

# The Morrill Land Grant College Act

ANNCR: The Morrill Land Grant College Act – On Today's Congressional Moment

The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, signed into law by Abraham Lincoln on July 2nd of that year, was first proposed in 1857 by Justin Smith Morrill, who served in Congress for 43 years as both a Representative and a Senator from Vermont.

The son of a blacksmith, Morrill had to leave school when he was 15. He saw the need for the everyday working people he identified with to have access to higher education.

The legislation he proposed used a simple formula to give federal land to every state for one purpose: to build at least one college, accessible to all, that would promote regional development by teaching agriculture and engineering in addition to "the higher graces of classical study," in Morrill's own words. These land-grant universities are considered forerunners of today's state universities.

Because of the Morrill Land Grant Act, 12 million acres now house 70 land-grant universities, including Michigan State University, Cornell University, the University of Kentucky, and Purdue University. Each year, land-grant schools award one-third of the nation's bachelors and masters degrees and 60% of all doctorates.

Justin Morrill's vision has made higher education available to millions of Americans, and has far exceeded his original expectations in both depth and scope.

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