I am a homesteader. The government created an act called the Homestead Act that offered 160 acres free to any family that wanted to settle on the plains. The government got a great response. We eventually numbered 1.6 million and settled close to 270 million acres, which proved to be 10% of the nation. Although 160 acres sounds like a lot, it isn’t if the soil is hard to work with like most soil in the Northwest Great Plains area. Still, the Homestead Act allowed my family and me to gain valuable and usable land for free. We would not have moved west into the Great Plains had the government not granted this to us. There were even some settlers that left for Oklahoma before the government said they could. These people were known as “sooners” because they left sooner than they were supposed to. Oklahoma became known as the “Sooner State.”

I am a land speculator. I took advantage of the Homestead Act and got land myself without any plans on farming it but using it as an investment. I hope to sell it later at a high price. Although this may sound dishonest, I look at it as a way of settling the Great Plains too. My area might be settled just a little bit later. Some people like me improved the land a little and then sell it. Most, however, do not go the extra mile to farm and till the land and make a profit from crops or farming.

I am an exoduster. I am an African-American moved from the Post-Reconstruction south to Kansas where I could start all over again with my family. During this time, racism was rampant in the south. There were even rumors that they were going to reinstitute slavery! My family and I now live in free-Kansas away from most of the racial suppression that exists in the south. We are able to get our own land and start OUR life anew. This is a huge opportunity for us.

I am a cattle rancher. Even though the land in the Homestead Act was not intended for people like me, I took advantage of the opportunity to gain more land to graze and raise my cattle. Cattle have become a big business as you all know and there’s a lot of money to be made. Having this land given by the government really helps me to start and maintain my livelihood as a cattle rancher. Without it, where would I graze my cattle? I need wide-open spaces like in the Great Plains to allow my job to work.

I am just your average woman living a typical life on the Great Plains. Let me tell you about what I do during the day. First of all, because my father spends a lot of time hunting, my mother and I are left a lone a lot and have to handle the farm and animals on our own. It can be scary because we’re not used to this life and a lot of the work requires strength, endurance and courage. It also can be very lonely without anyone around. If something were to happen to us, we would have no one to run to within miles. Although there are extreme difficulties, it is making us stronger women.

I own a railroad company. We have been holding the land given away by the government to hopefully build on it someday. Sure it wasn’t intended for us but we look at it as an investment. We hope to make lots of money on the land once we start building railroad along it. Also, we see the railroad as a great thing. Soon people will be able to ride across the entire United States on the railroad. The journey will take less than two weeks now instead of months. We believe that the citizens of the United States will now be able to travel easier. Additionally, by building a railroad we are assisting in the process of opening up the Great Plains and getting people here in the west to spread out.

I am a typical settler on the plains. Life here is not easy. There are many challenges. First of all, it’s dangerous. There are many wild animals. There are even other settlers that want our land. Native Americans are also a threat. Second of all, it’s very lonely. If you are in trouble, there is usually no one that can come and help you. Growing crops can be a challenge because of the soil and weather. We cannot control the weather. We live in all kinds of houses. The one I live in is called a “soddy.” A soddy is a sod or mud home that keeps us cool in the summer and warm in the winter. It’s a nice dwelling except for the fact that there are lots of snakes and bugs. It also leaks when it rains.

I’m an inventor and manufacturer. I invented a reaping machine that helped farmers to harvest crops. I mass-produced this machine so that it was easier to see on the market. Other inventors followed soon after me and took advantage of the new market. They invented things like machines to prepare soil, barbed wire, steel plows, steel wind mills and other machines to help cut into the hard soil. Without opening the Great Plains, these inventions maybe wouldn’t have been invented.

I am an environmentalist. I am aware of the environment as well as the effect we have on it. Settling the land has multiple negative effects on the environment. First of all, farming the land is fine until you start creating huge farms that cultivate only a few kinds of crops. These crops keep on taking the same nutrients from the ground rendering it useless. Secondly, since cattle have become such a huge industry, many cattle have been taken to market and their trails are wearing the wild plains thin. Lastly, now that the railroad is coming, our air is going to be polluted and beautiful landscapes that were once lush, green and open will be filled with people. The Great Plains will no longer be inhabited with animals and beauty for all to see but just filled with the typical urban cities we see everywhere else.

I am a college student during the opening of the Great Plains. Fortunately, for me the government opened the Morrill Act that gave federal land to state in order to help pay for college if you studied agriculture; agriculture is the study of plants and animals. They passed this act so that more people could learn HOW to farm and use the land properly. Through this act, the dry Great Plains were able to become the “Bread-Basket” of the nation bringing forth lots of food and providing it for the nation.

I am a Bonanza Farmer. The difference between me and another farmer is that I work on a 15,000-50,000 acre farm that farms mostly just one crop. This seemed to be very effective at the time because we thought we could mass-produce a crop and get more money for it. However, this proved to be a huge problem because sometimes the price of our one crop would fall and we had no other crops to fall back on. Consequently, we would buy more land and get more loans. This causes us to get further and further into debt. The rise of shipping costs didn’t help either. Our investment into bonanza farms slowly proved to take us down into bankruptcy.

I am a Native American. Opening the west is clearly something that hurts my people. We believe the land cannot be owned so the concept of moving into the west does not make sense to us. How can the White Americans move onto more and more land without any thoughts to how it effect the land or people that previously inhabited the land? Our people have suffered so many hardships by the hand of the white people. They give no regard to us or the way we live. If all the land is taken how will we farm? How will we survive? It’s bad enough that people want to come take the land we live on but to have the government give it out for free? To us, it is inhumane.