

The Almost Promised Land:

The Opposition to and Veto of the Agricultural College Act of 1857

Robert L Harpool

Indiana State University

Abstract

In 1857, Representative Justin Morrill put forth before the House of Representatives an act “Donating public lands to the several States and Territories which may provide colleges for the benefit of agriculture and the mechanic arts”. A different iteration of the bill would pass 5 years later, in 1862, under President Lincoln. The latter version would incubate what would become known as land-grant universities whose members would occupy significant positions in the landscape of higher education. The bill in 1857, however, barely passed through both houses of Congress though, and President Buchanan, a supporter of higher education, soundly vetoed it. Many scholars state the defeat of the bill was rooted in Southern opposition on the grounds of constitutionality and states’ rights. This one-dimensional view is an unjust labeling of the South as obstructionists for the sake of convenient curriculum. By making the conclusion the premise, numerous inherent issues such as why an agrarian South would oppose an agricultural bill are overlooked. In reality the veto of the agricultural college land act of 1857 was a result of a competitive interaction between numerous complex interests unbounded by the sectional rivalries of the time. If there is a common theme amongst the interests in opposition to the bill it is not sectionalism or ideology, it is finance.

Keywords: agricultural college, land grant, opposition, 1857, Buchanan,

Legislative acts have influenced the progression of education in the United States since the country's early colonial period. Most of these acts have only had a temporary impact and little long-term efficacy. Some, however, made sweeping changes to the educational landscape of the nation and their reverberations are still felt today. Two of the most significant of these laws were the college land-grant acts of the 19th century, which became popularly known as the Morrill Acts. These acts directly led to the founding and funding of over 75 universities. Many, such as Michigan State, the University of Tennessee and Texas A&M have become premier institutions of higher learning in their respective states and regions. Others such as Cornell, the University of California and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are renowned throughout the country and the world. Since inception, not one of the colleges created by the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 have ceased to offer higher education opportunities. Today, more than 3.5 million undergraduates and 1.1 million graduate students are enrolled at public land grant universities ("Land Grant", 2014). With such a success record, it is difficult to imagine why President James Buchanan, a supporter of higher education, firmly vetoed the first iteration of the agricultural college land act initially proposed in 1857.

Historical events such as the veto of the agricultural college land act of 1857 are the result of a competitive interaction between numerous complex interests. There is rarely a singular cause. Very little literature exists attempting to provide a comprehensive perspective of the reasons the act failed to become law. Furthermore, much of the literature that discusses the subject is limited in scope and frequently offers little more than one-dimensional generalizations. In *A History of American Higher Education*, Thelin (2011) asserted that President Buchanan, a Pennsylvanian, vetoed the bill to garner favor with the South who resisted extension of federal program. Rudolph (1990) expressed that Southerners had issues with the constitutionality of the

bill. He further added that the dislike of higher education was popular in the North and West. In *The Origins for Federal Support of Higher Education*, Williams (1991) simply states “chief among the objections (of the old South-West alliance) was the unconstitutionality.” (p. 38). Cross’s (1999) biography of Justin Morrill merely reinforces the theme of Southern objection to the constitutionality.

Some researchers focused on fears of land speculators and Southern legislators disturbed by perceived federal overreach (Herren & Hillison, 1996)(Herren & Edwards, 2003). In *Western Opposition to the Agricultural College Act*, Gates (1941) states “Western opposition . . . was chiefly owing to the fact that . . . land in one state should (not) be given for the benefit of another” (p.6). The distribution of land, which was to be essentially determined by the population of a state, short-changed western states. Additionally, “opposition to grants for absentee institutions . . . was especially strong in the West” (Gates, 1941, p.7). In their book *A Century of Service: Land-Grant Colleges and Universities*, Christy and Williamson (1991) do not even address the aborted agricultural college land act nor the reasons for its failure.

Ross (1938), Rainsford (1972), and Cross (1999) provide the most comprehensive view by stating the aforementioned reasons and adding a dimension of conflict between old and new states. Hightower (1978) viewed it as an unlawful appropriation of federal resources by pointing out that “critics called it a raid on the Treasury.” Rather than a regional divide between North, South and West, another frame through which to see the opponents of the agricultural college land act is the location of the land offered as scrip. Gates (1941) points out the distinction between the support provided by unlanded versus landed states. Simon (1963) claims the overall vote showed the opposition was along sectional and political lines.

In contrast to Rudolph (1990), Hightower (1978) discovered the midwestern farmers to be in favor of the bill. None who point to Southern opposition explain why the agrarian South would not want to take advantage of an opportunity to improve farming. The literature that puts the onus of the bill's defeat on states rights advocates in the South do not explain why the South would not celebrate the federal government's release of lands within their states.

The disjointed and sometimes contradictory nature of these views exemplify the ad hoc nature to which many of the aforementioned authors used a specific cause only to further a broader point in their work. Thelin (2011), for example, only mentions the failure of the bill to contrast how efficiently congress moved after the South seceded. Thus, a thorough review of the literature leaves several questions. What were all of the sources of opposition to the bill? Were there more reasons than what is addressed in the literature? Is there a common theme that binds them all? The purpose of this study was to explore these questions.

The following section details the methods used to acquire information on the subject. In the Findings section, the political environment is contextualized, the provisions of the bill are provided, and its movement through the houses of government is depicted. Then an enumeration of the arguments made in opposition to the bill are grouped at individual, organizational, state and federal levels. The discussion section addresses the merits of this study, presents its limitations, and highlights a unifying theme of all of the opposition parties. The conclusion restates the key findings and provides recommendations for future study.

Method

Historical research methods were used to explore this topic. As mentioned by Herren and Edwards (2003), I read and followed seven principles to researching and writing history: authority, interpretation, significance, context, representativeness, perspective and style (Short,

1991, p. 79-80). The search for literature on the subject began with a list of database groups available at Indiana State University. Pertinent groups such as biography, education, history and government policy were searched. The History of Education Review was specifically targeted. I further searched the education research databases established as a library guide to education on the university's website. Finally, I used Google Scholar as well as the reference lists of discovered works related to the topic. The following terms were used in my search: agriculture, college, land, grant, 1857, 1859, Morrill, Buchanan, panic, bounty and veterans.

I located a wide range of primary and secondary sources. Most of the secondary sources had very little depth on the subject. These included books, journal articles and on-line publications. Primary sources included Congressional records containing speeches, legislation and voting records. Additionally, several presidential speeches were referenced as well as information from the Census, statistical abstracts of the United States, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Department of Treasury. A color-coding of congressional House and Senate voting records were superimposed over a map of the United States to tease out cues to geographic voting patterns. All primary and secondary sources were found at the Indiana State University Cunningham Memorial Library, through interlibrary loan and on the Internet.

Findings

Political Climate

At the beginning of 1857, the government of the United States was fragmented and unstable. James Buchanan was the sitting president. Neither he nor any of his seven predecessors served more than one four-year term. Congress was splintered into more single-interest parties than nearly any other period. For the first time, a functioning coalition party was formed in Congress. The Democrats controlled the Senate with 34 of the 62 seats, with the Opposition

Coalition holding 20 seats and 7 vacant. In the House of Representatives, no political group had a majority of the 234 seats. The Opposition Coalition held the most with 96 seats. This coalition was comprised of members of the Free Soil Party, the Constitutional Union Party, Independents, Anti-Know-Nothing, Fusion, Anti-Nebraska-Act, Unionists and a few groups of Whigs. There were 81 Democrats in the 34th Congress and one lone Republican. The American Party, also referred to as the 'Know-Nothings', held 52 seats. Lending further ambiguity, many of these parties had Northern, Southern and sometimes Western factions.

Provisions of the Act

Given its future significance, the bill contains a small number of provisions. The agricultural college land act stipulated that 20,000 acres of federal land were to be apportioned to each state for each senator and representative serving in Congress. The land's value was established at \$1.25 per acre. In the event there were not sufficient public lands in a state, then the government issued scrip representing land in an unsettled portion of the country to that state. The proceeds from the sale of the land or scrip must be invested in safe stock yielding no less than 5%. The invested money would constitute a perpetual fund to support at least one college per state that offered courses in agriculture and mechanical arts. The college had to be founded within 5 years. No portion of the fund could be used for buildings and the states must file an annual report regarding the progress of the colleges to the department of agriculture (U.S. Congress, 35th, 2 Session, 1859).

Movement through Government

The bill took an unusual amount of time to move through the government and was touched by several historically significant figures. U.S. Representative Justin Morrill, a Whig from Vermont, initially proposed the act to the House of Representative on December 14, 1857.

It was officially called “An act donating public lands to the several States and Territories which may provide colleges for the benefit of agriculture and the mechanic arts” (U.S. Congress, 35th, 1 Session, 1858). It was referred to the Committee on Public Lands the following day. Four months later, the committee strongly urged that the bill not be passed. After some political maneuvering on behalf of Morrill and his allies, the bill passed the House by a vote of 105 to 100 on April 22, 1858 (U.S. Congress, 35th, 1 Session, 1858, p. 36-1609). In the Senate the act was referred to as H.R. 2 and was championed by Ben Wade “despite the instructions he received from the Ohio legislature” (Gates, 1941, p. 10). The bill passed the Senate on February 7, 1859 by a vote of 28 to 25 (U.S. Congress, 35th, 1 Session, 1859, p. 1412-1414). On February 24, 1859 the bill was vetoed by President Buchanan (Buchanan, 1858)

Opposition

Special Interest Groups.

There were several groups of individuals with interests that were in opposition to the provisions of the bill. These included some military veterans, farmers, slaveholders, speculators and members of the general public.

Veterans.

Though not discussed anywhere in the literature, one group of individuals who was not pleased with the agricultural college land act was former American servicemen. In the decades leading up to 1859, several military service acts were passed that issued bounty-land warrants to veterans of the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican War and various Indian campaigns. In the service act of 1855 alone, more than 263,285 veterans were awarded in excess of 34 million acres of land. This meant that in total nearly one half of a million retired military personnel and their families were in possession of bounty lands (Oberly, 1990). Though the price

was established at \$1.25 per acre upon issuance, by August of 1858 it had plummeted over 40% to \$.78 per acre (Oberly, 1990). This devaluation of land would become one of the principle causes of the Panic of 1857 (Calomiris & Schweikart, 1991). The veterans who held their lands were not pleased with the depreciation, and were not excited about the downward pressure on the market price that the 9 million acres of land grants would create. Though the literature discussed the affect the military bounty scrip on land prices, it did not addressed the act's potential impact on military veterans nor congressional voting behavior. Interestingly, many members of the government such as President Buchanan, who served briefly in the War of 1812, and Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, who fought in the Mexican-American War, found themselves firmly opposed to the agricultural college land act of 1857. There were numerous veterans of the Mexican war serving in Congress, thus giving them personal financial motive to oppose the act. Of further note, the states of Vermont, Maine, Connecticut and Rhode Island did not provide any volunteers to the war effort (Robarts, 1887) They were the core of the bill's most ardent supporters.

Slave Holders.

Slaveholders objected to the bill. They pointed out that the bill's provision did not clearly define a farmer's work as being more aligned with the work of a slave or of the overseer. From Morrill's perspective such a distinction wasn't necessary because both of their duties were combined in the efforts of small landowners and tenant farmers of the North and West. Because there was no distinction, slaveholders were afraid the bill might be interpreted to mean that college education should be provided to farming slaves (Lieberman, 1988)(Rainsford, 1972).

Farmers.

Some farmers disliked the entire idea of agricultural education. Simon (1963) points out “the juxtaposition of the word “agriculture” with the word “college” caused many amused chuckles” (p. 103). At no place was this more evident than the Pennsylvania College of Agriculture. It was originally called the Farmer’s High School of Pennsylvania "partly in a feeling that the farmers might be prejudiced against the word 'college' as that of a place where boys contracted idle habits" (College, 1862). As stated by Minnesota senator Rice said “we want no fancy farmers; we want no fancy mechanics” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 250). Some farmers opposed the act because they “thought the idea of educating farmers and working class people quixotic” (LaMay, 2001, p. 77). Some farmers scoffed at the idea of academics and scientists giving farming advice, whereas others didn’t believe crop yields would be affected in any way by government subsidies for agricultural education (Thelin, 2011).

Speculators.

Also not explored in the literature as an opposing interest to the agricultural college land act were the speculators. Like war veterans, wealthy land speculators occupied seats in Congress. One of the most noteworthy of these was Senator John Slidell of Louisiana who purchased over 25,000 acres of public land warrants in the 1850s (Oberly, 1990). Senator Slidell, not surprisingly, was one of the bills most vocal opponents, as he certainly did not want to see a devaluation of his speculative investment.

General Public.

As demonstrated by the close votes in both the House and Senate, there was little popular support or enthusiasm for the act. As Ross (1938) points out, “there was no formal party committal and the scant majorities, five in the House and 3 in the Senate, were due undoubtedly

to the pressure of the college lobby upon the doubtful and indifferent (p. 5). Horace Greeley, the famed newspaper editor and ardent support of the bill, stated he would be happy if only 5 colleges were established. Proponents of the Homestead Act, which was popular and also making its way through congress, felt the agricultural college land act would undermine it (Williams, 1991).

Organization Level.

In addition to groups of individuals in opposition of the agricultural college land act, several organizations were not keen to the bill's passage. The individual states of Virginia, Georgia and South Carolina had objections unique to their respective histories. Elected officials found themselves standing up for existing agricultural colleges, liberal arts colleges and even the Post Office.

Specific States.

State houses in Virginia, Georgia and South Carolina expressed their respective states had already experienced federal sales of their lands without compensation and they were not in a hurry to do it again. Prior to the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, Virginia laid claim to the Old Northwest, which would become the states of Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana and Ohio. Their claim was rooted in the fact that George Rogers Clark, a Virginian, had taken the city of Vincennes from the English. The land was later ceded to the federal government, who sold parts of it for more than \$79 million. Virginians claimed they did not receive any of that revenue. By that same measure, Georgia and South Carolina, prior to the formation of the federal government, laid claim to the Old Southwest, which would become the states of Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama. When the federal government sold these lands, neither Georgia nor South Carolina realized any revenue from land sales. Virginians, Georgians and South

Carolinians were each circumspect about the prospect of receiving proceeds from land sales for agricultural colleges or any other purpose (Rainsford, 1972).

Liberal Arts Colleges.

While caricaturizing the bill's successful passage under President Lincoln, Axtell (1971) states "Liberal Arts colleges today, after a recent cardiac arrest, its heart stopped on the floor of the House of Representatives, just as the roll call for Justin Morrill's Land-Grant Act had ended" (Axtell, 1971, p. 339). This sentiment was one reason put forth by President Buchanan in his veto when he expressed that federally issued land grants would "injuriously interfere with existing colleges" by establishing an "indefinite number of rival colleges." (Buchanan, 1859, p.1)

Agricultural Colleges.

Existing liberal arts colleges were resistant to the changing times that the bill portended. There was considerable debate over the bill's adverse affect on existing agricultural colleges. According to Ross (1938), over 20 technical colleges were founded by the early 1860's. Agricultural institutions existed in Kansas, Michigan, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Iowa and elsewhere (Ross, 1938). President Buchanan believed that many of these universities were "poor and sustained themselves with difficulty" and the competition would be too great (Buchanan, 1859, p.2). Clearly Buchanan overlooked the possibility of such institutions being the state's recipient of the grant money. This misunderstanding lies in the hands of Representative Morrill and Senator Wade for not advising Buchanan of the bill's intent. This misunderstanding was even more evident when President Buchanan wrote "it would be far better, if such an appropriation of land be made to institutions of learning, to apply it directly" to existing colleges (Buchanan, 1859, p. 2).

Representative Cobb of Ohio was concerned with the financial sustainability of the new agricultural colleges once they were founded. His primary talking point was that there would not be enough money from the sale of the lands to establish or support them (Cong. Globe, 35 Cong., 1 Sess., p. 1742). Because the act stipulated that every state establish a college within 5 years, the market would be saturated with land, prices would drop and insufficient money would be raised.

Post Office.

One final organization with concerns about the agricultural college land act was the Post Office. Senator George Pugh of Ohio worried that postage exemptions afforded to colleges would unduly burden the Post Office and cause its insolvency. Such institutions would be sending "everything through the mails in every direction, seeds, books, two-ounce letters, everything" (Gates, 1941, p. 65)

Clusters of States

At the state level, geographic sectionalism is frequently used in the literature to discuss the bill's opponents and supporters. This oversimplification is misleading. State affinity for the bill can be more accurately predicted when the states are framed as being new or old, large or small, and heavily or sparsely populated.

New States.

The agricultural college land act was forced through "by a combination of older states having no federal lands" (Gates, 1941, p. 15). As Hibbard (1965) pointed out "the new states fought the bill insistently, predicting evil effects of land speculation and absentee landlordism" (p. 330). Senator Joseph Wright of Indiana observed: "Nothing is so disadvantageous to a new State as to have a large amount of its land held by non-residents prior to its settlement" (U.S. Congress, 37th, 2 Session, p. 2441-2442). These sentiments about the bill's affect on new States

were echoed in President Buchanan's veto message. "Nothing could be more prejudicial to their interests than for wealthy individuals to acquire large tracts of the public land and hold them for speculative purposes" (Buchanan, 1859, p. 2).

Sparsely Populated States.

The population of a state determined the number of its congressional representatives, which in turn were the determinant for the amount of land a state received. States with the highest population and therefore the most money would get more in land grants than the less populated and least developed states. California and Rhode Island would have received the same amount of land grants. Many in the sparsely populated states "believed the bill was fundamentally inequitable, designed to benefit the more populous eastern states" (Williams, 1991, p. 39).

Public-land States.

A final determinant of a state's position on the agricultural college land act of 1857 was whether it was a large or small state or, more specifically, whether it was a public-land state. These states were concerned that speculators would hold their land scrip with the hope they would go up in value. This would prevent farmers and businesses from moving in and developing the land. While speaking of railroad and veteran land grants in a memorial to Congress, the state legislature of Iowa voiced, "The sale of public lands to other than actual settlers has materially retarded the growth and prosperity of our state" (U.S. Congress, 35th, 1 Session, 1858, p. 89). Morton Wilkinson of Minnesota said, "The scrip . . . will pass into the hands of speculators, a remorseless class of vampires, who care little for the common prosperity, and still less for the cause of education" (U.S. Congress, 37th, 2 Session, 1862, p. 2395). Clay protested that "greedy capitalists" would exclusively control hundreds of thousands of acres in

western states. (Gates, 1941, p. 42) Senator James Mason from Virginia posed a question to the Senate regarding what would stop "large capitalists" in northern cities acquiring significant amounts of these scrip and possessing large amounts of land (Gates, 1941, p. 43). Mason's question is particularly humorous in light of Louisiana's Senator Slidell's concurrent land speculation discussed earlier. Missouri and Minnesota were so concerned they put forth proposals to be exempted (U.S. Congress, 35th, 1 Session, 1858). The bill was widely viewed in public-land states "as a ruse to for placing valuable lands in the hands of eastern speculators" (Williams, 1991, p. 39). Though the bill passed through Congress, "the public land states gave 35 votes for the measure and 53 in opposition" (Gates, 1941, p. 10).

Federal Level.

The agricultural college land act experienced resistance at the federal level in terms of its constitutionality and as a result of fiscal concerns.

Constitutionality.

The federal government was constitutionally given the right to "dispose of federal lands". Whether the term "dispose" could be construed as meaning "give away" bogged the debate down into one of semantics (Florer, 1968)(Buchanan, 1859). To this dispute, President Buchanan deferred to Chief Justice Taney's denotation of "making sale of the lands or raising money from them" (Buchanan, 1859). Buchanan recognized that though land was bounteous at the time, it would not always be the case. Representative Cobb insisted that the government gained nothing from Morrill's proposal (Cong. Globe, 1 Session, p. 34). There was considerable opposition to the idea that federal government was empowered to take resources from one state and give them to another for specific purposes.

Another matter of constitutionality that was frequently brought out in the literature as an argument solely of the South was states rights. There was no precedent giving the federal government authority to establish standards or reporting requirements for states to follow. This sentiment was not unique to the South however. New England Federalists were also upset about federal over-reach from the Louisiana Purchase to “Mr. Madison’s War” of 1812. At the Hartford Convention held much earlier, representatives from each state in the region gathered for a series meetings to discuss the potential secession of New England from the union. Buel (2005) makes it plainly evident that the marrying of states rights and session was part of the heritage of the North as well as the South.

Another concern at the federal level was that the bill did not include any enforcement mechanisms. The national government was not empowered to confront a state should it choose to use its land grants to its own ends. President Buchanan stated “the Federal Government has no power, and ought to have no power, to compel the execution of the trust” (Buchanan, 1859). When a reiteration of the bill was passed five years later under President Lincoln’s administration, this question surfaced again as the state of Indiana looked to use its funds to aid orphaned children of Indiana farmers slain in the Civil War.

Politically speaking, President Buchanan was a constructionist who believed in the strictest reading of the Constitution with as little interpretation as possible. In President Buchanan’s mind, doling out Federal resources to the States would “constitute a sort of partnership between the two” that would blur the lines between them (Buchanan, 1859).

Another group opposed to the agricultural college land act of 1857 were those concerned with state dependency on the federal government. Senator Cobb of Alabama felt that if this act was passed, it would serve as a precedent leading the national government toward "feeding the

hungry" and "clothing the naked, building churches and schools, supporting those schools." (Gates, 1941, p. 67) Furthermore, the needy may ask "to aid in the erection of buildings to shelter them from the inclemency of the weather" (Cong. Globe 35 Cong. 1 Session 1742). It was widely held that support of such social programs were not under the purview of the U.S. government.

Fiscal Considerations.

In addition to objections based on sectional, political and constitutional grounds, fiscal considerations helped to stop the agricultural college land act of 1857. President Buchanan specified this as a reason in his veto message to Congress, however the literature either omits it or unduly boils it down to the term "inexpedient".

Reduced Federal Revenue.

The Panic of 1857 was more than just an inconvenience. As shown in Table 1, the Panic of 1857 reduced federal revenue by nearly 30%. The drastic reduction in public-land sales was tightly coupled to a significant decrease in westward immigration. Passenger lines to Chicago from the east, for example, experienced a decrease "from an estimated 108,000 passengers in 1856 to a mere 10,000 in 1860" (Calomiris & Schweikart, 1991). New farmers were a critical element to new farmland sales. Existing farmers suffered a decrease in purchasing power because not only did land prices drop, but grain prices plummeted as well. This decline was due to the re-entry of Crimea's wheat onto the market after its war. Thus, concurrent with decreased land sales, revenue from customs shriveled as demand for imports slowed.

Table 1
Federal Government Receipts: 1854 to 1858

Year	Total	Customs	Other	Public Land Sales
1854	73,800	64,224	9,576	8,471
1855	65,351	53,026	12,325	11,497
1856	74,057	64,023	10,034	8,918
1857	68,965	63,876	5,089	3,829
1858	46,655	41,790	4,866	3,514

Note: All figures in 1,000 of USD

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. (1975). *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, p. 1106.

Enlarged Deficit and Debt.

Along with the dramatic shrinking of the revenue, eight consecutive years of budget surplus turned sharply into a relatively monumental deficit. As shown in Table 2, the federal government's debt in 1858 had increased by 44% of its previous year's level. The Panic of 1857 caused banks to suspend services for weeks throughout many major urban areas. Riots and howls of protests could be heard from the city streets to the halls of Congress. Senator Joseph Wright, a Democrat from Indiana, was greatly worried about the "vast debt" that suddenly appeared and demanded a "halt to this sort of extravagance" (Gates, 1941, p. 64). In his State of the Union address, President Buchanan saw this debt as "only a slight misfortune when compared with the suffering and distress prevailing among the people" (Buchanan, 1858).

Table 2
Federal Government Debt, Deficit and Surplus: 1854 to 1858

Year	Debt	Surplus/Deficit
1854	42,244	+15,755
1855	35,588	+5,608
1856	31,974	+4,486
1857	28,701	+1,170
1858	44,913	-27,529

Note: All figures in 1000s of USD

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. (1975). *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, p. 1109

The Panic of 1857 resulted in decreased federal land sales due to a precipitous decline in western expansion. A glut of land grants to railroads and veterans had pushed down land values. Sagging grain prices left little money for American farmers to make purchases, thus curtailing federal revenue from Customs. In February of 1859, this stream of bad financial numbers weighed heavily on the minds of decision makers in the capitol. The prospect of giving away limited resources for a dubious future in a time of present need did not make sound financial sense.

Other Priorities.

The higher prioritization of other matters also contributed to the bills defeat. Potential military expenses were another concern of the time. The constitution was clear that the Federal government was responsible for raising and maintaining an army and navy to protect and defend the country. Though the war with Mexico was long over, a civil war raged on there for years. The conflict frequently spilled over the U.S. border, resulting in a steady stream of calls for redress from the border states. Other issues with which to contextualize the agricultural college land act were within Buchanan's State of the Union address. "Our relations with . . . all the Governments on the continent of Europe, except that of Spain, continue to be of the most friendly character" (Buchanan, 1858, p. 6). The primary source of contention with Spain was Cuba, which was seen as a source of possible appeasement to and expansion of the slaveholding South. Though Buchanan requested funds to appropriate it, he also saw a military contest with Spain might be in the future. Additionally, a canal through Central America was viewed as being of "incalculable importance as a means of communication" and trade (Buchanan, 1858, p. 7).

With tight finances, potential military conflicts and investment opportunities with more visible short and long-term returns, Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' made Buchanan's decision for him.

Discussion

There were a number of factors limiting the thoroughness of this study. The most significant was time. Deadlines prevented a more thorough review of the literature. Time also created limitations on my ability to access historically relevant documents from pertinent archives in Vermont and Pennsylvania. A somewhat limited knowledge of database searching most likely caused the exclusion of several salient documents.

Even with the data that was collected, time played a limiting role. There was insufficient time to cross check all of the members of congress with databases of veterans assigned war bounty scrip. The same is true for uncovering those members of government with large speculative land holdings. These two issues should be further explored. Because there was little enthusiasm one way or the other for the bill, personal motives may well have been the determining factor of its ultimate defeat. Another area for further research involves Representative Morrill himself. Having championed the Morrill Tariff, opposition to the agricultural college land act could have been as much about Morrill and his economic policies as the bill. Furthermore, a further exploration of the effects of the Panic of 1857 would bolster the literature on the matter. Like the speculators and veterans, the Panic of 1857 simply isn't brought out in any of the literature, yet its influence is overwhelmingly undeniable.

Though it may appear to be an intellectual curiosity of history, this topic merits further study. There is little doubt that the eventual passage of the Morrill acts resulted from a desire to bring scientific methods to the small American farmer. Thus, it is ironic how the passage of the bill years later would lead to the end of the small American farm it was intended to help. The

eventual passage of the bill directly and indirectly would create massive industrial farms that would dominate the food production. Agribusinesses concerns dominate the headlines of the news today in the form of GMOs, chemical contamination of the soil and food supplies, and a fragile food chain.

An additional reason this subject merits continued study lies in the need to portray history as accurately as possible. When determining what we value enough to pass on to younger generations, it is necessary to condense information. When so truncated, the end result should be as broad as possible. The modern literature, in an effort to create a convenient curriculum, has truncated the opposition to the bill in a way that typically places blame on an easy yet incorrect target, the South. The work of this paper and others like it clearly demonstrates this oversimplification to be inaccurate and thus injurious to those seeking a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Finally, the symbolic watershed represented by this veto of this act delineates very different times in U.S. and world history. The veto represented the final days before federal dominance over the states. Once passed in 1862, the Morrill act would serve as a precedent for greater federal involvement within the states. In retrospect, the veto of this bill was a last effort to prevent the beginning of the end of small American farm. Furthermore, it is of note that the year Buchanan vetoed the bill, is the same year that Darwin's *Origin of the Species* was published. Science was coming onto the scene in every walk of life. The veto of the agricultural college land act marked a final stand before the popularization of science.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the defeat of the agricultural college land act of 1857 was the result of a competitive interaction between numerous complex interests. These interests can be grouped at

four different levels: individual, organizational, state and federal. Each of these levels housed numerous parties in opposition to the act. Ross (1938) discussed the defeat of the bill in terms of education policy. Gates (1941) discussed it in terms of land policy. Most of the rest who explore this topic frame it as North versus the South. Only Keys (1996) would see the common theme throughout the opposition, but his enumeration of those interests came up short in many regards. The common thread provided in this exploration was simply finance. Those who had money, wanted more. Those who didn't have money tried to stop those who did from getting more.

References

- Axtell, J. (1971). The Death of the Liberal Arts College. *History of Education Quarterly*, 11(4), 339. doi:10.2307/367034
- Buchanan, J. (1858, December 6). Second State of the Union Address. Retrieved from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>
- Buchanan, J. (1859, February 24). Veto Message. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. Retrieved from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>
- Calomiris, C. W., & Schweikart, L. (1991). The Panic of 1857: Origins, Transmission, and Containment. *The Journal of Economic History*, 51(4), 807–834.
- Christy, R. D., & Williamson, L. (Eds.). (1991). *A Century of Service: Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, 1890-1990*. New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers.
- College, P. S. (1862). *The Agricultural College of Pennsylvania: Embracing a Succinct History of Agricultural Education in Europe and America, Together with the Circumstances of the Origin, Rise and Progress of the Agricultural College of Pennsylvania*. W. S. Young.
- Cross, C. (1999). *Justin Smith Morrill Father of the Land-Grant Colleges* (1st ed.). Michigan State University Press.
- Florer, J. H. (1968). Major Issues in the Congressional Debate of the Morrill Act of 1862. *History of Education Quarterly*, 8(4), 459. doi:10.2307/367539
- Gates, P. W. (1941). Western Opposition to the Agricultural College Act. *The Indiana Magazine of History*, 103–136.
- Herren, R. V., & Edwards, M. C. (2003). Whence We Came: The Land-Grant Institution-Origin, Evolution, And Implications For The 21st Century. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 43(4), 88–98. doi:10.5032/jae.2002.04088

Herren, R. V., & Hillison, J. (1996). Agricultural education and the 1862 land-grant institutions:

The rest of the story. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 37, 26–32.

Hibbard, B. H. (1965). *A history of the public land policies*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Hightower, J. (1978). *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times: The Original Hightower Report and Other*

Recent Reports. Cambridge, Mass: Transaction Publishers.

Key, S. (1996). Economics or Education: The Establishment of American Land-Grant

Universities. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 67(2), 196. doi:10.2307/2943980

LaMay, C. (2001). Justin Smith Morrill and The Politics of the Land-Grant College Acts.

Retrieved November 23, 2014, from <http://community-wealth.org/content/justin-smith-morrill-and-politics-land-grant-college-acts>

"Land Grant Heritage". (2014, December 1). Retrieved from <http://www.aplu.org/>

Lieberman, C. (1988, Winter). The Constitutional and Political Bases of Federal Aid to Higher

Education, 1787-1862.pdf. Pi Gamma Mu, International Honor Society in Social Sciences. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41881784>

Oberly, J. W. (1990). *Sixty Million Acres: American Veterans and the Public Lands Before the*

Civil War. Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ Pr.

Rainsford, G. N. (1972). *Congress and higher education in the nineteenth century* (1st edition.).

Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

Robarts, W. H. (1887). *Mexican War Veterans: A Complete Roster of the Regular and Volunteer*

Troops in the War Between the United States and Mexico, from 1846 to 1848; the

Volunteers are Arranged by States, Alphabetically. Brentano's. Retrieved from

<http://books.google.com>

Ross, E. D. (1938). The“ Father” of the Land-Grant College. *Agricultural History*, 12(2), 151–186.

Rudolph, F. (1990). *The American College and University: A History* (Reissue edition.). Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Short, E. C. (1991). *Forms of Curriculum Inquiry*. SUNY Press.

Thelin, J. R. (2011). *A History of American Higher Education, 2nd Edition* (2nd edition.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. (1975). *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Bicentennial Edition, Part 2. Washington, D.C.

U.S. Congress, 35th, 1 Session. (1858). *Congressional Globe*. Washington, D.C.

U.S. Congress, 35th, 2 Session. (1859). *Congressional Globe*. Washington, D.C.

U.S. Congress, 37th, 2 Session. (1862). *Congressional Globe*. Washington, D.C.

Williams, R. L. (1991). *The Origins of Federal Support for Higher Education: George W. Atherton and the Land-Grant College Movement*. University Park, Pa: Penn State Press.