

# High Country News

## Land-Grab Universities: Further Reading Robert Lee

Land-grant universities' ties to Indigenous history have started gaining attention in the last few years, typically framed by references to studies of universities' links to the slave trade. [Sharon Stein \(2017\)](#) and [Margaret Nash \(2019\)](#) have provided the most in-depth assessments. They are joined by a variety of brief academic and popular discussions, and preceded by a couple of small-scale efforts to tie land-grant parcels to Indigenous territory in GIS at [Cornell](#) and [Virginia Tech](#). For these works and others, see the section listed under "Morrill Act and Indigenous Dispossession."

Within the extensive literature on the Morrill Act, several older studies examined the grants, most prominently Paul Wallace Gates' *The Wisconsin Pine Lands of Cornell University* (1943). There have also been recent efforts to map Morrill Act parcels at [Michigan State University](#), [Iowa State University](#) and the [University of Nebraska](#). Although these works do not discuss Indigenous land, they are useful for understanding the grant-disposal process and are listed under "Morrill Act Grant Histories." The small body of literature that explores the economic impact of land-grant universities is listed under "Morrill Act and the Economy."

There are numerous studies of the Morrill Act itself that sidestep Indigenous history or U.S. territorial expansion, generally focusing on the act's promise to democratize education. Some of these explore the law's uneven impact in terms of class, gender, race and region. For an overview of the key questions, see Nathan M. Sorber and Roger L. Geiger's essay, "[The Welding of Opposite Views: Land-Grant Historiography at 150 Years](#)" (2014). Works in this vein appear under "Democracy's Colleges?"

Studies of slavery and universities, treaty-making, settler colonialism and the public domain offer critical background for understanding the Morrill Act's function as an Indigenous wealth transfer. Key works are listed under "Slavery and the University," "Treaties and Indigenous Sovereignty," "Settler Colonialism" and "Public Land Law and Policy."

### Morrill Act and Indigenous Dispossession

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