



ANTEBELLUM ECONOMY - UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYMENT IN 1850

Activity Item

The following item is part of this activity and appears at the end of this student version.

- Item 1: Employments of the Free Male Population of the United States Over Fifteen Years of Age: 1850

Student Learning Objectives:

- I will be able to interpret a primary source from 1850 to calculate percentages.
- I will be able to compare and contrast northern and southern economies in the years leading up to the Civil War.
- I will be able to write and answer my own questions about 1850 Census data.

- In 1850, the U.S. Census Bureau changed the way it collected information about American citizens for the decennial census. It added questions — about taxes, schools, crime, wages, the value of one’s estate, and mortality — and listed the name of each free person in the home (no longer just of the primary person who completed the form). Census Bureau workers also asked about the job of each person in the home who was older than 15. During this time, the United States was transforming from an agrarian — or agriculture-based — society to an industrial — or industry-based — economy.

With this information in mind, why do you think the census changed? How do you think this new information would be used by the U.S. Congress, state and local government agencies, and/or the general public?

- In the following chart, list five common jobs during the Antebellum Period and today.

Common Jobs in America

During the Antebellum Period	What You Typically See Today

8. Select three northern states and three southern states, and then calculate the percentage of each state’s free male population older than 15 employed in agriculture and the percentage employed in commerce and in nonagricultural labor. Record your answers in the following data table, rounding to the tenths place.

Formula:		
Percent of state’s free male population older than 15 working in a specific sector	=	$\frac{\text{total number of free men working in the specific sector}}{\text{total number of free men in the state}} \times 100$
Example:		
Percent of New York’s free male population older than 15 working in agriculture	=	$\frac{313,980}{888,294} \times 100 = 35.3\%$
Percent of New York’s free male population older than 15 employed in commerce and nonagricultural labor	=	$\frac{(312,697 + 196,613)}{888,294} \times 100 = 57.3\%$

Percentage of State Population (Free Men Older Than 15) Working in Agriculture or in Commerce and Nonagricultural Labor		
	Percentage working in agriculture	Percentage working in commerce and nonagricultural labor
Northern States		
Southern States		

Item 1: Employments of the Free Male Population of the United States Over Fifteen Years of Age: 1850

TABLE CXXX.—Employments of the Free Male Population of the United States over fifteen years of age—1850.

States and Territories.	Commerce, trade, manufactures, mechanic arts, and mining.	Agriculture.	Labor, not agricultural.	Army.	Sea and river navigation.	Law, medicine, & divinity.	Other pursuits requiring education.	Government civil service.	Domestic servants.	Other occupations.	Total.
Alabama	16,630	68,635	7,653	.....	807	2,610	3,638	325	42	97	100,467
Arkansas	4,296	28,942	5,684	33	106	911	676	110	.....	27	40,733
California	69,007	2,059	3,771	140	017	876	198	130	710	123	77,631
Columbia, Dist. of	6,129	421	2,535	91	186	330	436	559	507	16	11,209
Connecticut	38,653	31,681	16,813	.....	4,801	1,614	2,162	189	220	677	97,010
Delaware	5,633	7,884	6,663	.....	743	251	581	124	69	113	22,061
Florida	2,380	5,977	2,666	423	708	357	302	268	12	49	13,133
Georgia	29,715	83,362	11,505	18	282	2,815	3,942	416	15	173	123,243
Illinois	36,232	141,099	29,778	.....	1,644	3,307	2,071	701	376	151	215,359
Indiana	45,318	163,929	29,854	.....	1,725	4,229	3,031	677	184	449	248,698
Iowa	9,255	32,779	5,892	71	163	1,077	425	103	10	40	49,315
Kentucky	36,598	115,017	23,413	204	1,027	3,811	4,420	902	212	471	191,075
Louisiana	32,879	18,639	15,264	45	4,263	1,827	2,444	811	508	488	77,168
Maine	33,247	77,082	26,833	114	15,049	2,212	1,727	419	232	196	162,711
Maryland	47,616	28,583	32,102	67	9,740	2,059	2,442	963	1,021	278	124,876
Massachusetts	146,002	55,699	57,942	73	19,598	4,702	5,371	1,566	1,375	2,972	295,300
Michigan	22,375	65,815	15,662	143	1,220	2,007	1,092	337	220	167	103,978
Mississippi	12,053	50,234	6,067	.....	292	2,329	3,380	377	69	231	75,062
Missouri	30,098	65,591	20,326	305	2,471	2,893	3,147	767	1,458	1,140	128,173
New Hampshire	27,905	47,440	14,953	38	778	1,642	1,425	305	47	31	94,604
New Jersey	46,544	32,834	32,383	.....	4,351	1,731	2,457	373	404	1,603	128,740
New York	312,697	313,980	186,613	1,462	23,243	14,258	11,104	4,925	6,324	3,628	828,294
North Carolina	20,613	81,982	28,560	.....	1,659	2,263	3,447	570	46	247	139,337
Ohio	142,687	270,362	92,766	.....	4,109	9,001	8,263	1,218	1,167	1,219	530,792
Pennsylvania	266,927	207,495	163,628	101	9,064	9,954	10,830	3,719	4,431	4,495	680,644
Rhode Island	21,004	8,482	9,296	.....	2,032	556	851	176	774	269	43,471
South Carolina	12,205	41,302	8,151	.....	346	1,829	3,161	372	149	34	68,549
Tennessee	23,432	118,979	17,559	.....	258	3,363	3,589	705	10	345	168,240
Texas	7,327	25,299	6,194	584	321	1,368	996	677	.....	90	42,856
Vermont	17,063	48,327	22,997	.....	159	1,827	1,563	129	34	127	92,226
Virginia	52,675	108,364	48,338	274	3,263	4,791	5,622	1,491	79	1,978	226,875
Wisconsin	20,529	40,980	13,196	77	561	1,477	800	183	191	140	78,139
Territories	656	563	751	163	4	68	37	59	15	20	2,336
New Mexico	1,054	7,958	6,209	655	2	45	58	206	1,292	1	17,478
Oregon	1,007	1,704	511	289	130	99	48	40	40	6	3,874
Utah	828	1,581	622	.....	18	26	48	12	.....	.....	3,135
Total	1,596,265	2,400,563	993,620	5,370	116,341	94,515	95,814	24,066	22,243	22,159	5,371,876
Ratio p. ct. to total employed	29.72	44.69	18.50	.10	2.17	1.76	1.78	.46	.41	.41	.....

www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/sis/resources/historical-docs-images/h03-figure1.pdf

To view the data in an easier-to-read table, click on the link above.