the first Morrill Act – the idea of agricultural extension. Taking the latest in research literally to the field and to agricultural producers is a proudly held responsibility.

"The black land-grant universities are quite immersed in their land-grant mission," John Michael Lee Jr., Ph.D., confirmed. Lee is vice president of the Office for Access and Success at the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU).

"They're the same as any other land grant, whether it's Ohio State, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, or University of Maryland College Park. They all have extension services, agriculture programs, research, and degrees. They support students and communities in rural and urban areas."

Lee noted that 1890 institutions are particularly active outside large corporate farm settings.

"That's one of the specialties for 1890s. They work primarily with small farmers, whereas the 1862 land-grant universities more often work with larger farms/farmers."

The 125th anniversary of the passage of the Second Morrill Act is not going without recognition at these institutions, Lee said. A special website – 1890universities.org – has been created to recall the act and highlight the partnership between 1890s and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"Not only are they aware of the history, but they're celebrating that history," Lee enthused, adding that all the land grants are honoring the 150th anniversary of the 1862 act as well.

Agriculture remains one of America's biggest economic activities, Lee pointed out. Whether their origins date to



Students from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, an 1890 land-grant institution, attend the Borlaug Symposium at USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C., on March 25, 2014. The symposium highlighted current efforts to address global hunger. Symposium panels featured high school and university students, as well as scientists and policy advisers from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), USDA, and nongovernmental organizations. Leading students and individuals had the opportunity to present what they are doing to help achieve Dr. Norman Borlaug's vision of creating the next generation of hunger fighters. The 1890 universities are playing an important role in addressing agricultural issues that have nationwide and worldwide effects.

the first or second Morrill Acts, institutions like North Carolina A&T State University, Ohio State University, Mississippi State University, or Alcorn State University do extensive work in solving agricultural problems and in local outreach. They administer 4-H to youth and reach out to veterans in addition to providing liberal arts and other degrees aligned with the land-grant mission, like engineering.

For example, Florida A&M's Center for Viticulture and Small Fruit Research recently developed a new variety of large-fruited muscadine grape (a grapevine species native to North America) called "Majesty," which is disease resistant and can be more efficiently cultivated in the southern United States. Likewise, a Florida A&M professor is working to solve problems with the honey bee population's decimation by other insects. Given the natural role of honey bees, the research is relevant to the entire country's ecosystem.

"They're [1890s] working on problems that impact the world beyond the states they serve and reside in," Lee affirmed.

On the extension side, Tuskegee University is working with small farmers in Alabama's Black Belt region to connect their businesses and production to large retailers like Walmart.

"If it wasn't for 1890s, a lot of small farmers wouldn't be served in rural areas throughout many states, especially in West Virginia, North Carolina,

LIST OF THE 1890 LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES

- Alabama A&M University
- Alcorn State University
- Delaware State University
- Florida A&M University
- Fort Valley State University
- Kentucky State University
- Langston University
- Lincoln University
- North Carolina A&T State University
- Prairie View A&M University
- South Carolina State University
- Southern University System
- Tennessee State University
- Tuskegee University
- University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
- University of Maryland Eastern Shore
- Virginia State University
- West Virginia State University
- Central State University

Florida, and Georgia. They really do work with independent farmers and try to connect them," Lee explained. "The extension services help communities help themselves. That's one of the greatest facets of what the land grants do."

HBCUs and other 1890s land grants also fulfill their mission to expand access to higher education in the spirit of Justin Smith Morrill, Jonathan Baldwin Turner, and legislation their work fostered.

"One of the most important things about land grants in general," Lee acknowledged, "is that they have always promoted access to liberal and practical education for the industrial classes. They help ensure the American dream through access to education whether you are from Appalachia or from the inner cities of Atlanta or Detroit."

No discussion of access to higher education can ignore its dramatically rising cost. According to Lee, land-grant institutions are keenly aware of the problem and are taking steps to address the cost of a degree. The APLU recently initiated a partnership with the American Association of Community Colleges and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities to work across sectors/institutional types to find ways to increase affordability.

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“That association speaks to new thinking about how we can make college more affordable,” Lee said. It also reflects the values built into the land-grant system, particularly those universities that arose out of the Second Morrill Act.

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That mission has been extended through the addition of land-grant status to institutions like the 1994 land-grant colleges for Native Americans. Land-grant institutions like the

University of the District of Columbia are increasingly furthering their founding mission in urban settings as well.

“You’re seeing a reinvigoration of urban agriculture from land-grant institutions, not just those that are in urban areas but those located in rural areas as well,” Lee added. “West Virginia University is doing an [Urban Agriculture Conference] in Charleston, West Virginia. You’re seeing a focus on how we can serve urban centers with agricultural education.”

HBCUs and other 1890s are increasing their outreach and extension beyond U.S. borders to North America and further a field. Tuskegee University is working with farmers in Ghana, while other land grants are partnering with universities in Brazil, Canada, and Mexico. Lee said 1890s institutions are seeing an influx of international students and are sending more of their own students abroad.

The search for solutions to new problems is a continual challenge but also provides the universities that grew out of both Morrill Acts an opportunity to become ever more relevant. It’s an opportunity they’re embracing, Lee said.

“The 19th century land-grant idea has continued to evolve over the years to accommodate the needs we have in real time. Universities that are 1890s institutions are now doing work in biofuels, looking at new power-generation possibilities. I think we’re seeing the land-grant system adapt to national challenges. That’s why we see some revisiting of the [land-grant idea] to incorporate some new themes.” ■



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