CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 Name: _____ C: _____

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When Charles Grandison Finney preached, his listeners shrieked, moaned, and fainted. The most famous preacher of the era, Finney inspired emotional religious faith, using a speaking style that was as much high drama as prayer or sermon. Converted at the age of 29, Finney traveled by horseback to deliver his message. Finney seated the most likely converts in his audiences on a special "anxious bench," where he could fasten his eyes upon them. He lectured on the depth of the conversion experience.

"I know this is all so much algebra to those who have never felt it. But to those who have experienced the agony of wrestling, prevailing prayer, for the conversion of a soul, you may depend upon it, that soul . . . appears as dear as a child is to the mother who brought it forth with pain." —Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religions*

The convert's duty was to spread the word about personal salvation to others. This religious activism—or evangelism—was part of an overall era of reform that started in the 1830s. Reforms of the period included women's rights, school reform, and abolition, the movement to outlaw slavery. All of these movements emerged as responses to rapid changes in American society such as early industrial growth, increasing migration and immigration, and new means of communication.

Main Idea:

Much of the impulse toward reform was rooted in the revivals of the broad religious movement that swept the United States after 1790, known as the Second Great Awakening. Finney and his contemporaries were participants in the Second Great Awakening. These preachers rejected the 18th-century Calvinistic belief that God predetermined one's salvation or damnation—whether a person went to heaven or hell. Instead, they emphasized individual responsibility for seeking salvation, and they insisted that people could improve themselves and society.

Religious ideas current in the early 19th century promoted individualism and responsibility, similar to the emphasis of Jacksonian democracy on the power of the common citizen. Christian churches split over these ideas, as various denominations competed to proclaim the message of a democratic God, one who extends the possibility of salvation to all people. The forums for their messages were large gatherings, where some preachers could draw audiences of 20,000 or more at outdoor camps.

Main Idea:

Such a gathering was called a revival, an emotional meeting designed to awaken religious faith through impassioned preaching and prayer. A revival might last 4 or 5 days. During the day the participants studied the Bible and examined their souls. In the evening they heard emotional preaching that could make them cry out, burst into tears, or tremble with fear.

Revivalism swept across the United States in the early 19th century. Some of the most intense revivals took place in a part of western New York known as the burned-over district because of the religious fires that frequently burned there. Charles Finney fanned these flames, conducting some of his most successful revivals in Rochester, New York. The Rochester revivals earned Finney the reputation of "the father of modern revivalism." Revivalism had a strong impact on the public. According to one estimate, in 1800 just 1 in 15 Americans belonged to a church, but by 1850, 1 in 6 was a member.

Main Idea:

The Second Great Awakening also brought Christianity on a large scale to enslaved African Americans. There was a strong democratic impulse in the new churches and a belief that all people—black or white—belonged to the same God. Thus, the camp meetings and the new Baptist or Methodist churches were open to both blacks and whites. Slaves in the rural South—though they were segregated in pews of their own—worshiped in the same churches, heard the same sermons, and sang the same hymns as did the slave owners. Enslaved African Americans, however, interpreted the Christian message as a promise of freedom for their people. In the East, many free African Americans worshiped in separate black churches, like Richard Allen's Bethel African Church in Philadelphia, which by 1816 would become the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Allen inspired his congregation to strengthen its faith as well as to fight against slavery.

"Our only design is to secure to ourselves, our rights and privileges to regulate our affairs temporal and spiritual, the same as if we were white people, and to guard against any oppression which might possibly arise from the improper prejudices or administration of any individual having the exercise of Discipline over us." —Richard Allen quoted in *Segregated Sabbaths*

Membership in the African Methodist Episcopal Church grew rapidly. It became a political, cultural, and social center for African Americans, providing schools and other services that whites denied them. Eventually the African-American church developed a political voice and organized the first black national convention, held in Philadelphia in September 1830. Richard Allen convened the meeting, in which participants agreed to explore the possible settlement of free African Americans and fugitive slaves in Canada. Allen's convention was the first of what would become an annual convention of free blacks in the North. The African-American church gave its members a deep inner faith, a strong sense of community— and the spiritual support to oppose slavery.

Main Idea:

Many reformed-minded individuals sought an alternative to traditional religion but found revivalism too public a forum for religious expression.

By the mid-1800s, some Americans were taking new pride in their emerging culture. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a New England writer, nurtured this pride. He led a group practicing transcendentalism—a philosophical and literary movement that emphasized living a simple life and celebrated the truth found in nature and in personal emotion and imagination. Exalting the dignity of the individual, the transcendentalists spawned a literary movement that stressed American ideas of optimism, freedom, and selfreliance. Emerson's friend Henry David Thoreau put the idea of self-reliance into practice. Abandoning community life, he built himself a cabin on the shore of Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts, where he lived alone for two years.

"I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. . . . If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them." —Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Because Thoreau believed in the importance of individual conscience, he urged people not to obey laws they considered unjust. Instead of protesting with violence, they should peacefully refuse to obey those laws. This form of protest is called civil disobedience. For example, Thoreau did not want to support the U.S. government, which allowed slavery and fought the War with Mexico. Instead of paying taxes that helped finance the war, Thoreau went to jail.

Main Idea: