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## Book Review: Land-grant Universities for the Future

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# Land-grant Universities for the Future

**Reviewed by Alexander H. Jones  
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S.M. Gavazzi and E.G. Gee, *Land-grant Universities for the Future: Higher Education for the Public Good*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018, 216 pages. ISBN: 9781421426853, hardback

What does the land-grant university have to offer for the mosaic of higher education in the United States today and in the future? Gavazzi and Gee seek to answer this question in a thorough review of the mission and purpose of land-grant institutions as told by 27 acting presidents and chancellors from the original 1862 land-grant colleges and universities. In 2016 and 2017, Gavazzi and Gee interviewed these individuals to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) facing land-grant universities.

As lifelong champions of land-grant institutions, Gavazzi and Gee are well positioned for the authoring of this book and conducting the interviews. Gavazzi has spent his entire adult life at land-grant universities, either as a student at Pennsylvania State University and the University of Connecticut, or as a professor at The Ohio State University. As a scholar of families and children, Gavazzi has worked with one of Ohio State's regional campuses in community engagement efforts. Gee, who grew up in rural America, has served as president of several large universities, including The Ohio State University, Brown University, and Vanderbilt University. He currently serves as president of West Virginia University, his second stint in that position.

As the Introduction (pages 8–11) outlines, Chapter 1 of the text introduces the SWOT analysis and situates the study in the larger political context of the Trump presidency, as Trump's election and inauguration occurred amid the interviews. The authors highlight the election results near land-grant university campuses to point to the conflicting relationship between universities and communities, especially in regard to politics. Gavazzi and Gee champion the diversity in American institutions and argue that a marital covenant model of service best captures the potential of university/community engagement.

The second chapter examines the origins of the land-grant university, referencing the Morrill Acts. The authors again emphasize the covenant relationship that higher education ought to have vis-à-vis the public or the local community. Gavazzi and Gee criticize the privatization of higher education, and thus champion the land-grant university as the quintessential people's university because it, from its onset, has institutionalized community engagement. The authors highlight The Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, The Carnegie Foundation's Classification for Community Engagement, and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities' Innovation and Economic Prosperity Universities Designation as excellent examples of codifying university relationships with their local communities.

The authors' qualitative findings begin in Chapter 3 with interviews of 27 acting presidents and chancellors of the 1862 land-grant universities. Gavazzi and Gee identified seven emerging thematic paradoxes according to the SWOT analysis. This chapter, which synthesizes significant quotes from interviewees, is unique to the field; it covers a vast set of topics, including financial, mission, epistemological, access, geographic, global, and value pressures. For interested readers, Chapter 3 would be the recommended chapter to read to understand the overarching themes of the book. In Chapter 4, Gavazzi and Gee continue answering their driving question by focusing on several of the emergent themes from the interviews. In particular, the authors examine the financial, mission drift, and geographical pressures. The authors found that governing boards, elected officials, and accrediting agencies have immense power in shaping the land-grant university experience, pressuring presidents and chancellors to be more efficient with financial resources, to produce more knowledge through research (as opposed to an emphasis on teaching

and service), and to tailor education to rural communities instead of urban communities. Gavazzi and Gee suggest that these constituencies can inhibit or enhance the potential of land-grant universities to engage local communities.

Chapters 5 and 6 similarly accentuate the impact a constituency can have for better or worse on the traditional mission of land-grants. In Chapter 5, the authors reference the constituency of faculty. They trace interviewee responses to document the critical role that faculty have in appropriately positioning land-grant universities alongside communities. Faculty after all are a primary stakeholder in engaging the community through teaching, research, and service. The authors argue that despite limitations in promotion and tenure processes, faculty governance systems can advance the mission-critical notion of university/community engagement. Students are also central to the production of university/community engagement as Gavazzi and Gee's Chapter 6 suggests. According to the authors, presidents and chancellors emphasized the salient role of students in developing robust relationships with communities, whether through service learning, extracurricular engagement, activism, or even as alumni who return to work in the local community.

Chapter 7, the final chapter, issues a clarion call for developing a servant university marked by a healthy marriage between university and community. The authors, harkening back to their earlier reference to the Trump campaign, cast a vision for Making America Great Again through a moderate, bridge-building agenda centered on the capacities of land-grant universities.

This text is a fine attempt at bridging the gap between the traditions of higher education in the nation and the impending doom facing postsecondary education. As many scholars note, the demise of faculty governance, questions about access and affordability, issues of grade inflation and learning, the corporatization of higher education, technology, and inequities in student success continue to affect the public's perception of higher education. Despite the giddy nostalgia of the 1860s, the authors do make a solid argument that land-grant universities have historically developed and contemporarily enact a model of university/community engagement that responds to these major questions in the field regarding access, affordability, and the tripartite mission

of teaching, service, and research. Nevertheless, the authors leave two major omissions that taint their positive perspective on the land-grant institution: The plight of indigenous peoples and the destruction of natural resources.

First, regarding indigenous Americans, the Morrill Act that granted 30,000 acres of land per senator to every state in the Union in 1862 was part and parcel of the ongoing Manifest Destiny project of westward expansion (Pfaff, 2010). A month prior to President Lincoln signing the Morrill Act of 1862, the president signed another act that granted copious amounts of land in the west, the Homestead Act of 1862. Further, only a day before Lincoln signed the Morrill Act, he signed the Pacific Railway Act, which donated land and resources from the federal government to build the first transcontinental railroad. All three acts were federal directives that utilized stolen land for the purpose of American potentiation. To be sure, the federal "granting" of 30,000 acres must be interpreted not as positive university/community engagement, but as part of the imagination that produced the genocide of indigenous peoples. The gruesome irony in Gavazzi and Gee's text is not an exaggeration: To champion the historicity of land-grant university/community engagement is to also champion the proliferation of the university at the expense of others, particularly indigenous peoples. The Morrill Act, and thus the very essence of the land-grant university, is not innocuous, and certainly ought not to be celebrated. The violence of the 1800s on indigenous peoples must be reckoned with and repaired by these very land-grant universities if they are to truly exemplify mutuality in their efforts to engage the local community. When nostalgia supplants reality, something has gone terribly awry.

Second, regarding natural resources, the land-grant university, as Gavazzi and Gee note, was originally founded to train agriculturalists, engineers, and military cadets. The esteemed authors fail to acknowledge the ecological mayhem in the present age that has been produced, in part, by the education and ideologies received at land-grant universities. Land-grant universities embodied the federal impulse of capitalist production at the expense of the earth; they are the higher education normalization of ecological devastation and resistance to inclusive epistemologies (Collins & Kolehua Mueller, 2016). If university/community engagement practices

of the land-grants is the quintessential model of marriage between university and community, then the relationship is going to be one characterized by extractive violence.

In sum, Gavazzi and Gee champion the servant mentality of land-grant universities in the face of the political and cultural *zeitgeist*. But, the authors fail to ask the appropriate question. Rather than inquiring, “What does the land-grant university have to offer for the mosaic of higher education in the U.S. today and in the future?” it would be more appropriate to ask, “*To whom and for what* does the land-grant university have to offer for the mosaic of higher education in the U.S. today and in the future?” Their answer to the latter question is not one of service, but one that is an erasure of indigenous identity and a stopgap to ecological flourishing.

### References

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### About the Reviewer

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