

Cornell: A History of
Indigenous Dispossession and
Genocide

Land Acknowledgement

Cornell University is located on the traditional homelands of the Gayogohó:nq' (the Cayuga Nation). The Gayogohó:nq' are members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, an alliance of six sovereign Nations with a historic and contemporary presence on this land. The Confederacy precedes the establishment of Cornell University, New York State, and the United States of America. We acknowledge the painful history of Gayogohó:nq' dispossession, and honor the ongoing connection of Gayogohó:nq' people, past and present, to these lands and waters.

Objectives

- Brief historical overview of the Gayogohó:no (Cayuga) Nation and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy
- Introduce the historical context by which the Cayuga Nation (the original inhabitants of the land now occupied by Cornell) was displaced
- Provide an Overview of how the Cornell endowment is tied to the displacement of Indigenous peoples in 15 states
- NAISAC Demands

Intro to Haudenosaunee History

- Cayuga Nation, along with the Seneca, Onondaga, Oneida and Mohawk Nations formed the Haudenosaunee Confederacy under the Great Law of Peace in the 12th Century.
 - The Haudenosaunee (people of the longhouse) were also referred to as the Iroquois but don't do that it's weird.
 - The Tuscarora Nation later joined the Confederacy in 1722, leading to the other common name of "The Six Nations"
- Their constitution influenced many in existence today, including that of the United States

Clans of the Cayuga

- Five clans, each signifying family lineage
 - Bear, Heron, Snipe, Turtle, Wolf
- Clans are determined by the citizen's mother
- Matrilineal Societies: Within the clans are Clan Mothers and Council Representatives

Sullivan Campaign

- Series of destructive raids carried out by Seneca and Onondaga, and American loyalists on the frontiers of New York and Pennsylvania in 1778. The raids crippled the American Continental Army by depriving it of food and manpower
- In response, Washington ordered 4,469 men under General Sullivan and General Clinton to destroy the ability of the Six Nations to wage war on the Americans.
- Despite their neutral status, the Cayuga Nation was targeted by the US Military in this campaign in 1779
 - Many villages were destroyed and orchards burned
 - The majority of losses of human life were due to exposure and starvation later
 - The Cayuga citizens were then further driven from their land, which was parceled and “granted” to soldiers

Treaty of Canandaigua

- November 1794: the Sachems of the Confederacy Nation and the United States signed a treaty affirming the Cayuga Nation's right to 64,000 acres of sovereign land.
- The land was not returned to the Cayuga

Aftermath

- For the 250 years following the signing of the still-unobserved treaty the Cayuga Nation continued to pursue their land claim
- Beginning in the 21st Century they began buying their rightful spaces back

“Land Grant Institution”

Morrill Land Grant Act (1862)- The purpose of the land-grant colleges was: to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life. There was a military training requirement as well.

- Military training requirement and the Indian Wars
- The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934
 - Cornell had divested all physical land holdings by 1935

Under the act, each eligible state received 30,000 acres of federal land, either within or contiguous to its boundaries, for each member of congress the state had as of the census of 1860. This land, or the proceeds from its sale, was to be used toward establishing and funding of a single institution of the states choosing.

In the Context of Cornell's Founding

- Post-parceling (after the Sullivan-Clinton Campaign), 990,000 acres of land were granted to the State of New York through the Morrill Land Grant Act, and Cornell was approved as a land grant institution
- But with no federal land available within its borders, New York was given paper scrip to acquire land in other states.
- If the federal land within a state was insufficient to meet that state's land grant, the state was issued scrip which authorized the state to select federal lands in other states to fund its institution

Continued: Wisconsin

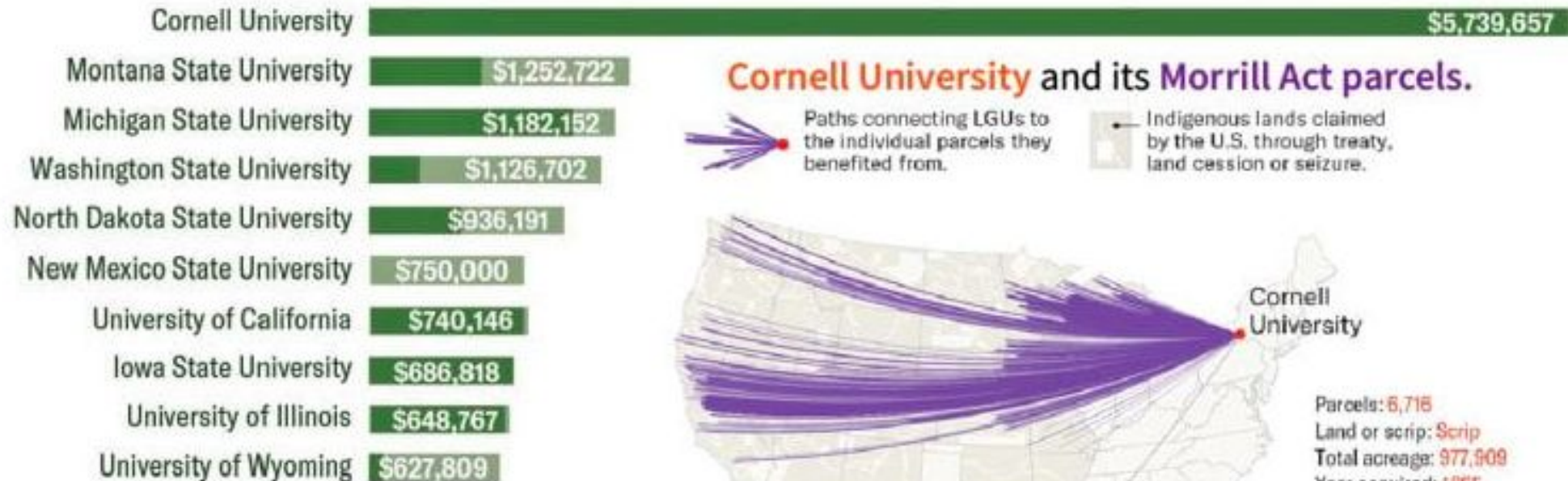
- This was done through the buying and selling of pine forests in Wisconsin acquired by timber baron John McGraw. These forests were taken under duress from the Ojibwe and Menominee as well as surrounding tribes (TL;DR the Cayuga weren't the only victims on the path to the institution's founding)
- New York only received one tenth of the land grant, but by the 1920s Cornell had yielded one third of the total grant revenues generated by all states through this process

Grand Total

- Cornell received the most land under the Morrill Act of any University- a total of 987,000 acres
- This land was located in 6,716 parcels across 15 current states and 202 counties, and by 1914 an estimated \$5.7 million had been raised from these lands for the University (this is approximately \$148 million in 2020 dollars)
- As of 1914, Cornell had raised over 4.5 times as much money as the next closest land-grant university (Montana State).

Whose endowment raised the most from Indigenous land?

Top 10 beneficiaries by **principal** and **value of unsold land**, ca. 1914



SOURCES: Andrews 1918; GLO, BLM; Royce 1896-1897; USFS; USGS; Natural

In the Context of Cornell Today

- Despite this history, attempts to recognize the original people and the process that led to Cornell's founding have struggled to advance
- However, Cornell's recognition of the Cayuga Nation is slowly increasing
 - 2019 marked the first time the Cayuga language has been taught at Cornell, with the Gayogohó: no language and culture course crosslisted with AIISP
- This indicates a potential shift towards a more respectful and reconciliatory relationship (we hope)

1. The American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program shall transition to department status; this transition is to be completed within the next four years.
2. Increased funding shall be granted to the AIISP for the recruitment and retention of new Indigenous faculty members, to support the transition of the program to department status. A minimum of five new faculty members shall be hired within the next four years.
3. Increased funding shall be granted to the AIISP to support increased recruitment and retention efforts of Indigenous students. In 2017, there were only 67 Native Americans enrolled across all colleges, undergraduate and graduate. We only make up 0.3% of the overall Cornell student population. We demand that the number of enrolled Native American/Alaska Native students be increased to 1.7% of the total Cornell student population, equal to the percentage of Native American/Alaska Natives in the United States. The University shall make efforts to increase the number of enrolled Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students to 1% of the total student population. In order to support increased rates of retention, an additional staff member shall be hired to separate the duties of recruitment and retention efforts within the AIISP. Recruitment conducted by the University shall focus on Indigenous students from communities historically affected and/or displaced by the Morrill Land Grant Act. Any student coming from a community affected and/or displaced by the Morrill Land Grant Act shall receive a free education, regardless of field of study.
4. An Indigenous therapist will be hired by Cornell Health, to aid in addressing the unique mental health struggles affecting Indigenous students, staff, and faculty.

3. Increased funding shall be granted to the AIISP to support increased recruitment and retention efforts of Indigenous students. In 2017, there were only 67 Native Americans enrolled across all colleges, undergraduate and graduate. We only make up 0.3% of the overall Cornell student population. We demand that the number of enrolled Native American/Alaska Native students be increased to 1.7% of the total Cornell student population, equal to the percentage of Native American/Alaska Natives in the United States. The University shall make efforts to increase the number of enrolled Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students to 1% of the total student population. In order to support increased rates of retention, an additional staff member shall be hired to separate the duties of recruitment and retention efforts within the AIISP. Recruitment conducted by the University shall focus on Indigenous students from communities historically affected and/or displaced by the Morrill Land Grant Act. Any student coming from a community affected and/or displaced by the Morrill Land Grant Act shall receive a free education, regardless of field of study.

4. An Indigenous therapist will be hired by Cornell Health, to aid in addressing the unique mental health struggles affecting Indigenous students, staff, and faculty.

5. The University shall include a land acknowledgement of the Gayogohó:nq' (Cayuga) people before all Ithaca-based University-affiliated events. The land acknowledgement used will be the AIISP-approved version.

6. The University shall put out a statement acknowledging the amount of land acquired, interest accrued, and mineral rights funds received through the Morrill Land Act and thus through Indigenous dispossession. The University shall commit to a policy of refraining from mineral and resource extraction on lands gained through the Morrill Land Grant Act.

7. The University shall return all lands in the Ithaca area not immediately utilized for educational purposes to the traditional Gayogohó:nq' leadership. The University shall build and maintain channels of communication with the traditional Gayogohó:nq' leadership until the land return process is complete.

8. To ensure that all students have a basic understanding of the gravity of Indigenous genocide and their own positionality on stolen Indigenous land, the University shall mandate that all students take an introductory Indigenous Studies course during their first year of study.

9. To ensure that monuments to historical figures of colonization and violence against Indigenous people are removed, the University shall rename Morrill Hall on the Arts Quad. Consultation with AIISP Faculty and Students in the renaming is required.

10. The Ad-Hoc Committee on Native American Affairs shall be reinstituted to oversee the approval of these demands. The Committee shall be made up of Indigenous students, staff, faculty, local Indigenous leadership, and delegates from University administration.

Organization Sponsorships

Native American and Indigenous Students At Cornell
the American Indian Science and Engineering Society
Indigenous Graduate Students' Association
Cornell Asian Pacific Islander Student Union
Black Students Union
People's Organizing Collective
Black Women Support Network
South Asian Council
The Puerto Rican Students Association
The Cornell Abolitionist Revolutionary Society

Cornell Welcomes Refugees
Cornell Vietnamese Association
Cornell Dream Team
La Asociacion Latina
The Gender Justice Advocacy Coalition
International Students' Union
First Generation Students' Union
Haven
Cornell Higher Education Review
Climate Justice Cornell
Collective X

Petition

868 Total Signatures

- 395 undergraduates
- 111 graduate students
- 35 Faculty Members
- 26 Staff Members
- 124 Alumni
- 177 Community Members

Conclusion

And/or questions?