The Risks and Rewards of Technological Innovation

The 19th century was the Age of Progress, and improved transportation was one of its hallmarks. Between the 1830s and the 1860s, American capitalists and workers, aided by state governments, built steam powered railroads that stretched across the nation and reduced the cost of moving goods and people by more than 90 percent. Yet, like all major technological changes, the railroad revolution was controversial, expensive, and politically explosive.

Go to page 298-299 in your text book. There are seven sources that discuss the advancements in transportation. These sources are both support and go against the rise of intercontinental transportation. After examining the documents answer the following questions (hint: this will help you with context and sourcing to make arguments!)

1. What does source 1 tell us about the hopes of steam railroad pioneers? Do the others sources suggest their hopes were achieved?
2. What does source 2 suggest about early railroad design and marketing? How does this image contrast with source 3? What threats does source 3 highlight? What audiences were the targets of these illustrations, and how successful were their respective messages?
3. According to source 4, how did Pennsylvania raise money for these subsidies? Who was left holding the bag? Why would governments fund such private enterprises?
4. What social tensions do the lyrics to source 5 reveal? What other conflicts are manifest in the document?
5. Who are the sleepers in source 6? How does Thoreau calculate the cost of progress? How are these costs similar to or different from the ones described by the author in source 5?

In one page answer the following question using evidence from the documents:

* Was the transportation revolution most of a benefit or a cost to the United States? Why?