

Charles Grandison Finney

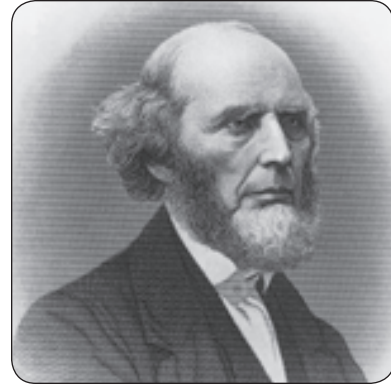
1792–1875



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Charles Grandison Finney was an important religious leader in the years leading up to the Civil War. His ideas had a large impact on Christian churches as well as the social climate of the time.



As you read the biography below, think about how Charles Grandison Finney's idealism played a role in the abolitionist movement.



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In the 1800s many social changes were taking place. The church was the center of several of those changes. New religious movements challenged the ideas and practices of the traditional church. Charles Grandison Finney was an important **evangelist**, a preacher of Christianity, at the time.

Finney began his career in the ministry of the Presbyterian Church. He was given a job as a preacher at the Broadway Tabernacle in New York City in 1834. However, Finney disagreed with some of the traditional teachings of the **denomination**, so the church split with the Presbyterian Church.

At the Broadway Tabernacle, Finney preached his revivalist ideas. He believed that the people of the church should play a large role in the way a church is run. He also strived to convert people to Christianity. Non-believers were given a seat on the “anxious bench,” a place where they could pray about converting with the preachers following the service. Another somewhat radical idea of the time included Finney’s decision to allow women to pray in public.

Finney was also involved in the abolitionist movement. He often preached about the crime of

VOCABULARY

evangelist one who preaches or tries to convert others to Christianity

denomination a religious organization uniting local congregations into a single legal and administrative body

slavery in front of his church. Many of the people he converted to Christianity became well-known abolitionists themselves.

In 1835 Finney went so far as to ban slaveholders from worshiping in his church. That same year he moved to Ohio to become a professor at Oberlin College. In later years, as president of the college, Finney continued his efforts as an abolitionist. Oberlin was the first university in the United States that allowed African Americans and women to take classes alongside white men.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Draw Conclusions** Why do you think there were so many changes in religion at this time in history?

- 2. Evaluate** How might Finney's role as a preacher have affected those who heard his views on slavery?

ACTIVITY

Write an epitaph for Charles Grandison Finney using information from this biography.