



ANTEBELLUM ECONOMY – UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYMENT IN 1850

TEACHER VERSION

Subject Level:

High School History

Grade Level:

9-12

Approx. Time Required:

60 minutes

Learning Objectives:

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

Activity Description

Students will examine a table of 1850 Census data on employment to understand the professions of free men across the United States at the time, calculating the percentages working in different industries. Students will also compare and contrast economies in the North and South during the Antebellum Period.

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9-12

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Topics:

- Antebellum Period
- Economy

Skills Taught:

- Comparing and contrasting
 - Examining primary sources
 - Synthesizing data
-

Materials Required

- The student version of this activity, 7 pages
- Calculators

Activity Item

The following item is part of this activity. The item, its source, and instructions for viewing it online appear at the end of this teacher version.

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

For more information to help you introduce your students to the U.S. Census Bureau, read [*"Census Bureau 101 for Students."*](#) This information sheet can be printed and passed out to your students as well.

Standards Addressed

See charts below. For more information, read

[*"Overview of Education Standards and Guidelines Addressed in Statistics in Schools Activities."*](#)

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

Standard	Strand	Cluster
<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7 Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.</p>	RH 9-10 - History/ Social Studies	Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.</p>	RH 11-12 - History/ Social Studies	Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

UCLA National Standards for History: U.S. History Content Standards

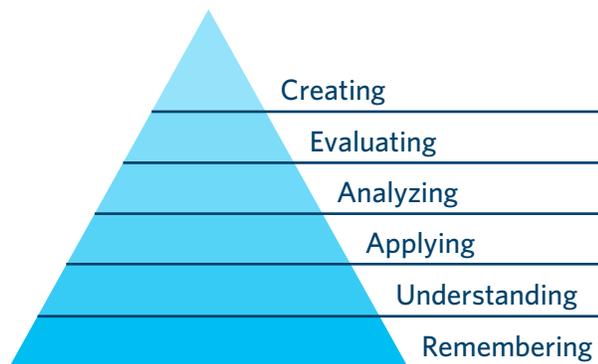
Era	Standard
4 - Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)	Standard 2: How the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed the lives of Americans and led toward regional tensions

UCLA National Standards for History: Historical Thinking Standards

Standard	Description
Standard 2: Historical Comprehension	Utilize visual and mathematical data. Students will examine 1850 Census data in a table to understand employment and economies during the Antebellum Period.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Students will **create** and support their own inferences after examining census data.



Teacher Notes

Before the Activity

Students must understand the following key terms:

- **Antebellum Period** - the time period before the Civil War, during which the divide between opponents and supporters of slavery grew
- **Civil service** - work in the administrative divisions of the U.S. government (e.g., at post offices), excluding the armed forces
- **Commerce** - the activity of buying and selling goods or services
- **Divinity** - the formal study of religion
- **Domestic servant** - a person who is employed to work within a household for a family or individual

Students should have a basic understanding of the following concepts:

- The major differences in the northern and southern economies in the years leading up to the Civil War
- The states that were considered northern and southern, respectively, in 1850

Teachers should review **Item 1** with students to help them understand the data, specifically the job categories (e.g., divinity, government civil service). If necessary, teachers should also go over how to calculate percentages.

During the Activity

Teachers should monitor students as they work.

After the Activity

Teachers should ask students to share their responses to question 10 with their classmates. Then teachers should review with the class the differences in the northern and southern economies in the years leading up to the Civil War as well as the ways in which some of those differences are reflected in the 1850 employment data.

Extension Ideas

- Teachers could have students conduct research and create a visual tool — such as a timeline or infographic — depicting how U.S. industries have changed since the Antebellum Period.
- Teachers could have students examine and discuss an example of a filled-in questionnaire from the 1850 Census (www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/programs-surveys/sis/resources/historical-documents-and-images/h03-figure6.jpg). Students could compare the data for Henry Clay, a Virginia statesman at the time, with the data for other census respondents noted on the form.

Student Activity

Click [here](#) to download a printable version for students.

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.

Answer the following questions using **Item 1: Employments of the Free Male Population of the United States Over Fifteen Years of Age: 1850.**

1. Summarize what the data show as well as how and when they were collected. Also mention a couple groups of people that are not included in the table.

Student answers will vary but should include that the table displays employment data about the free male population older than 15, collected as part of the 1850 Census. The data are organized by employment type across all of the states and territories that existed at the time. The table does not include data for enslaved people or for free women, for example.

2. Fill in the following pieces of information.
 - a. The state or territory with the greatest number of free men in the Army:
New York
 - b. The number of domestic servants working in Pennsylvania:
4,431
 - c. The total number of free men employed in Delaware:
22,061
 - d. The percentage of the total number of free men working in sea and river navigation:
2.17 percent

e. The employment category with the greatest number of free men in Louisiana:

Commerce, trade, manufactures, mechanic arts, and mining

3. 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?

Student answers will vary but should reference points from the paragraph above. Students could also mention that Congress and government agencies used the information to plan for the future and to allocate appropriate resources to the states that needed them most.

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

Student answers will vary. Sample answers appear in the chart below.

Common Jobs in America

During the Antebellum Period	What You Typically See Today
Newspaper reporter	Retail salesperson
Plantation owner	Cashier
Army service member	Food service worker
Railroad worker	Nurse
Textile manufacturer	Secretary

5. Looking at the jobs you just wrote in your chart, how are they similar and how are they different?

Student answers will vary based on the jobs selected.

6. Name several jobs from the Antebellum Period that would fit in the commerce and nonagricultural labor employment categories, which may or may not include jobs from your table in question 4.

Student answers will vary but could include boat builders, merchants, shop and factory owners, and manufacturers of tools or cloth.

7. Looking at the last row of data in the item, which category of employment has the largest percentage of free male workers in 1850?

Agriculture

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.

Student answers will vary. Two sample answers appear in the table below.

Formula:		total number of free men working in the specific sector
Percent of state’s free male population older than 15 working in a specific sector	=	$\frac{\text{total number of free menworking in the specific sector}}{\text{total number of free menin the state}} \times 100$
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		
New York	35.3	57.3
Southern States		
Virginia	47.8	44.5

9. Using your table and your background knowledge, compare and contrast northern and southern economies prior to the Civil War, being sure to address the role of free labor versus that of slave labor in each economy.

Student answers will vary depending on the states selected but should be supported by the percentages calculated and mention that, during this time, northern states had primarily commerce- and industry-based economies (using free labor) while southern states had mostly agriculture-based economies (using slave labor).

10. Explain how the differences between the economies of the North and South may have caused a problem for the nation.

Student answers will vary but could include difficulty coming to a national consensus on political and economic issues.

11. Imagine you are the teacher: Write three questions — including at least one open-ended, critical-thinking question — and answer them using **Item 1**. (Think to yourself: What would I want my students to know?)

Student questions and answers will vary.

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	40,785
California.....	69,007	2,059	3,771	140	617	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.....	28,653	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	13,135
Georgia.....	20,715	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	153,229	29,854	.....	1,725	4,229	3,031	677	184	449	248,698
Iowa.....	9,255	32,779	5,392	71	163	1,077	425	103	10	40	49,315
Kentucky.....	36,598	115,017	28,413	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	489	77,168
Maine.....	33,247	77,082	26,833	114	15,649	2,912	1,727	419	232	196	162,711
Maryland.....	47,616	28,589	32,102	67	9,740	2,059	2,442	963	1,021	278	124,870
Massachusetts.....	146,002	55,693	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	108,978
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	128,170
New Hampshire.....	27,905	47,440	14,953	38	778	1,642	1,425	305	47	31	94,504
New Jersey.....	46,544	32,834	38,383	.....	4,351	1,731	2,457	373	404	1,603	128,740
New York.....	312,697	312,980	196,613	1,462	22,243	14,258	11,104	4,985	6,324	3,628	828,204
North Carolina.....	20,613	81,982	28,560	.....	1,659	2,263	3,447	570	46	247	139,357
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	680,641
Rhode Island.....	21,004	8,482	9,296	.....	2,033	556	881	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	524	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.....	20,526	40,980	13,196	77	561	1,477	800	183	191	140	78,139
Territories. { Minnesota.....	656	563	751	163	4	68	37	59	15	20	2,336
{ New Mexico.....	1,054	7,956	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	2,400,583	893,620	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.