

University of Minnesota Land Grant Legacy and Future

Excerpt from introductory remarks by Senior Vice President Robert J. Jones, UMN Land Grant 150 Great Conversations: Public Mission, Urban Challenges | May 2, 2012

A video of the May 2 event is on the Land Grant 150 website: <http://www.landgrant150.edu>

This year, the University of Minnesota is marking the 150th anniversary of its **mission and heritage as a land-grant public research university**, a mission rooted in the Morrill Act of 1862.

The Morrill Act, signed by President Lincoln, has rightly been described as one of the most significant pieces of legislation ever enacted.

Without question, it fundamentally transformed higher education in America—with lasting benefits for all of American society.

Obviously, President Lincoln couldn't put out a tweet announcing this landmark legislation.

But I think if he were around today, he might tweet **that the Morrill Act put the “public” in higher education.**

The act granted parcels of federally owned land to states, to create universities for “the working and industrial classes.”

This was a radical idea at a time when university education was the province of the privileged few.

The Morrill Act set in motion a new and profoundly democratic vision for U.S. higher education:

- educational opportunities for people from all walks of life
- research and teaching connected to the needs of society
- a focus on discovering and sharing knowledge to strengthen the well-being of states and to advance the public good.

When the Morrill Act was passed, and for decades afterward, the focus was on agriculture, home economics, and mechanical arts professions serving largely industrial and rural society within state borders.

Obviously, in 2012, our institutions—and the challenges we face—look very different from those of 150 years ago.

Our two Land Grant 150 “Great Conversations”—the one today and one planned for the fall—will look at how we **redefine our land-grant mission as a vitally engaged research institution for the 21st century**.

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Today, the challenges we face are no longer primarily rural and local. We live in an age of rural, urban, and global interdependence.

There’s no question that we’ve moved toward a much more complex, *strongly engaged, and collaborative* vision of what it means to be a university with a public mission serving communities both near and far.

But our public mission has remained fundamentally much the same over the years: *learning, discovery and engagement* that expands opportunity, strengthens the well being of our communities and state, and advances the common good.