Geography and Population of the North and South

The North has a climate of warm summers and snowy cold winters. The terrain is rocky, hilly, and not good for farming. These conditions, along with a short growing season, made farming difficult. Most of the forest was made up of timber used for shipbuilding. There are many sheltered bays and inlets on the Atlantic coast. Settlers found that ships could sail along wide rivers into many of these bays. Most of the rivers are fast, shallow, and hard to navigate. At a certain point, called the Fall Line—a plateau over which eastward-flowing rivers fell onto the plain—the many waterfalls of most rivers made them no longer navigable. At the Fall Line many ships dropped their cargo.

CITIES, which served as trading centers, grew up at these points. Soon people realized that the waterfalls were a cheap source of energy, and the waterpower began to be used to run factories. The period between 1800 and 1860 brought rapid population growth throughout the United States. In the North the overall population rose from about 5 million to 31 million during this time. Part of this increase was due to massive immigration. Between 1830 and 1850 alone, over 2 million Irish, German, and other northern Europeans arrived in the United States. Most of them settled in the North.

Cities in the North thrived as centers of commerce. They were set up along the Atlantic coast and served as centers of trade between the North and Europe. They were hubs of manufacturing of textiles (cloth goods) and other products. Many people from rural New England moved to the cities looking for employment opportunities. In 1800 about 5 percent of the population lived in cities, but by 1850 nearly 15 percent did. Increased trade and manufacturing drew many laborers to town to work. Cities were often crowded and dirty. Not until after 1830’s were harbors and streets improved, sanitation systems were started, and police forces were created. Public services such as education began to take root. Cities were important centers of art, culture, and education. Most cities printed newspapers and books and provided many forms of recreation, such as dancing, card playing, and theater.
Geography and Population of the North and South

The South has a climate that is generally warm and sunny, with long, hot, humid summers, and mild winters, and heavy rainfall. It has a climate ideal for agriculture and the ability to grow many different crops in large amounts. The Southeast is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico and had many broad, slow moving, navigable rivers.

Cities developed along these rivers and as ports along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. The Atlantic Coastal Plain is an area of fertile, rich soil and swamps. To the west of the Atlantic Coast Plain is the Piedmont, another area of good farmland and forests. Population of the South was made up of Europeans (mostly of English and Scotch-Irish descent) and enslaved Africans. By 1860 there were 4 million slaves in America and the United States was the largest slave holding republic. The total population of the South reached 12 million, thirteen percent of who were slaves.

The South was an overwhelmingly agricultural region of mostly farmers. Most farmers lived on medium sized farms, while a small number of planters ran large farms, or plantations. Only one fourth of the Southern population owned slaves and most of these were the planters. The rest of the population was made up of white independent farmers, tenant farmers (who rented land and paid the landowners in crops or money), laborers, or frontier families. Most Southerners lived on farms, scattered along the coastal plains and the small farmers in the backcountry. Since the economy was based on agriculture, industries and towns developed at a slower pace than in the North. There were many small towns along the banks of rivers and the coasts. Only a few large cities developed as trading centers in the South. Plantations were so large and so distant from each other that they became almost self sufficient, like small towns. Still, the major Southern cities included Baltimore, New Orleans, Louisville, Charleston, and Richmond. The combined population of these Southern cities by 1860 had reached nearly 530,000, only four percent of the total Southern population.

Adapted from: The American Battlefields Trust - www.battlefields.org
Industry and Economy of the North and South

The American economy was in a state of transition in the years prior to the Civil War. What had been an almost purely agricultural economy in 1800 was in the first stages of an industrial revolution, which would result in the United States becoming one of the world’s leading industrial powers by 1900. The beginnings of the industrial revolution in the years before the Civil War were almost completely limited to the regions north of the Mason-Dixon line (The line separating Maryland and Pennsylvania), leaving much of the South far behind.

In 1860, the South was still predominantly agricultural, highly dependent upon the sale of crops to the world market. By 1815, cotton had become the most valuable export in the United States; by 1840, it was worth more than all other products exported from the South combined. But, while the Southern states produced two-thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) of the world’s supply of cotton, the South had about 15 percent of the nation’s manufacturing or industrial capability, about 84 percent of the nation’s large farms, and only 13 percent of the nation’s banks. The South did experiment with using slave labor in factory work, but for the most part it was satisfied with its agricultural economy.

The North, by contrast, was well on its way toward a manufacturing economy based on factory labor, which would have a direct impact on its ability to supply and army to fight a prolonged war. By 1860, 90 percent of the nation’s manufacturing output came from northern states. The North produced 17 times more textiles than the South, 30 times more leather goods, 20 times more iron, and 32 times more firearms. The North produced 3,200 firearms to every 100 produced in the South.

Even in the agricultural sector, Northern farmers were out-producing their southern counterparts in several important areas, as Southern agriculture remained labor intensive and northern agriculture became increasingly driven by machines. By 1860, the free states had nearly twice the value of farm machinery per acre and per farm worker as did the slave states, leading to increased productivity. As a result, in 1860, the Northern states produced half of the nation’s corn, four-fifths of its wheat, and seven-eighths of its oats.

The Southern lag in industrial development did not result in any economic disadvantages. There was great wealth in the South, but it was primarily tied up in the slave economy. In 1860, the
economic value of slaves in the United States exceeded the invested value of all of the nation's railroads, factories, and banks combined. The average price for a slave in 1830 was $300 (over $8,000 today). By 1860, the price jumped to $800 (about $25,000 today). On the eve of the Civil War, cotton prices were at an all-time high. The Confederate leaders were confident that the importance of cotton on the world market, particularly in England and France, would provide the South with the diplomatic and military assistance they needed for victory.

Source: Benjamin T. Arrington, National Park Service (Edited)
Transportation Development in the North and South

Although slavery was highly profitable, it had a negative impact on the Southern economy. It impeded the development of industry and cities and contributed to soil exhaustion, a lack of transportation infrastructure, and overall technological innovation.

In the early 1800s, most American roads were rutted boneshakers. In 1806, Congress funded the construction of a National Road across the Appalachian Mountains. The purpose of this highway was to connect the new western states with the East. With its smooth gravel surface, the National Road was a joy to travel.

Fast Ships and Canals Even with better roads, river travel was still faster and cheaper than travel by land. But moving upstream against a river’s current was hard work. To solve this problem, inventors in both the United States and Europe experimented with boats powered by steam engines. In 1807, Robert Fulton showed that steamboats were practical by racing the steamboat Clermont upstream on New York’s Hudson River. Said Fulton, “I overtook many boats and passed them as if they had been at anchor.” A Dutchman watching the strange craft from the shore shouted, “The devil is on his way up-river with a sawmill on a boat!” By the 1820s, smoke-belching steamboats were chugging up and down major rivers and across the Great Lakes.

The future of transportation, however, lay not on water, but on rails. Inspired by the success of steamboats, inventors developed steam-powered locomotives. These trains traveled faster than steamboats and could go wherever tracks could be laid—even across mountains. So many railroad companies were laying tracks that, by the 1840s, railroads were the North’s biggest business. By 1860, more than 20,000 miles of rail linked Northern factories to cities hundreds of miles away.
Cotton was the most important Southern product shipped by water. On plantation docks, slaves loaded cotton bales directly onto steam-powered riverboats. The riverboats then traveled hundreds of miles downstream to such port cities as Savannah, Georgia, or Mobile, Alabama. West of the Appalachians, most cotton moved down the Mississippi River, the largest of all the Southern waterways. The cotton boom made New Orleans, the port at the mouth of the Mississippi, one of the South’s few big cities. Once the cotton reached the sea, it was loaded onto sailing ships headed for ports in England or the North. Because river travel was the South’s main form of transportation, most Southern towns and cities sprang up along waterways. With little need for roads or canals to connect these settlements, Southerners opposed bills in Congress that would use federal funds for internal improvements. Such projects, they believed, would benefit the North far more than the South.

Some railroads were built in the South, including lines that helped Southern farmers ship their products to the North. Southerners were proud of the fact that the iron rails for many of the area’s railroads came from Virginia’s Tredegar Iron Works. Still, in 1860 the South had just 10,000 miles of rail (28% of the nation’s railroad), compared with over 20,000 miles in the North (72% of the nation’s railroad).
Transportation of the North and South

Roads, Canals, and Rails in the 1800s

Map by National Geographic Society
www.nationalgeographic.org