

Reimagining Affirmative Action in the Land Grant University System

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The State of African Americans in the Black Belt Region (SAABB)
July 26, 2023



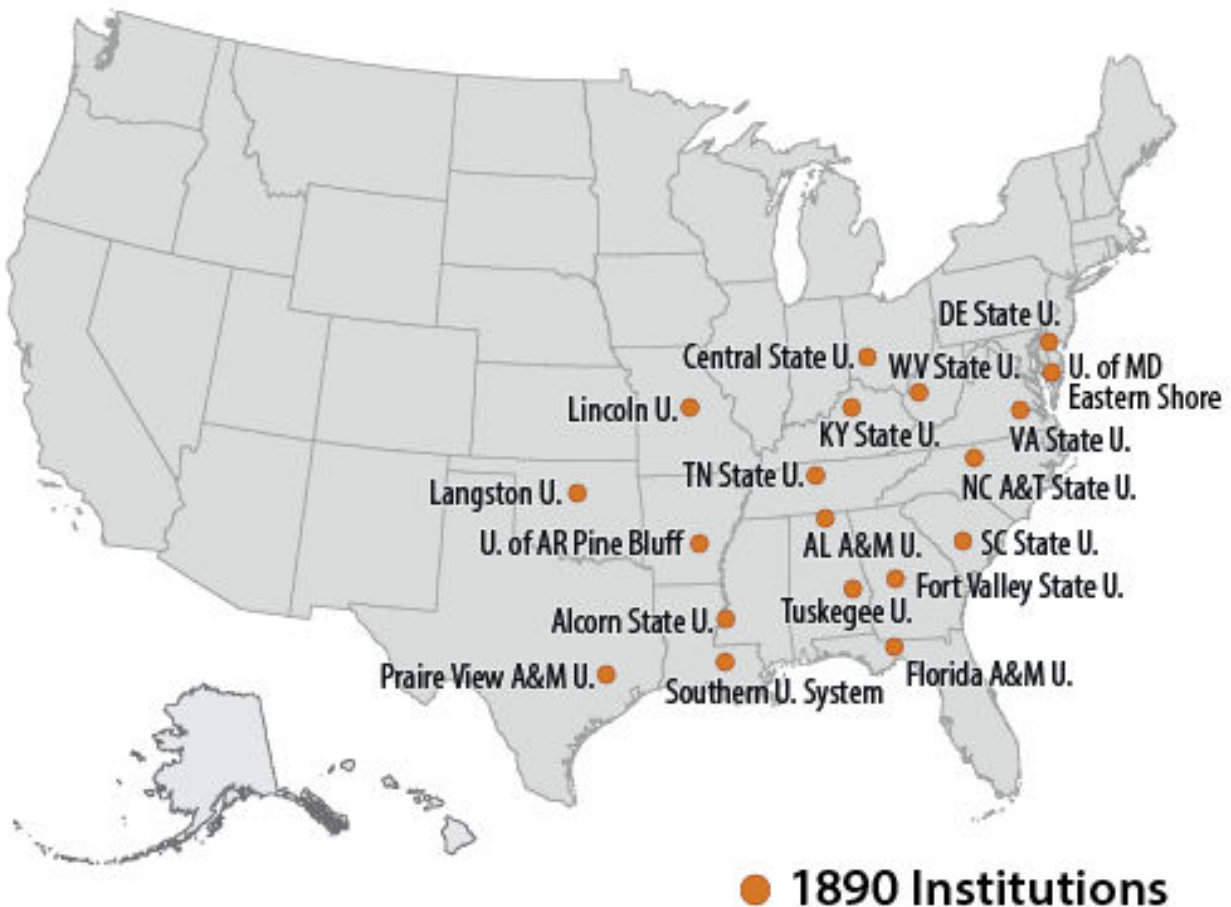
Introduction

On June 29, 2023, the United States Supreme Court overturned the 1978 Supreme Court decision that allowed colleges and universities to consider race as one factor in their admissions process. Better known as Affirmative Action, this court-approved tool helped predominantly white colleges and universities move toward a more racially diverse and equitable educational system. However, it is essential to note that Affirmative Action did not cause the doors at these institutions to swing wide open; in fact, they were only cracked. Affirmative Action increased enrollment of African American students at many predominately white universities, but it was their drive and intellect that kept them there - in other words, Affirmative Action ended with admission.

Despite Affirmative Action, many Black students still choose to attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Contrary to what many believe, HBCUs play a significant role in educating countless Black people. The **Thurgood Marshall College** fund reports that among African Americans, HBCUs graduate 40% of African American members of Congress and engineers, 50% of African American lawyers, and 80% of African American judges. Furthermore, the report proves that HBCUs positively impact economic mobility for African Americans. For these reasons, overturning Affirmative Action should not be viewed solely as a setback; in fact it provides opportunities for HBCUs – in this case 1890 Land Grant Universities - to improve and expand their footprint in rural

areas that suffer from a history of inequitable access to public and private resources while also building a stronger and more resilient 1890 Land Grant system.

Below is a map with a listing and location of 1890 Land-Grant Universities in the United States.



1890 Land-Grant Universities in the United States

Brief History of the Land Grant University System

Historically, the **first Morrill Act of 1862** established a white Land Grant University (LGU) system. These schools primarily focused on agriculture research and rural development geared toward white farmers, farm related businesses, and communities. After three decades the federal government implemented the second Morrill Act of 1890 to provide African Americans farmers and their communities the same opportunities that had been afforded their white counterparts. This Act established a predominately African American Land Grant University system (*see the list of the Land Grant University's at the end of this article*). It is important to note that the **Second Morrill Act of 1890** prohibited the distribution of federal funds to states with an 1862 LGU unless that state agreed to establish an 1890 LGU. In other words, rather than integrate, those states created the country's first "separate but equal" education system. Although severely underfunded, the 1890 Land Grant

University system provided African Americans with the opportunity pursue the college education that predominately white Land Grant Universities had denied them.

Land Grant University Funding Inequities

Today, nineteen 1890 LGUs educate, by far, the most students in agriculture. However, their counterparts (predominantly white 1862's) still receive far greater funding and other resources from the federal, state and private sectors. For instance, a Forbes investigation revealed a \$1.9 billion shortfall in the **Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU)** funding compared to the state's predominantly white LGU.



*Alumni Affairs - **Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU)***

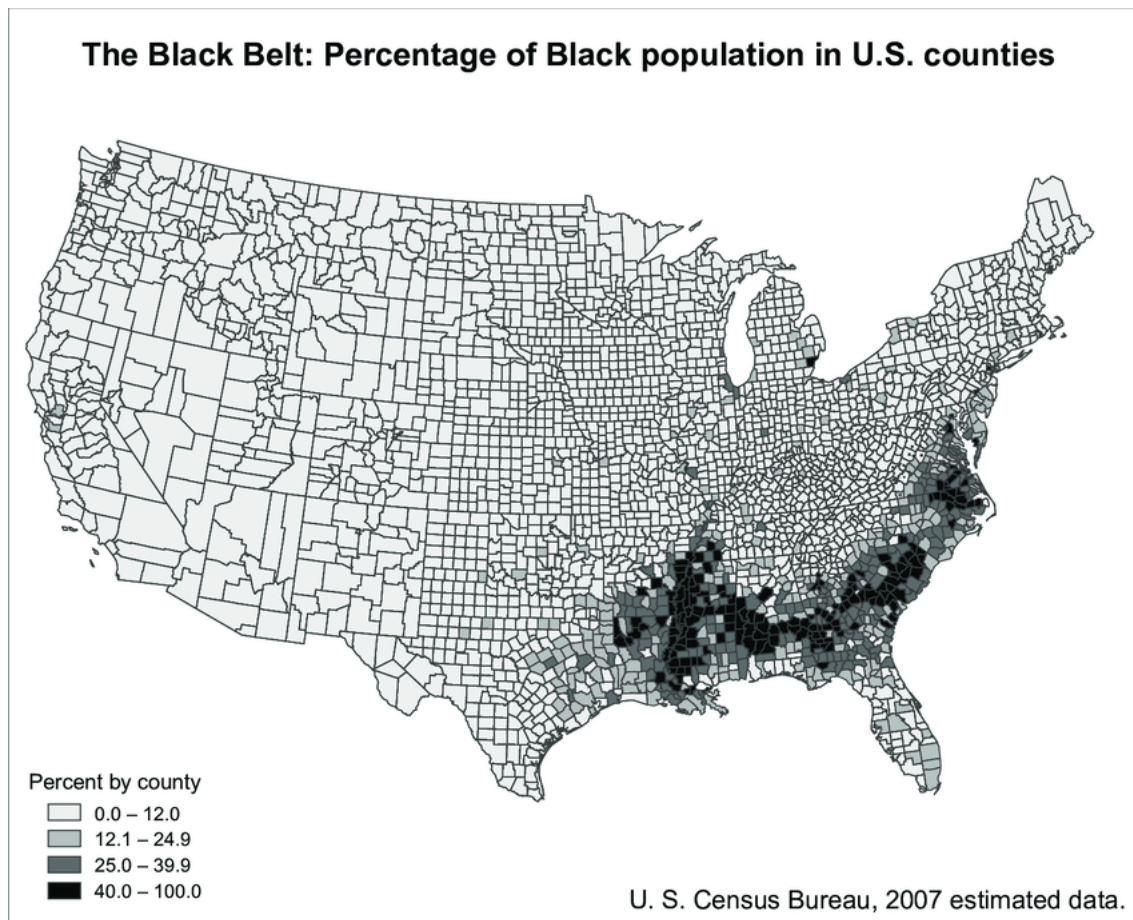
Forbes found that FAMU's \$123 million in state appropriations amounted to about \$13,000 per student in 2020. That funding falls short of the University of Florida's \$15,600 state funding per student. Unfortunately, this disparity is common in several states. Forbes also reports that North Carolina Agricultural and Technical (A&T) State University, Tennessee's State University, Southern University (A&M) College, and Prairie View A&M University (all predominately African American LGUs) have been underfunded by over \$1 billion compared to the predominately white LGUs. (*A&M refers to 'Agricultural and Mechanical' universities created by the [Morrill Land-Grant Acts](#)*)

To achieve equity between 1890 and 1862 educational systems, SAABB contends that the federal government should immediately institute a comprehensive program that reimagines Affirmative Action to bring equity throughout the Land Grant System. The program requires the government to take specific **“Actions to Affirm the Need for and Benefits of Attending 1890 Land Grant Universities.”** The program would require the following actions from the government:

- 1. The government should endow a scholarship program for Black students to attend an 1890 Land Grant University;*
- 2. Close the funding gap between 1890 and 1862 Land Grant Universities;*
- 3. Implement a student loan payoff initiative.*

While all are critically important, student loans have the potential to severely limit the economic development of the African American community for decades to come and virtually eliminate any possibility of creating intergenerational wealth; therefore, it warrants further explanation. America's racial history contributes to the racial wealth gap causing a sizable percentage of HBCU students to take out loans. Christelle Bamona, a researcher at the Center for Research Libraries states, "HBCU students receive less institutional aid and are more likely to take out loans than their peers at non-HBCU institutions." A major component of increasing economic mobility includes eliminating the need for student loans by expanding scholarship programs to cover full tuition, room and board, fees, and books.

There are currently four loan forgiveness programs available for teachers: (1) Teacher Loan Forgiveness, (2) Public Service Loan Forgiveness, (3) Perkins Loan Cancellation, and (4) various state-sponsored programs. These programs are intended to help meet the critical shortage of qualified teachers while also helping to close the educational gap in underserved areas. The government must develop another loan-related program to address the inequitable distribution of resources and the brain drain hindering sustainable economic growth in rural America, especially in the Black Belt Region.



The Black Belt: percentage of Black population in the U.S. ([ResearchGate](#))

Creating Equity in the Land Grant University System

We propose the establishment of a Rural Assistance Loan Payoff Program (RALPP) that would be a hybrid of the various teacher loan forgiveness programs. RALPP would pay off all student loans for students who graduate from an 1890 Land Grant University. To qualify, the individual must work for a qualified community-based organization or other service provider in a depressed rural area (preferably the Black Belt Region) for a minimum of five and a maximum of ten years, based on the loan amount. This program would be a model for reimagining affirmative action across America's education system.

Ultimately, overturning Affirmative Action provides the opportunity to reimagine initiatives to address inequities in the Land Grant University system. A more equitable Land Grant System will increase economic mobility for Black students and lead to significant economic development in the Black Belt Region of the United States. We affirm the need to change the existing environment in the Black Belt by strengthening support for 1890 Land Grant Universities. It is time to reimagine innovative solutions to mitigate community challenges brought on by a history of racial discrimination. It is time to create a future where African Americans have equitable access to resources that can help them build a more just and equitable society.

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The State of African Americans in the Black Belt Region (SAABB) is a project of Tuskegee University's Carver Integrative Sustainability Center (CISC) College of Agriculture, Environment and Nutrition Sciences (CAENS). SAABB produces an annual report that provides policymakers, advocates, and academics with data-driven information and recommendations to assist them in their work on behalf of African Americans and their communities in the Black Belt Region.



1890 Land Grant Universities **in the United States**

Alabama A&M University
Alcorn State University, Mississippi
Central State University, Ohio
Delaware State University
Florida A&M University
Fort Valley State University, Georgia
Kentucky State University
Langston University, Oklahoma
Lincoln University, Missouri
North Carolina A&T State University
Prairie View A&M University, Texas
South Carolina State University
Southern University, Louisiana
Tennessee State University
Tuskegee University, Alabama
University of Arkansas Pine Bluff
University of Maryland Eastern Shore
Virginia State University
West Virginia State University