

# Was the Morrill Act Moral?

The Morrill Act's Unseen Cost: Indigenous Land Seizure and the Path to Reparation

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Landgrabu.org



## Morrill Act of 1862

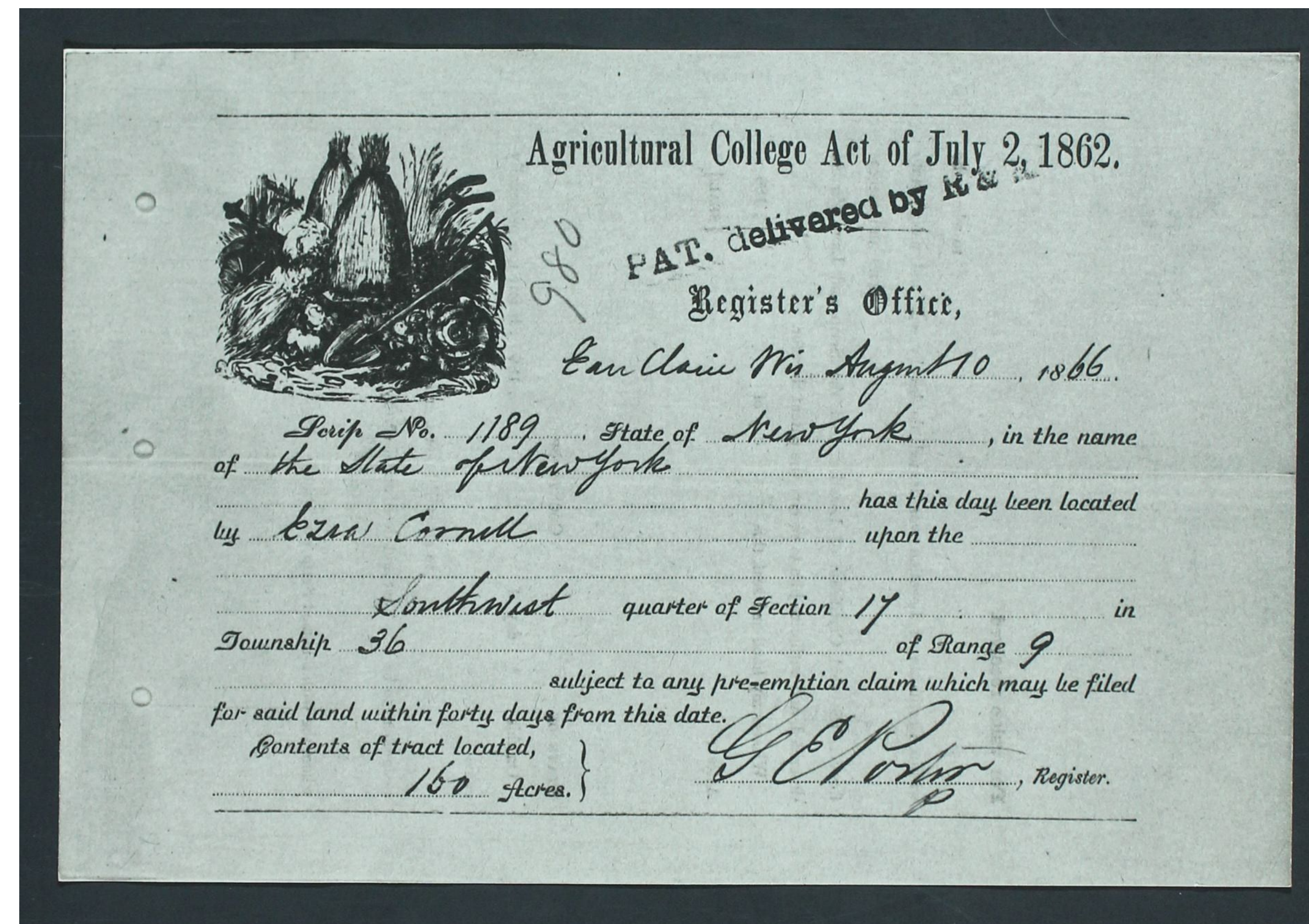
- 30,000 acres of Land for each member of congress that Union states had
- Signed in by Pres. Lincoln, sponsored by Senator Justin Morrill
- Land granted for the purpose of endowing agricultural and mechanical arts colleges
- States without unused land given “scrip” for ‘open’ land in the west
- States to sell land to private owners for \$1.25 per acre

## Important Statistics

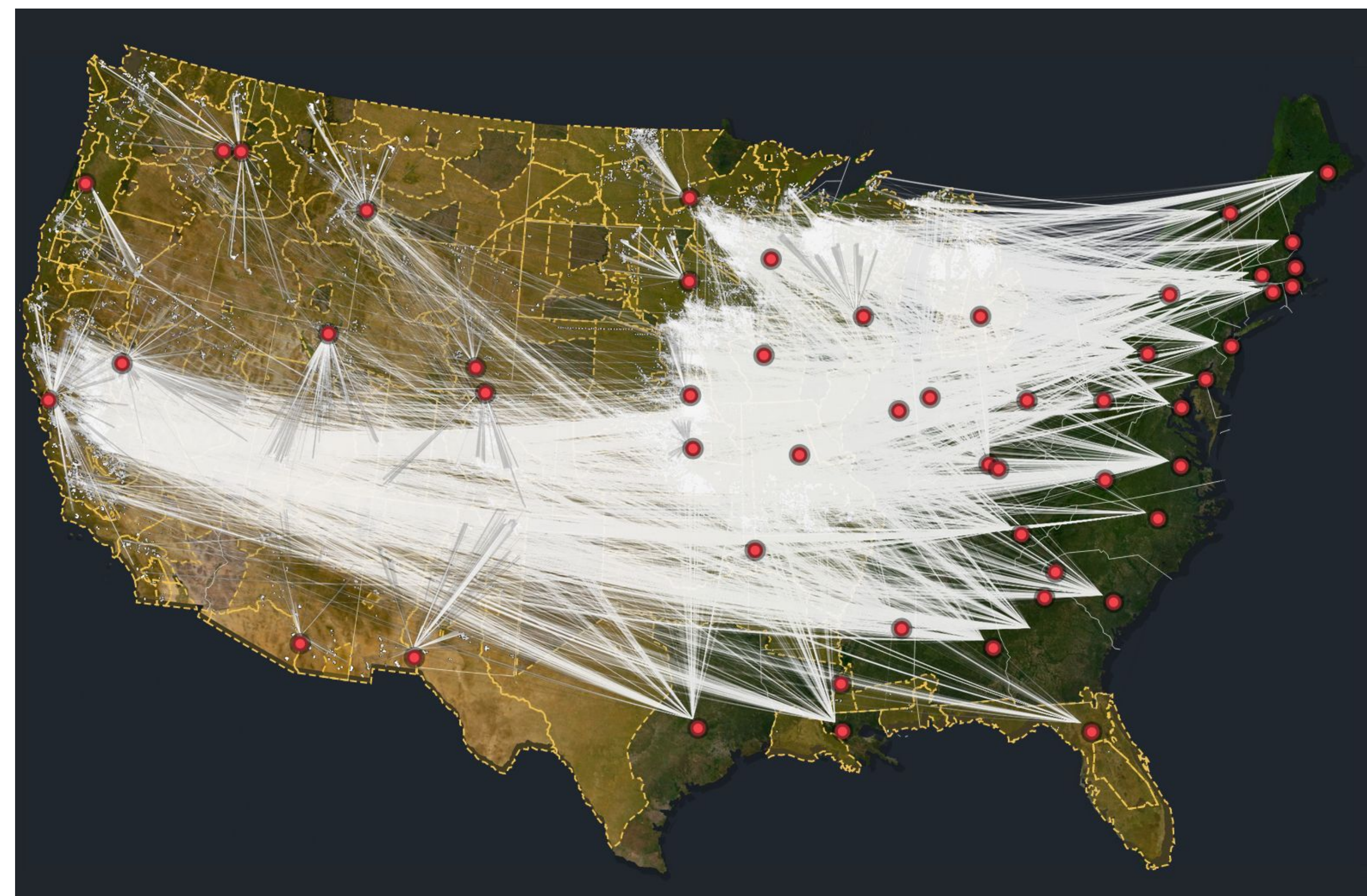
- Nearly 11 million acres of Indigenous Land seized
- Affected over 250 Tribal nations
- Based on over 160 violence- backed treaties & land seizures
- Established 52 universities
- 0.5% aggregate enrollment of Native American students at the 52 universities
- 495 million endowment in 2020 dollars

## Reparations Categories

- **Inclusion approach**  
ex: tuition waivers, sponsored curriculum, funded research
- **Monetary approach**  
ex: money from “trust lands,” repayment to affected nations, Indigenous-controlled trusts
- **Land-back approach**  
ex: “trust lands” back, co-management agreements, symbolic land back



Location Certificate for New York State Land Scrip, Piece No. 1189, located for Ezra Cornell in Section 17, Township 36, of Range 9 in the District of the Eau Claire, Wisconsin Land Office, dated August 10, 1866 (Credit: University Archives, Cornell University Library)



Map of Land Granted to states from Morrill Act of 1862 (Credit: Geoff McGhee and Cody Leff)

## Modern Day Scholarly Conversation

- The Act has long been celebrated for boosting American educational opportunities and distributing Western land at a reasonable price for Americans to develop
- In 2020, High Country News published massive investigative journalism report “Land-Grab Universities”
- This led to growing scholarly conversations about the Act and call for reparations
- Many universities responded with initiatives and groups to study forms of reparation

## My Findings on Reparations

- Three categories: Feasibility, long-term investment potential, justice brought
- Rated 1-3 for fulfillment of categories in order
- **Inclusion approach: 3, 2, 1**
- **Monetary approach: 2, 2, 2**
- **Land-back approach: 1, 3, 3**

## Relevant Sources

- *Journal of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association* [NAIS], vol. 8
- “Land Grab Universities”
- “‘Let Us Tell the Story of Our Land and Place’: Tribal Leaders on the Seizure and Sale of Territories Benefiting Land-Grant Universities.” *Tribal College Journal*, vol. 33, no. 4,
- The University of California Land Grab: A Legacy of Profit from Indigenous Land —A Report of Key Learnings and Recommendations