

# TOWARDS RECOGNITION AND UNIVERSITY-TRIBAL HEALING (TRUTH): A STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF THE MORRILL LAND GRAB IN MINNESOTA

## RESILIENT COMMUNITIES PROJECT

### About the Partner

The University of Minnesota's American Indian Tribal Nations Relations is housed within the Office of Equity and Diversity. They act as a liaison between the University and the 11 recognized Tribal Nations who share geography with Minnesota, as well as the Urban Native populations. Their aim is to deepen relationships and engagement between the University and Tribal Nations and serve American Indian students, staff, and faculty.

### Project Description

The University of Minnesota's founding came at a dire cost to Dakota and Ojibwe people, and this has never been reconciled. Specifically, the University was developed from the proceeds of the sale and lease of lands that were not willingly ceded and it continues to profit from those lands today.

In 1851, when Minnesota was still a territory and the majority of inhabitants were American Indian, a statute was written that the University of Minnesota be established "at or near the falls of Saint Anthony." When Minnesota became a state in 1858, the University was granted constitutional autonomy, allowing for self-governance from the state, a right that was not afforded to Tribal Nations.

The Morrill Act was signed into law in 1862, and states were given federal lands to sell in order to fund universities. No other state university system benefited from this land transfer more than Minnesota's. High Country News studied these land transfers and found that the federal government gave the state of Minnesota 94,631 acres, for which they paid tribes \$2,309. This equates to one out of every 13 acres redistributed under the Morrill Act.

The majority of this land, 92,871 acres, are the traditional homelands of the Oceti Sakowin, more specifically the Wahpeton and Sisseton Bands. When some of these lands were sold, the state raised \$574,430 that formed the principal for the University's endowment fund. The return on payments to tribes was 251:1. The University leased out some of this land, and this income was combined with additional land grants to form the Permanent University Fund. In 2016, the market value of this fund was \$543 million.

This project seeks to track the progression and value of these lands through a forensic financial analysis incorporating historical archives, treaties, violence-backed land cessions (particularly through the Morrill Act), and publicly-available existing data sets, along with other methods/tools/data researchers are able to develop.

## Key Issues, Questions, and Ideas to Explore

1. What does UMN's land grab equate to in today's dollars? For the Dakota tribes? For the Ojibwe tribes? Can a dollar amount be determined for each tribal nation?
2. The lands taken from the Dakota people funded not only the University of Minnesota; the sale/lease of these lands created an initial endowment for 34 other universities (through scrip). How much was taken, by what universities, and how much is this land worth in today's dollars?
3. The Morrill Act stipulates that all money made from land sales must be used in perpetuity, meaning those funds still remain on university ledgers to this day. How much interest have these funds accrued over the years?
4. Using an analysis of the plots identified by Land-Grab Universities [High Country News, Lee, R., et al. (n.d.)], is the University still generating a profit from violence-backed cession lands, and if so, how much annually?
5. In addition to the land itself, resources have also been taken. Is there a monetary value that we can associate with this resource extraction/hoarding? In addition, the University has taken money from entities in direct opposition to Indigenous values (e.g. Enbridge where lines cross the Fond Du Lac reservation). Is there a way to assess monetary value to this harm?

## How Student Work Will Be Used to Build Community Resilience

- To build a shared truth within the University that acknowledges the harms inflicted on Indigenous people so that reconciliation and redress may occur
- To provide an economic analysis that can serve as the foundation for systems change within the University and Tribal Relations

## Potential Community Partners or Stakeholders

- Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC)
- The 11 recognized Tribal Nations who share geography with Minnesota:
  - Bois Forte, Fond Du Lac, Grand Portage, Leech Lake, Mille Lacs, Red Lake Nation, White Earth, Lower Sioux, Prairie Island, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux (Dakota) Community, Upper Sioux

## Existing Plans & Reports

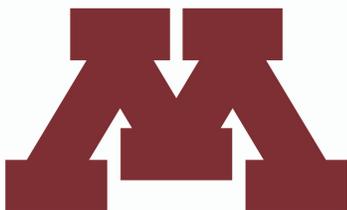
- TRUTH proposal
- Land-Grab Universities (High Country News, March 2020)
- Minnesota Indian Affairs Council Resolution
  - Accompanying memo
- American Indian and Tribal Nations Relations strategic plan

### UofM RCP Contact

Sarah Tschida, Coordinator  
University of Minnesota  
tschi066@umn.edu, 612.625.6550

### Project Lead

Tadd Johnson, Esq.,  
Senior Director of American Indian and Tribal Nations  
Relations, University of Minnesota  
taddjohn@d.umn.edu, 218.260.0525



## Resilient Communities Project

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