Extended Dialogue: Extending Education

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SPEAKERS

Carl Van Ness, Ricky Telg, Phillip Stokes

R **Ricky Telg** 00:04

This is Science by the Slice, a podcast from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Center for Public Issues Education. In this podcast, experts discuss the science of issues affecting our daily lives reveal the motivations behind the decisions people make, and ultimately provide insight to solutions for our lives.

P **Phillip Stokes** 00:32

Welcome to Science by the Slice, I'm Phillip Stokes. Former US Senator Justin Smith Morrill of Vermont is by no means a household name today. However, his legacy is vast and lasting and can be felt in every state in the US. He proposed the land grant college act of 1862. In short, the Morrill Act, as it's more commonly known, was a visionary piece of legislation that created many new universities and reshaped the way Americans thought about higher education. Morrill himself was an unlikely author of an education bill having never attended any college. But it was his lack of access to higher education that inspired him to draft this legislation, in hopes of expanding opportunities of education as wide as possible. And I think those last four words as wide as possible, are important to remember, because even after this act, higher education was still restricted to white males. Now, of course, Americans views of who is represented within our citizenry have expanded over time to account for ethnicity, race, class, gender, and other demographics, and therefore the demography of land grant universities have changed as well, and continue to do so. In this series from science by the slice, we're going to explore how leaders at the University of Florida and more specifically the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, or ifas, are addressing some of the cultural realities that land grant universities, including Cooperative Extension and the constituents they serve. This series is made up of conversations with a larger goal to continue civil dialogue to foster greater understanding of topics such as diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice. I certainly recognize that conversations about race and other issues related to human differences can be very difficult and trigger strong emotions. I do believe that these conversations are vital to understanding one another, and understanding is vital to healing and enduring change. And in this episode, I speak with Carl Van Ness, the official historian at the University of Florida, Carl

and I discuss how land grant universities were formed, who they were formed to serve, and what we can learn from the past to create a future in higher education that serves a greater, more diverse and inclusive population. Well, Carl Van Ness, it's so great to have you on the pie sinners podcast science, by the slice to talk with you today. So I just want to give you the opportunity to introduce yourself. Tell us a little bit about your background and your position at the University of Florida.

C Carl Van Ness 03:26

Well, good morning, it's a pleasure to speak with you. My name is Carl Van Ness. And I am a an archivist in the George A. Smathers Libraries in the Department of Special and Area Studies collections. I've been here since 1985. I have done a variety of things over the years as an archivist in this department, work with a number of collections. My primary role right now is as the Florida political papers archivist. I'm also served as the official historian of the university. And that is why I'm speaking to you today.

P Phillip Stokes 04:02

Yeah, absolutely. And yeah. 1985. So that's, that's incredible, and a lot of perspective there. So yeah, I really looking forward to talking with you about our topic for today. And of course, we're talking about the history of land grants, and specifically about the university's land grant. And also, we're going to be getting into how that impacts diversity, equity, inclusion and justice, and kind of looking at that from a historical perspective and thinking about the past, the present and the future and all of that. So, as a historian, of course, we'll start asking you about the past. So just first off, what is a land grant university and how was the University of Florida established in this way?

C Carl Van Ness 04:42

Well, we typically define the land grant universities as those being tied in some way to the moral acts of 1862 in 1890, and then there are a bunch of other acts that followed the first moral acts, and they're also considered Landgrant acts. However, the expression land grant university is tied specifically to the Morrill Act of 1862 as it was the first of the acts and it was the only one that involved the granting of land to support higher education. I should also note that some of the designated land grant colleges came into being long after the moral acts, Hawaii and Alaska for example. Today we have land grant colleges that serve indigenous populations. So the concept of the land grant college has been broadened over the years, the land came from federally owned properties. If a state had sufficient unutilized federal lands within its borders, the state could select federal lands there. Most states though did not including Florida, and most states selected lands available elsewhere, mostly from the American West. Those lands tended to be lands that had either been expropriated from indigenous people or purchase from them absurdly low prices. And in some cases, Native Americans were still fighting over that land. Each state received 30,000 acres of land for each congressional representative based on the 1860 census. In the case of Florida, it was the minimum amount as Florida had only its two senators and also one member of the House. So that's 90,000 acres. Of course, in 1862, Florida did not receive any land as as it was not part of the United States of America. It was part of the Confederate States of America. However, once

the Civil War ended, Florida and the 10 other former Confederate states were permitted to acquire their land grants. Florida did so in 1872. But it was not until 1874 That land transaction was completed. This timing was rather poor, as it followed the panic of 1873, which was a catastrophic national economic depression that resulted in plummeting land values. So the state of Florida's land grant is the smallest it can possibly be. Florida invested its money, which was $100,000 in state bonds. The investments were required to yield a minimum of 9%. So Florida's annual income came to about $9,000 annually. Clearly, that's not enough to support an actual college. The original land grant college in Florida was the Florida Agricultural College, which opened its doors in 1884, and Lake City. He was the first college of any type in Florida and was followed by Rollins College in 1885, and Stetson University in 1891. So 40 years after statehood, the state of Florida finally has a college. For the first 15 years, the Florida Agricultural College received very little support from the state of Florida. Its operating budget came almost exclusively exclusively from the land grant endowment, and then later federal acts. It wasn't until the beginning of the 20th century that the state provided any meaningful funding.

P Phillip Stokes 08:08

So you said it was I'm just gonna summarize a couple of things. So 1862 was that first morale act? But of course, you said the University of Florida. Shoot, what was it the the agricultural college or agricultural college? Yeah, okay. That was 1884. Yes, open an 1884 1984.

C Carl Van Ness 08:27

And we were the last we were the last of the southern states to actually open a land grant facility.

P Phillip Stokes 08:34

From what I've heard, the University of Florida kind of touts itself on being one of the older land grants, but But you're saying it's not that way.

C Carl Van Ness 08:43

Well, we trace our roots back to the East Florida Seminary, which was founded in Ocala in 1853. That school never became an actual college. It was primarily a prep school, a publicly funded prep school. It was later moved to Gainesville after the Civil War, and, but it never attained a collegiate status. Unlike the West Florida Seminary in Tallahassee, which became the Florida State College in 1901. And then became later the State College for Women and is now FSU. Right, right. Okay. We both both institutions trace their roots back to the seminaries.

P Phillip Stokes 09:25

Interesting, interesting. So thinking more about the morel act. Why was it important? At that time, it was a senator you said

C Carl Van Ness 09:34

Justin Smith Morrill, who was from the state of Vermont,

P Phillip Stokes 09:36

Vermont. So why did he think it was important to create this? Who was it created for it and just why? Why were federal lands and lands designated for higher education at that time?

C Carl Van Ness 09:49

Well, the land grant colleges were intended to serve a broader population than other colleges of the mid 19th century. The Act itself refers to the children of the industry Real classes, or as Senator Morell called them the sons of toil. land grant colleges were required to provide a curriculum that included instruction in the practical arts of agriculture and engineering, in conjunction with the liberal arts. In other words, this is not purely a vocational education designed to produce a better farmer or mechanic. We already had those kind of schools in the mid 18, mid 19th century, but rather, it was intended to create a farmer or mechanic who was also been exposed to history, political science, literature languages, and in order to fashion a more productive and engaged citizen. Initially, Florida's land grant college was limited to white males, it admitted white women in 1894. Then in 1903, it became the University of Florida. And then after the passage of the Buckman act of 1905, which was not a land grant act as a state Act, the campus was moved to Gainesville, and again, restricted to white males. We did not become co educational until 1947. And we did not admit an African American student until 1958. And then we went through this very long period of nominal integration that lasted well, well until the 1970s. So in Florida, and in the south, overall, not everyone benefited from the land grant movement. It was constricted by the racial laws of the South, and in Florida, by laws prohibiting the admission of women.

P Phillip Stokes 11:33

So the morel Act was explained to be for the common man, right. But the common man at this time, like you said, was, well, the way it was defined at the time, a white male with any type of economic status?

C Carl Van Ness 11:50

Land grant institutions were very democratic in their admissions. In the state of Florida. Again, we're restricting this to white men, but any white male with a high school diploma, could attend the University of Florida, and it was no tuition during the early history of the university, so it's a very democratic institution in that sense, again, considering the social constraints of the time, we're talking about the period of segregation in the Jim Crow era. But the the Moral Act certainly succeeded in its attendance in impact. More students from different social classes attended college after the Civil War. But it's really not until after the two world wars that

enrollments increased significantly, prior to World War One. enrollment at the University of Florida stood at about 500. Then with a few years after the war, we were at 1000. And then it continued to rise until the next war, then World War Two brought what's commonly known as the GI Bill into place. And then enrollments at the University of Florida and other land grant institutions skyrocket. land grant colleges more so than other types of colleges benefited from the postwar booms, because of their emphasis on engineering and the hard sciences, which were job applicable. These are the kind of professions that students wanted to get into. They wanted to go into engineering, or maybe chemistry and then immediately leave the university with a job. So sorry, it wasn't agriculture that attracted the students. There were very few students in the College of Agriculture.

P Phillip Stokes 13:30

Interesting. So yeah, you've You made it sound like okay, at the beginning, it was, yeah, maybe there was an agricultural emphasis. But those colleges already existed, this was more of that liberal arts education, getting a broader perspective. And then later on, like you said, it was math and sciences and things like that, that attracted students.

C Carl Van Ness 13:52

Well, the intent was always to have people attend the agricultural, the school and but the attractive, very few farmers. But agriculture, though, has its big impact on research, not undergraduate enrollment. And so the passage of the Hatch Act of 1887, which is another Land Grant Act again, there's no land involved. It created a nationwide network of agricultural experiment stations. And this has a radical impact on higher education. So the idea that colleges would engage in research that was intended to have a direct application in society, that was unheard of at the time. So also included in the mission of a land grant institution is concept of service. And this was a very important part of the land grant mission. Almost from the very beginning. land grant colleges were intended to not only graduate students who came from classes that previously did not intend colleges, but also to bring their knowledge to the populace. to the to the general population. So we see various acts being passed by Congress to broaden that concept, including the Smith Lever act of 1914. But even before that, the land grant institutions were going out into the, the farm lands and bringing their new technology and new agricultural innovations to farmers. And at first, this was restricted to agriculture later was broaden to general extension. This is known most commonly as the Wisconsin plan. It was the idea of President Charles van Heiss at the University of Wisconsin, that that university should serve the state of Florida, I mean, State of Wisconsin, and much more in a broader way, and to take all of the all of its research and make it available to the state to provide educational opportunities to the citizens.

P Phillip Stokes 15:57

So that idea of service. I mean, I think that is certainly is very pervasive in our footprint today. And ifas. Specifically, you know, I can talk about that, you know, personally, but I know, other land grant universities as well. I mean, we, you know, here an office, we say what solutions for your life. And so a lot of the research and the work and the extension that you mentioned in the education, yeah, that is for, it's for everyone, it's for Floridians, and globally as well.

C Carl Van Ness 16:30

You know, today, of course, is what we do, it's what we do in chemistry was to what we do in engineering, the medical sciences, Computer Sciences. But it all began with agriculture. And it was the agricultural experiment stations that would stamp the identity of the land grant college as the proverbial cow college. Because there really were cows and pigs and horses on the campus. You know, we have lots of photographs in the University Archives with depict animals of various kinds. And in the background, you'll see the university auditorium. And basically anything south of new old drive was given to agricultural pursuits. Of course, today, it's not the case. But, you know, most of the research has done at the branch facilities around the state. But in those days, clearly, he was done on campus.

P Phillip Stokes 17:20

Yeah, no, we were talking before. And I mentioned that the building that I'm in now is an old barn. It's an it's a converted barn into now office space, and it was a mule barn. And we have some old photos, not a lot, but of what it looked like, you know, I don't know, close, and maybe 75 years ago, close to 100 years ago. So I want to go back to what you were saying at the beginning about the land. So you said it was in this original Land Grant Act. It was federally owned land, but then some of it was taken. So let's think about you know, am I being too direct when I say taken, or is that, for me, that was that was,

C Carl Van Ness 17:55

That was often the case. In some cases, the land is simply expropriated. And there has been studies done on where this the lands existed. We did not receive actual land, what we receive was scrip. And that script could come from any number of states. Most of our script came from western states, some came from from California. Other states can't remember which states but and in some cases, you could tie that land to a specific indigenous group,

P Phillip Stokes 18:29

As well, a little bit back, you said in 1958 was the first year that African American students were admitted into the University of Florida. Were there any other specific acts or passing items passing in Congress that allowed for the university to be more accepting well,

C Carl Van Ness 18:47

Before, before 1958, and before integration here, the the second Morrill Act of 1890 attempted to remedy some of the shortcomings of the first Morrill Act, particularly in regards to finances. So the second Morrill Act provided direct cash payments to the states instead of land. Because you know, these they saw clearly there was a problem here, Florida's land endowment was very small, New York's was rather large. So with the second Morrill Act, every state received the same amount of money, it was a cash cash payment. However, states that refuse to admit black students were required to split the money with a designated school for African

Americans. Now, it's clear when you look at the debates and discussions concerned concerning the historically black land grant colleges, that it was never the intent of the second Morrill Act to create a parallel system of black colleges. It was understood both within the South and outside the South, that the designated land grants for African American students would be inferior to the white colleges. In fact, they would not be colleges at all, not not initially at least. So Florida A&M University, which was called the State Normal and Industrial school when it was designated the black land grant in 1890, did not offer college level courses until 1909 and only achieved provisional accreditation in 1931 and then full accreditation in 1935. Even then, the course offerings were far more limited than those that University of Florida or even the State College for Women for that matter. It also heightened tensions between black educators and the white politicians who ran the southern states in those days. FAMU began its history not as a land grant institution, but as a normal school. That is a teacher's college. And there was a crying need for black teachers and teacher training at that time. The second Morril Act, on the other hand, stressed vocational training in the limited vocations that were open to African Americans in the South. So instead of engineers, the black land grant schools are producing brick masons and cobblers, and slowly these vocational courses rather than the coursework that teachers needed, began to dominate the curriculum at Black land grant schools. And this was met with considerable resistance by black administrators by their faculties and by the students who attended the schools. In 1921, Nathan Young was fired as the president of the Florida A&M because he resisted efforts to limit the curriculum there. And that in turn set off a rather dramatic student uprising that saw the torching of several campus buildings. It's remarkable to me that the black land grant schools made the progress they did during the period of Jim Crow, given the obstacles that were thrown on their way.

P **Phillip Stokes** 21:35

So there was, like you said, clear intention to kind of suppress the progress of historically black colleges and universities. Is that correct?

C **Carl Van Ness** 21:45

That would be correct. There was a very clear intent the actions that precipitated the firing of Nathan Young law occurred after Cary Hardee was elected governor, and the Board of Education, the Florida Board of Education passed a series of revenue resolutions, basically saying that any student at Florida A&M had to participate in vocational education regardless of whether they wanted to or not, and they had to perform labor for free. So yeah. And that precipitated the revolt that occurred later,

P **Phillip Stokes** 22:18

Given, you know, you've mentioned the Jim Crow era laws, and were the foundings of some of these universities, mandated from the federal government and more resisted in certain areas?

C **Carl Van Ness** 22:32

Yeah, I don't see that there was a lot of resistance on the part of the South to create separate institutions. In fact, it was it was southern a members of Congress who actually urged the

institutions. In fact, it was it was Southern a members of Congress who actually urged the creation made the decision to split the money. But it was never their intention to have these schools be in any way, shape or form on a par with the land grant institutions for white students.

P **Phillip Stokes** 22:57

So what would you say has changed over time with land grant universities? What has happened since 1862, with that first Morrill Act, for land grants to become more inclusive and looking at equity, inclusion and justice as well?

C **Carl Van Ness** 23:18

Well, I don't I don't know that the missions of land grant universities per se have changed over over the years rather, all universities have changed. You know, every university in the country practically is taking part in this discussion on race, and diversity. And of course, this movement is ongoing. We haven't arrived at the final destination, and at least I hope we haven't still have a way to go. Historically, these changes have come in spurts. Usually precipitated by an event or a movement. More recently, Black Lives Matter has, again has is again looking at our racial past. In the university's past, a demonstration known as Black Thursday, which occurred on April 15 1971, was a watershed event. So on that day, about 60 African American students staged a sit down strike in President O'Connell's office making a list of demands and their primary demand was that the University of Florida finally addressed this the issue of admissions and make a greater effort to enroll black students. At that time there were probably less than 500 African American students at the University of Florida. The students were all arrested. And as a result of this turmoil, the university finally began to look at what it was doing or what it wasn't doing, and began to make changes in in terms of affirmative action. Black Thursday also occurred in the midst of other social movements. So this is the same period when college students are demanding to be heard. When we see the first stirrings of the gay rights movement. And this is when women are opening doors to professions that had previously been monopolized by men, including a lot of those we associate with associate with the land grant mission in agriculture and engineering. Women were never prohibited from attending engineering classes. In fact, the first woman to graduate from a public college in Florida, Daisy Rogers received her degree in engineering. But there were very few places where women could find employment as an engineer. But all that is beginning to change in the in the 1960s and 1970s.

P **Phillip Stokes** 25:34

Yeah, it does seem to be the formula for for changes comes from those grassroots movements, right? It's from the people, right, it's it's more bottom up right, then then top down, is that has that kind of happened in colleges and universities as well?

C **Carl Van Ness** 25:51

Absolutely. Change has always come as a result of people making demands.

P Phillip Stokes 25:57

So what do you think the past reveals to us? When thinking about colleges and universities, things that we can learn and apply today, and in the future as as we shape the University of Florida and other land grant universities?

C Carl Van Ness 26:14

That's a good question. I think that's a very complicated question. I think there's a number of things involved here. And it goes beyond the University of Florida. There's a book that was recently published, it's called the state must provide written by Adam Harris. And he notes that the historically black land grant colleges today continue to graduate a disproportionate number of African American students, yet they still receive a small fraction of what the historically white colleges receive. And this is something that the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities has acknowledged. So So why are they still why are these universities still considered third tier institutions by resource allocators? You know, we know why would they were in the Jim Crow era. But what is the rationale Now, ironically, integration became the rationale for not funding the black universities. FAMU is our third oldest state university. It was founded in 1887, shortly after the founding of the land grant college, and you wouldn't know that by its funding today. I mean, we he makes a very convincing argument that these schools need should be funded on in the same way that other universities are funded. But we also have to look at the land grant mission itself. And does the land grant mission still perform, did the land grant universities still perform their mission? The premise of the Moral Act was inclusion, you know, those that, you know, couldn't previously attend a college now could. In this democratic characteristic of the land grant was something that was regularly touted by educational leaders of the the 19th and 20th century. The first 50 years, as I mentioned earlier, Florida was open to any white student with a high school diploma and there was no no tuition that eventually proved to be impractical, and some restrictions had to be put in place. But overall, admission to the University of Florida was still relatively easy until recently. And that's not true anymore. We've become exclusive. We even hear the term public ivy league. I mean, this is not what Vermont senator Justin Morrill intended.

P Phillip Stokes 28:25

That is an interesting thing to think about. If these, if the land grant universities were founded with the idea of a democratic movement inclusivity. I mean, maybe that is thinking about the President in the future. That's what we look to we say, hey, look, this is how these land grants were established. You know, we had a different mindset of what who that would include at that time, but we can use that same structure today. To open that up a bit more broadly.

C Carl Van Ness 28:53

I think we can. I don't know that that's what's gonna occur. But we seem to be, you know, moving away from the original mission. But you know, institutions evolve. This one certainly has, and it'll continue to change. No one in 1884 would have predicted the type of land grant university that exists today. I really don't have any idea what the future holds. When I talk to

students today, I always remarked that this is not the University of Florida that their parents might have attended if they're in fact their parents did attend University of Florida. I came here in the mid 1980s. And the changes are incredible. Some of the changes are driven by technology, and some by social change. Change is inevitable. It's not always good. It's inevitable. This this institution will continue to evolve, and hopefully for the better.

P Phillip Stokes 29:48

This concludes the first episode of our four part series titled extended dialogue. I want to thank Carl Van Ness for being a guest on science by the slice. Be sure to listen to Our next episode in the series with Dr. Andra Johnson. That episode is available now. I want to thank everyone involved with Science by the Slice, Michaela Kandzer, Rachel Rabon, Valentina Castano, Sydney Honeycutt, Ricky Telg, Ashley McLeod-Morin, and Alena Poulin. I'm Phillip Stokes. Thanks for listening to Science by the Slice.