

Recall This Book 76
Land-Grab Universities
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Robert Lee (JP, JT)

John Plotz: From Brandeis University, welcome to *Recall this Book*, where we assemble scholars and writers from different disciplines to make sense of contemporary issues, problems, and events, and I think today maybe our title says it all: Land Grab Universities, the relationship of American higher Ed, not just in Western states, to the expropriation of Native American lands that characterized settler colonialism's creep across the continent. So, I'm John Plotz, a science fiction scholar, and your regular RtB host and joining me today is a new host from here at Brandeis, Jerome Tharaud, my colleague in the English department, author of a wonderful book on 19th Century Literature, art, and religion, called *Apocalyptic Geographies: Religion, Media, and the American landscape*. So, Jerome welcome hi.

Jerome Tharaud: Hi, it's great to be here.

John Plotz: Yeah, it's awesome to have new faces, new faces and we're happy to welcome for reasons that will become obvious, Dr. Robert Lee, whose PhD is from Berkeley. He was a fellow at Harvard and is now an assistant professor of history at Cambridge. A very impressive instance of eastward migration. Bobby so, hello and welcome.

Robert Lee: Hi, thanks for having me.

John Plotz: It's great to have you, so you're, I'll just say that his work generally, focuses on indigenous dispossession and US state formation in the 19th century American West, and specifically he has a cluster of articles and a database, all linked to in our show notes, in which that title Landgrab University is first aired. So, Bobby, can we just start by asking you about that project and I should say you worked

on it with the celebrated journalist Tristan Athone. A member of the Kiawah tribe, incoming editor at large at *Grist* who previously served as editor in chief at the *Texas Observer* and Indigenous Affairs Editor at *High Country News*. I just wanted to sort of slip that biography in, since obviously, you know this is so much about your work, but I assume a lot of it is work that you did with Tristan as well.

Robert Lee: Yeah, it's an important point. Land Grab Universities is a collaborative project. It's also a multimedia project and I hope we can talk about both of those aspects, but just to give you a little bit of the subject matter background of what it's about, it is about the history of land expropriation for the benefit of land grant universities in the United States. I'm sure all your listeners have heard of land grant universities and in the most material sense they're called land grant universities because they receive lots of land from the federal government under the Morrill Act of 1862, a law that's passed, a land law that's passed in 1862. And the investigation was in effort to sort of unspool the big confusing knot of where this land came from and what were the indigenous nations that the United States acquired this land from and how, and how did it redistribute and capitalize this land for the benefit of endowment building for land grant universities mostly in the 19th century, but into the 20th century and in order to build these endowments, in order to sort of see the land grant university program. And so, the investigation was, I mean at root, a digital humanities investigation where we were trying to track down math and sort of unspool and not completely to connect all of the indigenous nations that the land and land grant universities came from to the universities that they benefitted.

John Plotz: Great and Bobby just the key point for me at least that was a revelation if you could sort of unpack that, the Land Grant university, I always associated it with oh, the University of Nebraska was given some land to build this campus, but the land grants you're talking about do not operate that way at

all. They operate at a distance, right? The university and its land can be far separated from one another.

Robert Lee: Well, that's right, but anything with the land grant university system, there are exceptions, so there are a few universities that did acquire land for their campuses, uh, through these land grants, but for the most part, no, it's not about the land that's underneath campuses. It's about land that's at a distance, that can be sold or managed in order to raise funds for endowments. So, this is land that in some cases is hundreds of miles away. In some cases, thousands of miles away from the universities who benefited. There were really 2 main ways in which universities were able to take advantage of this act, the way that it was administered different geographically. So, universities of states that were universities in the east had a select land in the West of surveyed land in the public domain that had been expropriated through various treaties, ratified treaties, unratified treaties, land seizures and surveyed into those parcels that you see when you look out the window when you're flying in a plane across the United States and then to select parcels from anywhere on the surveyed public domain in the United States. Because public land federal land isn't in eastern states, the public domain is in the West for the most part and Western states had to select land to build up their endowments that was within the boundaries of their individual states. So, all of the University of California land under the Morrill Act comes out of California, but there are also maybe 30 other universities that benefit from land selections in California in the mid-19th century, this is going on during the time that you have the California genocide that's been written about a lot in the last few years going on, so the land redistribution differed by states. But it was generally land that was at a distance used for the purpose of generating capital, not bases on which to hold classes.

John Plotz: Yeah, that sort of brings up a lot of interesting questions

about the relationship of this to like new university land acknowledgments, for example, which I hope we can get to. But before Jerome gets to a meaty question, can I ask you kind of like a visualization question? When you mentioned these selections, is that kind of like draft day in the NFL or something? Like, were they all invited into the room to pick from a map? Is there like a moment of selection or how? Does that work?

Robert Lee: No, there's not a moment. A draft isn't really the right image. It's all decentralized, so for the most part, I mean, how this works with the land that universities in the East, so you guys are in Massachusetts, the beneficiaries of Massachusetts land was MIT and they had to split it up. Most of these states in the east that have these selections in the West in order to actuate the selection, they got basically coupons. This is called script. This is land script that they can use. Basically, it's a form it says, this is a piece of script for 160 acres under the Morrill Act of 1862. For the benefit of the state of Massachusetts and then they have to fill in where the land is, but they don't have to do it themselves. They can sell that. They can sell the right to select it, so what most of the universities in the east where most of the states of benefiting universities in the East did was, they just sold the script in bulk for the most part, to speculators, because they didn't want to deal with the administrative costs of actually going through the whole selection process. There were major exceptions to this. Cornell, which is the largest beneficiary of the Morrill Act, was a was a major exception of this. Brown tried to at first engage in selections, but then it abandoned the effort, so most of these sort of sold the script or the coupons off to large speculators so they could because part of the way that they act worked was that you could only live off the interest, so there was an incentive to raise capital as quickly as possible and you could do that by selling off the script as quickly as possible to get the cash that you could then invest in and start using for the benefit of the university. It was different in the Western states that had the select land

within it within their state, they tended to set up 'cause they didn't get script, they had to actually go through the process of selecting and they set up these land boards. The University of California basically ran a real estate office out of the university for decades, and they were acting like any other land speculators would in the 19th and in the early 20th century and looking for the best parcels that they could acquire to then resell. And then you have a whole another phenomenon where universities wind up not selling this land. This happens a lot in sort of the mountain states in the West and the later state, the later territories that became States and were grandfathered into this program. I mean it couldn't be like a draft because this was a sort of evolving program, where, as new states were created, they were grandfathered in and joined in and became beneficiaries of the Morrill Act.

John Plotz: So, in other words, like New Mexico in 1912 or whatever gets handed, yeah.

Robert Lee: Yeah, they come, they come much later, and they don't get their Morrill act until much later and a lot of these later states wind up holding onto the land. So, we did a follow up story that showed that there were around 500,000 acres of the Morrill Act land that were never sold. They're still held onto by the States and in many cases these parcels are, they were leased out. And they have been able to sort of keep up with inflation in a way that the capital raised from the original grants has not because the way that the way the program was structured you had to spend the income that was produced every year so you didn't have this effect of sort of compound interest growing the pot from \$100,000 to you know what it would be today if it had compound interest. It's still \$100,000 for a lot of these early grants. You know if that's what they originally raised, but it's different for the ones that were able to hold onto the land, they are able to set current leasing prices and to earn more. Me out of it. This is why South Dakota State University which we which we mentioned in the main article in the project,

which was out ahead of the curve and sort of reallocating the use of these funds. They were able to reallocate them towards the student needs of indigenous students, but those were more than symbolic funds because they had this land that's still generating probably a few \$100,000 a year income.

Jerome Tharaud: So, can I, Bobby, ask us to go back a minute to when you we're talking about the sort of, the West versus east dynamics of this. Uhm, so in the article you describe 11 million acres broken up into 80,000 parcels of land, scattered mostly across 24 Western States and so I'm looking at the map. And I see that there are more universities in the East and that most of the land which is in purple is in the sort of the plain states in the West.

John Plotz: I should say all of these links and the map itself will be up on our website, so you should definitely navigate through the show notes to take a look at it.

Jerome Tharaud: So, and I thought that the example you gave of the University of California and Cornell was really illuminating because you know, you point out that like University of California, which only got land within the borders of the state of California, got something like \$740,000 worth in Morrill funds, whereas Cornell got \$5.7 million worth and so that they kind of made me think of this older story of colonialism in the West as a resource colony, you know a plundered province, as Bernard Devoto famously called it. And so, I'm just wondering, you know, how we should think about the relationship of those two forms of colonialism? The sort of extractive resource colonialism versus the settler colonialism that, I think is the focus of your story.

Robert Lee: I don't know if I would draw such a stark distinction between the Eastern states benefiting from the West and the Western states benefiting from the West. I mean, this is all a form of colonial extraction, it's just you know, it's

different. The sort of distance that they're that they're operating on, and this was an issue in the in the 19th century. There are certain controversies around the passage of the Morrill Act. All there were you know, there are Westerners who were saying why should easterners benefit from land in the West. You know nothing at all in terms of the colonization of the continent from indigenous people thinking about, you know, who among the settlers in this space should benefit from its exploitation. Then there was the other half of the coin where, and this was an argument that Justin Morrill was the, Morrill act was named after Justin Morrill, who was a senator from Vermont congressman and a senator when he was pushing who sponsored the bill when he was pushing for this, he wanted the arguments that he was making was that eastern states had earned the right to uh, sort of plunder the western provinces, as you put it, as payback for doing things like building the infrastructure like canals and turnpikes that eased passage into the West for settlers, right? That made it possible and attractive for Easterners to move into the West and they conceptualized this sort of a sort of a payback, and of course, and there were differences of where their congressional delegates would come down on this. You know it wasn't unanimously passed. I don't remember the exact breakdown. But there were real arguments about who should reap the benefits of colonizing the continent. But for all of them it was a process of colonization and resource extraction. It was about who was going to accrue the benefits and where that was California going to be the sole benefit of the lands within California or was it going to be distributed across states? But there are a tremendous amount of what's known as Indian claims cases in the 20th century. I don't know if you've heard of it or maybe read about it somewhere, it's something called the Indian Claims Commission, which ran from the mid-1940s until the late 1970s and was supposed to be a vehicle to process legal claims connected to broken treaties across the country, I mean it didn't live up to its promise in a in a lot of ways, and it was geared more towards extinguishing claims rather

than providing real economic redress. But there were hundreds of these cases, more than 800 of these claims, that were processed in the mid-20th century. The most famous of these is a Black Hills case that eventually makes its way to the Supreme Court. Supreme Court 1980 decides that the two land in the Black Hills was stolen in the 1870s and 1860s and they were going to give an award of approximately \$100 million to compensate for that. And the students said, no, we're not taking that and it's still unresolved to this day. But there are lots of these cases in the 20th century, and this was the source that we actually used because one of the mandates for litigating broken treaties was figuring out what was, what were the damages? And in order to figure out the damages, part of that was figuring out what was paid originally for the land? You know, where the Treaties were up to what extent were they...so in the mid-20th century the federal government engages in this massive forensic accounting investigation process in order to in order to look into these cases and one piece of that forensic accounting is figuring out what was paid for all these treaties in the 19th century. So, this is the way we can figure out how much was paid originally for this land. It's using those courses.

Jerome Tharaud: So, so in the article you make a distinction between parcels seized by unratified treaty versus those seized by treaty. And so I was curious about what the difference is and why that's important, because you know in the article uh, you quote Jameson Suite as saying you can point to every treaty where there's some kind of fraud where there's some kind of coercion going on and and so, so that would seem like, well, even when the land is ceded by treaty, you know it's still stolen land and so, so why is the distinction between being seized by unratified treaty versus ceded by treaty? Why is that important?

Robert Lee: Well, it's important for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, in the context of the research for the for the article we were trying to figure out what was the difference

between what was paid to extinguish Indigenous title and what was raised for the endowments. The capital that was raised to be able to see what that and quantify what that difference was. When it comes to the difference between ratified and unratified treaties in that context, ratified treaties typically would have some kind of a token payment. You know this might be a few cents an acre, or sometimes it might be as high as \$0.10 or \$0.25 an acre. But mostly in the range of, you know one to three cents an acre. Unratified treaties are land that is, uh, well that, I mean literally unratified pretty much means it's UN ratified by Congress. They made an agreement, sort of in the field. This is, I mean, this is the story of California, California is all unratified treaties in the in the early 1850s they make this all of these treaties across California, Congress never ratifies them, so they technically never become the law of the land. The land is taken, the land's taken under these treaties, but no payments are made. There is no fulfillment of these properties. So, California is really the epicenter for that, although you also see it in other places and on post Oregon, Nevada, there are lots of unratified treaties, but no payments at all would have been made for unratified treaties versus ratified treaties, or there would have been a relation setup and some sort of some sort of token payment.

John Plotz: So, in other words, like New Mexico in 1912 or whatever gets handed, yeah.

Robert Lee: Yes, I in general uhm the like land in Louisiana, is just, uh, is just taken and assumed to be conquered by the Spanish and then when it's transferred as part of the Louisiana Purchase, it's just taken. There's no treaties made in or no efforts to make any types of treaties in places like in Louisiana, for the vast majority of the continent, there is some type of instrument, it might be a treaty. It might be an unratified treaty, but also as you get further into the 19th century, I mean officially treaty making stopped between the United States and Indigenous nations in 1871 and after that point

they're making what are often called treaty-like agreements. They are, they look just like treaties. They have articles just like treaties. They don't look much different than what comes in the 1860s, the 1850s technically, but they're not treaties. Technically, they're legal agreements. Which is something that I'm not sure what it is, except it's not a treaty. They're, just it's pretty like...

John Plotz: Because that's prior to the Indian Citizenship Act, right? I mean, so it's not as if...

Robert Lee: Yes, this is this prior to the Indian – this is the period between 1870 and into the early 20th century and citizenship is 1924. But there's also other instruments that are used to simply take indigenous land. Executive orders, especially in the later 19th century. And there are just unilateral congressional acts that are passed that take land. I mean, this is the best known one is probably the Dawes Act. Dawes General Severalty Act, which has this sort of this back door of dispossession where it says we are going to distribute land in and briefly be simple to members, you know, to the tribal members on the rolls, and we're going to take the surplus land that's left in in reservations, so they do that, and then through the allotment process you also have the loss of millions of more acres through things like tax seizures and all other sort of unscrupulous means by which people are able to extract the land, the allotments from indigenous allottees.

Jerome Tharaud: So, as you did that research, what surprised you as your data emerged; I mean was there an a-ha moment?

Robert Lee: Well, we didn't know what it was going to look like and it's not so much an a-ha moment. But it's like, we should have known moment, right? When you look at that map that you were talking about before that's linked on the site that shows all of the 80,000 parcels. That's like the investigation, like in miniature and one page. You know the picture. All these where all these parcels on the map is made by, uh, by

Margaret Pearson, as a cryptographer for the project again, and we talked about sort collaboration on this. This, Margaret Peters is a work, but we didn't know what that map is going to look like. But now that we see it, it's obvious why it looks the way it does. If you take a look at it what you're going to see is a big sort of half-crescent that goes from Missouri up until up through Wisconsin in Minnesota and Wisconsin, and it's sort of like this this half-crescent state of parcels. This was where the sort of main property frontier was in the 1860s and 1870s, so This is why the script was located in this way. This was sort of the hot property market, but you also see is a cluster in California. In the great Central Valley of California, where this is a really other dense set of parcels. This is another script that's being that's being snapped up in the in the 1860s, in the 1870s in California, which is the other hot landmark. So, this is just the story. It's sort of a pedestrian story of the beneficiaries of these universities, you know, doing what, uh, what others were doing at the time with those sort of larger land markets were doing because and the Morrill Act acres and I was describing it a couple of minutes ago as this huge land area, it's still just a drop in the bucket of the amount of land is being churned, uh, indigenous land is being converted into settler property in the 19th century. What we're talking about in all is like more than a billion acres over the course of the 19th century, and this is like 10-10 million acres, 11 million acres. It's like one percent of it.

Jerome Tharaud: Yeah, that's one thing that's I mean was surprising to me and made me think differently about efforts to return land you know, and when I think of land back, I tend to think of places like the Black Hills or, you know, national parks, or, you know, public, large contiguous uh, tracts of public land. Uhm, and but then when you start thinking about those 80,000, you know parcels of land where some are like in Walmart, parking lots and some are on playgrounds in California you know, and it's, I guess it reveals just how complicated, uhm, the process of achieving justice would

be. And sort of makes me wonder, I guess like is returning land feasible? Or since these parcels have been kind of capitalized, right like they've been invested and turned into money? Yeah, turned into endowments. Is the best mechanism for justice through the kinds of scholarships like you were talking about at South Dakota State? Or are there other models?

Robert Lee: Yeah, I mean there are sort of two tiers of feasibility or ease of feasibility of land return at that which is land specific to the distribution under the moral. The land that's still retained by the states, so the small percentage about 5% or so, that's still retained by the states that could be returned by the states. I mean, it would be a matter, the real challenge would be political because you would have to go to state legislatures and convince them to divest themselves of this land. And most of this land is in Western states that are controlled by Republican state legislatures, not that I would expect a different outcome from democratic state legislatures, but I think the hill would even be higher to climb in a lot of these deep red Western states, to convince them to divest themselves of this land on the other...

John Plotz: Though California might be an interesting test case. Sorry Bobby, just in terms of thinking about a western blue state, maybe California. There would be more friction between competing political interests and...

Robert Lee: Yeah, but they are in the category of having sold all of their land, so they're in the second category of having distributed their land into the open market.

John Plotz: Oh, I see.

Robert Lee: The real estate markets in the United States. This is the Place that's been chopped up and turned into the tract housing. It's been turned into baseball diamonds, you know, into the various private public property of all sorts. So, it is in the same boat as property, on the public domain of the

United States, it's really no different, it's just it. It reached the market through a different law, but there are thousands of these laws in the in the 19th century that produced the sort of mosaic of property that we have in the former public domain of the United States. But then when it comes to sort of a different or more creative Native solutions to what to do and you know, California is a good example. I mean, California University of California owns other land that they have acquired over the course of the late 19th and 20th and 21st century and you could think of, a people are thinking about this about, trying to come up with new types of partnerships or sharing or controlling these spaces or returning other land. Or creating you know, programs that could generate, that could redirect funds that are not only being produced, but to pay back what's been produced over time, through the Morrill Act, and that could be channeled into a number of different things when people talk about this project that, the question of you know, what now often comes up. You know, what do we do now? And these often revolve around what land grant universities can do in terms of expanding enrollment, changing curriculum, providing better services, and more recruitment of indigenous students, staff, and faculty. Various programs that are going on. I mean, South Dakota State, is one of them. We've seen some actions sort of moving in this direction. The University of Minnesota, uh, seems to be active in this way. Ohio State University has created a partnership with the First Nations Development Institute to think about what moving forward with the full knowledge of the Morrill Action can look like for them, it's still to be seen what's going to come out of that. But there are there are other sort of creative solutions that could be put in play.

John Plotz:

Sorry, this is probably a totally different research project that one would have to undertake, but do you have any idea of what the numbers are of Native American or Indigenous students who've gotten degrees at these universities like, do they represent the vast majority of all Native Americans who've ever gotten college degrees probably got, came

through one of these universities? Or how do you know what those numbers look like?

Robert Lee: I don't know what they look like specifically, but one of the reactions to this piece was a study that appeared in the *Native American and Indigenous Studies* journal by a pair of economists who were not asking that question precisely, they were asking the question, how well have land grant universities served indigenous students? Vis-à-vis Non-land grant universities. Not saying exactly how many, but in general what they found is that land grant universities were not statistically better or had a statistically more significant record of providing educations to indigenous students than non-land grant universities. So, these there are some that that enroll larger numbers than others University of New Mexico versus something like something like Cornell. We did include, so, there are three parts of the project that you sort of mentioned at the beginning. There's the article, there's the database. and there's a website and so on. On the website landgrabu.org there are pages for each university and one of the statistics that we did collect for each one of the universities is what is the proportion of native and indigenous students today for those universities? But I think this is just down there. I think 2019 or 2020, whichever ones would publish when the story came out, but so we have a tiny sliver of that story that's waiting to be to be written.

John Plotz: I was thinking about that Walter Benjamin idea that every document of civilization is also a document of barbarism, and I was thinking about the ways in which one of the things I love about this project is that it helps us see universities, well, as you said at the beginning, as kind of like the railroads as instruments of you know, expropriation and extinction of native land claims and yet also they are like the places that we go to if we want to study questions like this like they're both of those things. And so, the kind of prosaic question I had is there's a way now that universities are trying to grapple with that through the land

acknowledgement process, and I just wondered if you had any thoughts given the land acknowledgement that you're proposing is not so much the acknowledgement of the acres that we're standing on, but it's more about those acres all the way over there that were extinguished, I guess, in order for this university to be founded or to you know to be funded. So yeah, whether you have thoughts about that question about like the land acknowledgement as a way of grappling with the double legacy of universities or other ways that we can think about that double legacy.

Robert Lee: Yeah, the Benjamin quote is a great way of thinking about the sort of paradox. Or the contradiction that's embedded within the land grant universities. On the one hand, these sort of sites of progress of development. I mean, this is a story that you see in the things like the murals that they have up at these land grant universities where it's like a vision of American progress through technological development. And there's a lot of great things to say about what land grant universities have done and produced. I mean, it's a graduate of language of a land grant university who's responsible for a lot of the vaccines that we get as children. You know, the things that we use, television tubes that the developed land grant universities, and there are a lot of wonderful things of food that we eat the dominant corn variety that is in most of the food that Americans eat is developed at land grant university. Whether or not that's a good or bad thing.

John Plotz: Yeah, that's that one is a mixed blessing right yeah?

Robert Lee: I'll leave that to listeners to decide. But it has been a transformative thing that's been cast as progress and for most of sort of the period of sort of public memory and historical writing about land grant universities, it's about been about telling that side of the story: the story of progress and development that comes out of land grant Universities. The flip side of that is the flip side of every parcel of land that's been plucked out of the public domain

in the United States. On the one hand, you have this history of disposal of the gain of individuals of this property. On the flip side, is the history of Colonialism and resource extraction that's been traditionally sort of left out of the story and land acknowledgments have been one solution I think, a highly problematic and imperfect one, to recognizing that duality. One of the things that we were trying to do with this project was to show, I mean one of the many shortcomings of, I think, land acknowledgements were you know, they first took off outside the United States, that sort of migrated there's this global phenomenon where settler societies recognize their presence on expropriated indigenous land and the problem becomes when that is a sort of a performance in itself rather than a starting point for some sort of material change or a concrete action that moves towards redress. What we are trying to show in the land grab university project was that it's not just about the land that we're standing on, it's the way the whole ways in which land has been capitalized to transform a settler society. And this is just one, this is just one small aspect of it, so we have seen some changes in land acknowledgments in response to the research. So, for example, the Washington State University Pullman incorporated some of our data about Washington state and the funds that they raised out of this into their land acknowledgement to acknowledge that. And not a lot of the others are doing that. What we've seen in reaction to the piece, especially lately the Utah State University recently came out with the land acknowledgement; Cornell University adjusted its land acknowledgement too. To, uh, to acknowledge its land grant history, but they are tending to focus on using land acknowledgements to cling to the idea that land acknowledgements are just about the land that you're standing on, not about the society that is developed around. It's not about the buildings that you're standing in, which you are also provided during this process of appropriation.

John Plotz: Right since you mentioned the global context, probably can I

just ask really quickly, do you, are there comparable projects undertaken in other settler societies? Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa? Are there records of those similar like land grant university processes or?

Robert Lee: There are some, especially in the in the British Empire, that is the context that I'm most familiar with, mainly through the work of one of the contributors to the to the forum that they had on the Land Grab University project in the in the *Mace* Journal. Looking at this from a from a British colonial perspective, we see these universities under different forms in Australia, in New Zealand and in Canada, I mean the whole I, I mean land grant universities as they emerged and under the sort of, they didn't appear fully formed with the Morrill Act of 1862, this was a model that developed over a long period of time. I mean from my research I think one of the earliest land grant universities is or land grab universities is Trinity College Dublin, which in the late in the late 1500s gets Irish land that's been expropriated to start a Trinity college. So, using this sort of overseas colonization, a form of extraction and then that map, that model gets exported to the American colonies. Yeah, you see it in Virginia. You see it and you see it in New England once you get to the 19th century in the United States, you have other land grants.

John Plotz: That's fascinating, yes.

Robert Lee: That are pre-Morrill Act land grants to build state universities. University of Missouri, that's one of these. There's a university in Mississippi. It's no longer in operation that was Jefferson Davis's alma mater that received a grant of a grant of indigenous land. There was a story that came out after we published land grab universities in *Scalawag* magazine that documented the University of North Carolina is pre-Morrill Act fund raising from the selloff of Cherokee land. So, there is this long history of doing this and it's, uh, and there's a wide history too. I don't, I'm not as familiar with. I know there's some in

the Spanish Empire universities you know uh in Mexico City, in Peru, there's a college in the early colonial period. That is that is benefiting through Spanish colonial land policies. This runs much deeper and much wider, but there's still wide field research left to be done on both on how it operates with anyone from within the United States and how it operates globally.

John Plotz: Thank you, I really hope people looking for dissertation topics just pricked up their ears at that because I'm really glad you made the point about it being outside just the British. I assumed it was a British Empire, so it's helpful to know that it's worldwide. That's great, yeah?

Jerome Tharaud: Wanted to circle back a minute you were talking about some of the responses from land grant institutions themselves in terms of their land, acknowledgments and I was just going to ask what the response to this story has been from native communities.

Robert Lee: Yeah, I mean, it's been a mix, most of the response, most of the body of the response has come from native communities within universities. So indigenous student groups, indigenous faculty that have really been the central sort of driving force in asking their universities to respond to this piece or to think about what the history of the Morrill Act means at their universities, and that is where the main the main focus of reactions have been. There have been, you know, some we've spoken at the indigenous GIS conference and some people there are working on issues related to that. We've gotten requests from some tribal nations for access or instruction on how to use the data set. But really, the propensity of the response to this piece has been of native communities connected to and embedded within university communities. The other set of literature that I tend to connect this research to is the emerging work on the capitalization of the university, primarily through its connections to slavery and the slave trade. This is really sort of the thrust where of you know of looking at the university

in this way came from, you know, rethinking it, sort of tossing out really the old literature on land grant, universities, and thinking about them as a participant in histories of colonization and exploitation and resource extraction. So, thinking about like Greg Wilders, *Ebony and Ivy* and the reports that came out at Brown about slavery in the university and thinking about universities also is connected to the history of the colonization of indigenous lands.

John Plotz: But I was thinking about the recent Georgetown case. With the, you know, this selling of enslaved people down to Louisiana, in fact, right, in order to pay for some of Christian's debts and. Of course, there's an obvious difference, which is that it's easy to make a rich university like Brown or Georgetown a villain and a story like that, because we already think of them as pampered and privileged, and so there the story is, you know, rich universities do what it takes to bankroll their fancy Ivy halls, but there's another difference also, which is why I think it's so interesting to talk about this question of extinguished land titles, or ratified and unratified treaties, is that the context of slavery and capitalism is one form of exploitation of other human beings as like units of Labor action within an economy like black people as just enslaved workers and then the Native American land is a slightly different form of expropriation, right? Because it's about another, it's about a seemingly an international boundary that gets violated because then Native American nations have their land taken away from them, and I feel like one of the big questions that I'm struggling with now. And it's like this is why I like people like Thomas Piketty is thinking about whether those things are different from one another. You know whether there's two different racial issues in America, one of which is the intersection of the United States with native nations? So that you know, Red America and White America are like two different national forces, or whether we're just talking about a complete racial system in which you know enslaved, enslaved African

Americans, and expropriated Native Americans and settler, European Americans, you know, that's all one big picture, or whether those things are distinct from one another.

Robert Lee: Yeah, I mean they're to me there are different pieces of a larger puzzle. I mean, it's important to remember that the Morrill Act is passed in 1862 in the middle of the Civil War, which is a large part of fight over where slavery is going to be able to expand into. About how indigenous land in the West is going to be exploited in places like California and in Texas. And what that is going to look like? And it had been, I mean slavery and land expropriation had been connected in the United States from all the way up to this point I mean, especially in places like the South. Yeah, where the removals of the 1830s are part and parcel of the cotton boom that allows the growth of the southern economy and makes it possible for a civil war to happen.

John Plotz: Jerome, unless you have a final question, this might be a good time to pivot to recallable books.

Jerome Tharaud: Sounds good.

John Plotz: To me, OK, so as listeners will know, this is the moment where we ask our participants if they're, you know if you enjoyed this conversation, is there a book you would like to point listeners to? So, Bobby, do you mind if we start with you?

Robert Lee: So, I want to draw attention to a much older book in this historiography of land grant universities that we were talking about. This book called the *Wisconsin Pine Lands of Cornell University* and if you can't tell from the descriptive title, old school monograph this is published in 1943 by Paul Wallace Gate, who was the Dean of Public Land Studies in the mid-20th century really from the 1930s to the 1970s, and in the 1930s and 1940s, he was at Cornell, yeah, well he was at Cornell University for most of his for most of his career he had accessed the archives there and he

wrote what was one of the earliest and most sophisticated accounts of the disposal of land under the Morrill Act, using Cornell as an example, it's really a remarkable book. It's been reissued by Cornell University Press that published more nearly 80 years ago. It was, but as we actually been, maybe a 2nd, 3rd edition and he argues, and I think correctly, that Cornell's land grant under the Morrill Act facilitated one of the most successful land speculations in American history. The raising of this, you know, \$5 million that exploded in value, and made the roommate university possible made it the third wealthiest university in the United States from being a nonexistent university, you know 20 years earlier yeah and he and it's really this wonderful, detailed study of the land grant university system. But the really interesting thing reading it now is to be able to take a step back. And to imagine how this bearing a thorough, very detailed scholar just didn't want to, uh, wasn't engaged with conceptualizing this whole entire aspect of the history of public lands. You won't find anything about native people in this book. If it was being written today. I think it would. Be called the Ojibwa lands of Cornell University, but it isn't, and it's really emblematic of what is distinguished about the long history of public lands scholarship in the United States and what is short sighted about it. It has this long history of developing, not thinking about the consequences, causes and results of colonialism in the United States or the most fundamental aspect of the topic that they were devoted to. So, you have this huge brilliant literature that is completely disengaged from the conquest of a continent.

John Plotz: Yeah, it does.

Robert Lee: It's really fascinating to read these days, and it's an old book, but it's widely available.

John Plotz: That's great doesn't. Doesn't Eve Sedgwick open the epistemology of the closet by saying along with our epistemology of knowledge, we need an epistemology of

ignorance as well, like in other words, a genealogy of the things that are not said. Yeah, yeah, that's great but.

Robert Lee: Any questions not asked yeah.

Jerome Tharaud: That actually leads pretty well into to my recallable book, which actually is not a book. Maybe appropriately, since we're talking about an article or series of articles. Uhm, but well, and I suppose before I say that I just want to make a plug for the *High Country News* as just as a resource for understanding the all the issues you know in in the West that then there's nothing like it. And for people who want to teach those issues and teach stories like land, grab universities. A story they've got. A great. Uhm, a program where you can where your students get a, you know free digital access for a semester, so it's a good resource.

John Plotz: Do you get a Commission on this?

Jerome Tharaud: No! But any rate so but the source that I that I wanted to talk about is Brenda Child's essay. *The Boarding School as Metaphor* about of course it's a different area of native education. Talking about the boarding school and she's interested in how the boarding school became this kind of master metaphor for colonial processes, and in a way that in some cases sort of flatten the diversity of experiences that individuals and communities experienced within those institutions. Uhm, but uh, but she asks this question, she says. Is the boarding school experience overly remembered? Is it remembered at the expense of other significant events, tragedies, and practices of settler colonialism that also dramatically shaped American Indian people's lives? And so, I was just thinking about. That that, I guess the native experience in higher education might be one of those less remembered aspects of indigenous life. You know I'm thinking of. Uh, I mean as to putting my literary scholar hat on for a minute just thinking about the, you know, classic. Uhm, works of Native American literature

that I sometimes teach. Whether it's you know, the protagonist able and *A House Made of Dawn*, or Tio in *Ceremony*, or Archilde in D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded*. You know these characters. I guess those novels make a lot out of the elementary school education and the boarding school education of. Uh, or at least the sort of the colonizer's education. I would say they're not all in boarding schools, but. Uh, but we I feel like we read much less often in the literary record about the experience of native people in higher education. Uhm, even though those each of the authors that I just mentioned did attend public universities and so I don't know our conversation about the tribal colleges just makes me feel like that is. You know, uh, an aspect of native education that we should pay more attention to.

John Plotz:

That's great, I love how in your non-book recommendation you nonetheless slipped in three book titles, and I haven't read *House Made of Dawn*, so I'm very excited to read that and my yeah, recallable book is, kind of owes a lot actually to hearing Jerome, give a paper about this book, but it's Willa Cather's, *The Professor's House*, and she's, you know, I thought of her originally because she is, you know, a child of University of Nebraska like it's inconceivable to think of this, you know, young woman from the prairies rising up to become like a New York, you know, literary force and novelists without. Going to University of Nebraska. But of course, you know also an instrument of barbarism, you know. She's part of that settler colonial movement of Nebraska in the 1870s and 80s, and then professor's house. Is, you know probably best remembered as a novel. That's kind of elegiac about the kind of lost world, quote UN quote, lost world of the Cliff dwelling Native American. Sort of the new Mexican settlements that that the one of the protagonist visits. But it's also an academic. Novel like it takes place actually on a campus with an older professor who is hearing the story of. These quotes lost worlds of Native American culture, so it just kind of. I think it's a beautiful juxtaposition of like the being elegiac, about

something striving to understand it, and also profiting from the way that that that very same thing that you're trying to understand has been expropriated and extinct. You know the claim. Has it been extinguished and reinvested in in in the land grant university? So yeah, we'll gather.

Jerome Tharaud: OK of the land grant university I.

John Plotz: Should say, right?

John Plotz: Yeah, that's what I'm saying. That's my whole point. I totally yeah exactly. Yeah, so Bobby thank you so much for coming. It's a great conversation and I really enjoyed it.

Robert Lee: No, thanks for having me it's great talking to you guys.

John Plotz: Cool and I should just say quickly that recall this book is sponsored by Brandeis and the Mandel Humanity Center. Sounded ending is by Naomi Cohen, website design and social media by Miranda Peery of the English department and Jerome and I are eager of course to hear your comment to your criticism and your thoughts on today's discussion and on *Recall this Book* generally. So please subscribe if you're not already a subscriber by wherever you get your podcast and write a review or rate us on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher or Spotify wherever so from all of us here at RTB. Thanks for listening.