The Morrill Land-Grant Act:

- Created agricultural and mechanical colleges in each state
- Offered 30,000 acres for each U.S. senator and representative
- Resulted in the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama (1872), which later became Auburn University.

During the Civil War, the Republican-controlled Congress passed, and President Abraham Lincoln signed, the Morrill Act (1862). This legislation was designed to aid in the establishment of agricultural and mechanical colleges in each state. The bill offered 30,000 acres of public land for each senator and representative in the national legislature as an endowment for the proposed schools. Consequently, these schools were called "land-grant" colleges. In some states the land proceeds went to existing institutions, as it did to the state university in Wisconsin. In others, new schools came into existence, as did Purdue University in Indiana. Envisioned as a way to offer practical education for the common man, these "People's Colleges" became centers for agricultural and engineering learning in every state.

With the end of the Civil War, states of the former Confederacy could take advantage of the Morrill Act. In 1872, the state legislature accepted the offer of land and buildings of the Methodists' East Alabama Male College and established, with the Morrill Act endowment, what would become Auburn University.

In 1890, a Second Morrill Act encouraged southern states to endow with federal funds agricultural and mechanical college for blacks—Alabama's share went to what is now the Alabama Agricultural & Mechanical University in Normal. Another congressional act in 1899 brought present-day Tuskegee University into the federally endowed system of A&M institutions.