

Northeastern Region, 1800-1850



The Materials in this part were drawn from the northeastern region of the United States—New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the states of New England, including Maine. (Maine, which had been part of Massachusetts, became a separate state in 1820.)

Regional Differences in Society

Today, modern methods of transportation and communication make it possible for millions of Americans to share the same experiences. Network television brings the same news, jokes, clothing styles, habits of speech and the same commercials for the same products into American homes. The Internet adds another layer of common experience. Marketing techniques make it possible to release the same books, films, and records all over the United States at the same time. Automobiles, trains, and airplanes carry Americans from every state into every other state. People all over the country can see many of the same sights, eat the same foods, and sleep in hotels that look just about the same in Maine, Montana and New Mexico.

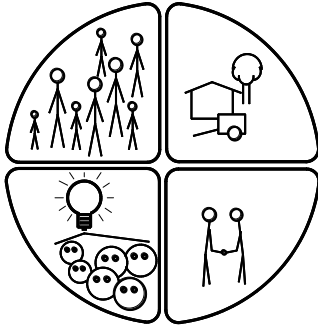
This development is fairly recent. Until the second half of the 1800s, transportation and communication among the regions of the United States were very slow. Separated by hundreds or even thousands of miles, Americans in the Northeast, the South, and the West had somewhat different experiences. And they also had somewhat different ideas, attitudes, values and ways of acting.

Not all their differences grew out of their different experiences, of course. Many of those differences originated overseas and were brought over by those coming to America. Even immigrants from different parts of England tended to differ in important ways. However, regional differences in environment and experience help explain some of the events and problems Americans faced in the 1800s.

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Investigation: Interpreting Data for the Northeast

Use the Model to analyze each piece of data. You'll find (or be able to infer) information about:



1. *Setting, both natural and human-made, including such things as transportation methods.*
2. *Demography: Population density and distribution (where do people live?)*
3. *Action patterns: Occupations, child rearing patterns, organizations, social classes, etc.*
4. *Shared ideas about education, religion, status, the future, etc.*

Make notes on the information, which will help you summarize the Northeast when you've studied all the material in this activity.

Timothy Dwight, a Congregationalist minister and President of Yale University, was a leading citizen of New England. He traveled throughout the Northeast in the early 1800s. Dwight wrote his impressions of the region in the form of letters which he kept in notebooks (published 1823). The selections below are from those notebooks.

I will mention some facts concerning the state in which I live. Connecticut is divided into eight counties and 119 towns. Every community in Connecticut has its church. Connecticut contains 216 Presbyterian or Congregational, 9 Independent, 61 Episcopal, and 67 Baptist congregations. In addition to these, there are a few Methodists scattered over the state.

There is a schoolhouse near enough to every man's door in this state to allow his children to go conveniently to school throughout most of the year. The number of schoolhouses cannot be determined. In the community of Greenfield, containing a little more than 14 square miles and 1,440 people in the year 1790, there were eight schools, besides an academy.

Children who live at a distance from school are usually not sent until after they are four years of age. Those who are near are frequently sent at two, and generally at three. A considerable number of boys, after they have arrived at eight, nine, or ten years of age, are employed during the warm season in the family business. Girls often leave the school at 12 years of age and most commonly at 14.

But whatever may be the number of students at any given time, there is scarcely a child in this state who is not taught reading, writing, and arithmetic. Poverty here does not exclude anyone from this degree of education.

(Continued)

I have given you a view of the schools in Connecticut. The picture is about the same in the rest of New England. In Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont, schools are everywhere established. Each area has enough schools to admit all the children which it contains.

We rode the first day to Middletown, Connecticut. This town has excellent land. It is well cultivated and produces an excess of the necessities and comforts of life. The New Haven market allows the farmers to sell everything they raise. There is a nice but small village on the hill upon which their church is built, extending along the road perhaps a mile. The houses are generally good and their owners are obviously well-to-do.

I say their owners, for you are to understand that every man, almost without an exception, lives on his own ground. Every farmer in Connecticut and throughout New England is, therefore, dependent for his enjoyments on none but himself, his government, and his God. Every farmer is the ruler of a kingdom large enough to supply all his needs. If he is not in debt because of sickness or weakness, he is absolutely his own master.

The legislature of each town is made up of the inhabitants, personally present in town meetings. A majority of them decide every question. The proceedings of this legislature are all controlled by exact rules and are under the direction of the proper officers. There is no confusion.

Men learn to do public business by being involved with the affairs of towns. You will remember that every town annually elects a considerable number of officers. Even the humblest of these jobs offers chances for information and wise decision-making.

The public business done here is so varied, so similar in many ways to that of a state or national legislature, so connected with the public good, occurs so often, involves so many people and so many offices, that the inhabitants become quite well acquainted with public affairs.

On the 20th of September, 1815, I set out upon a trip to the western parts of the state of New York.

On the 28th, in company with several gentlemen, I ascended the Catskill Mountains. From a height of 3,000 feet, we could see several counties. The whole area was settled, cultivated, and beautifully spotted with farms and groves. There seemed to be scarcely room left for a single additional farmer. At the bottom of this valley, the Hudson stretched in clear view over a length of 50 miles. On its waters were moving in various directions many vessels that looked like dim white spots. With a telescope, we discovered one of these to be a steamboat, making rapid progress. In this great view, a series of towns and villages met the eye.

I've met many visitors from England to America. These visitors, with few exceptions, have assumed they are superior to the people they meet here. They complain about poor treatment in their American travels, but the main reason is that they provoke the treatment they receive. An Englishman, when he enters an inn, treats the inn-keeper as if he were his servant or even his slave. The inn-keeper is not used to being treated this way, and becomes impatient with the traveler. Treating people as servants is not customary here, and this treatment is unwelcome. As every New-England man feels entirely independent, it is not strange that he considers this kind of treatment as unfair abuse. If the traveler would simply be polite, the inn-keeper would do what is necessary to please him.

We have in New-England no such class of men that are called *peasants* on the other side of the Atlantic. A few such people, merely laborers, live in the larger towns, but these are mostly a collection of shiftless, idle, or vicious people. Many of them are foreigners.

Here every apprentice at a trade originally intends, and usually succeeds, to set himself up in business. Every seaman plans to become a vessel's officer or master, and many end up as planned. Every young man that is hired to work on a farm, plans to acquire a farm for himself, and almost all are successful. All men, here, are masters of themselves; the combined effect of education and society are such that a person who fails at one kind of business can easily find another at which he will be successful.

There is a vein of practical good sense, the most valuable of all intellectual possessions, running through the people of New-England, which makes them distinctive.

Towns in [New England] provide for all sick strangers not otherwise provided for within their limits. The expense is paid back from the public treasury.

Every town is required to support its own inhabitants when they are unable to support themselves.

Dwight reported the business life in New Haven, Connecticut in 1811:

There were in New Haven:

29 businesses dealing in foreign commerce	1 bell founder
41 stores of dry goods	9 tanners
42 grocery stores	30 shoe and bootmakers
4 ship equipment stores	9 carriagemakers
2 wholesale hardware stores	7 goldsmiths
7 curers of leather	4 watchmakers
2 brass founders	4 harnessmakers
3 wholesale dry goods stores	5 cabinetmakers
1 wholesale glass and china store	50 carpenters and joiners
1 furrier's store	3 combmakers
10 apothecaries stores	4 Windsor-chair makers
6 traders in lumber	15 masons
1 trader in paperhangings	26 tailors
6 shoe stores	14 makers of barrels and corks
7 manufacturers of hats	3 stonecutters
5 hat stores	7 curers of leather
4 bookstores	2 blockmakers
3 ropemakers	5 barbers
2 sail lofts	3 tanners
1 shipyard	1 maker and repairer of wheels
17 butchers	1 leather dresser
16 schools	1 nailer
12 inns	2 papermakers
5 candlemakers	5 painting offices
2 brass founders	2 bookbinders
3 brass workers	5 bakers
29 blacksmiths	2 newspapers published

There were also:

6 clergymen
16 lawyers
9 practising physicians
1 surgeon

Charles A. Murray, an English traveler, visited the United States in 1837. He reported on his treatment while staying at a country farm in New York State.

The very first evening that I passed under the roof of my worthy host, not only he, but his farm assistants and laborers, called me “Charlie.” To most English travelers, this use of my name would have seemed too personal and impolite, especially when we had just met. On the other hand, a traveler may find in the first village to which he comes, that the small tavern is run by a general, the broken wheel of his wagon is mended by a colonel, and the day-laborers and mechanics speak of one another as “this gentleman” and “that gentleman.”

An English traveler to the United States in the 1830s, Frederick Marryat, wrote *A Diary in America*. In it he describes this scene in northern New Jersey. Similar scenes could be seen all over the Northeast.

I crossed over to New Jersey and took the railroad to view the falls of the Passaic River, about 15 miles from New York. This water power has given birth to Paterson, a town with ten thousand people, where a variety of manufactures is carried on.

Below the falls one can see manufacturing in full activity—millions of reels whirling in their sockets—the bright polished cylinders forever turning, and never tiring. What used to be the work of thousands of women, who sat with their children at the cottage door spinning thread, is now done in a hundredth part of the time. The machines that do this require only the attention of one child to several hundred machines. But machinery cannot perform everything, and so the romantic falls of the Passaic provides jobs for thousands of people.

(If you’re curious and have Internet access, use “Great Falls of the Passaic” as keywords.)

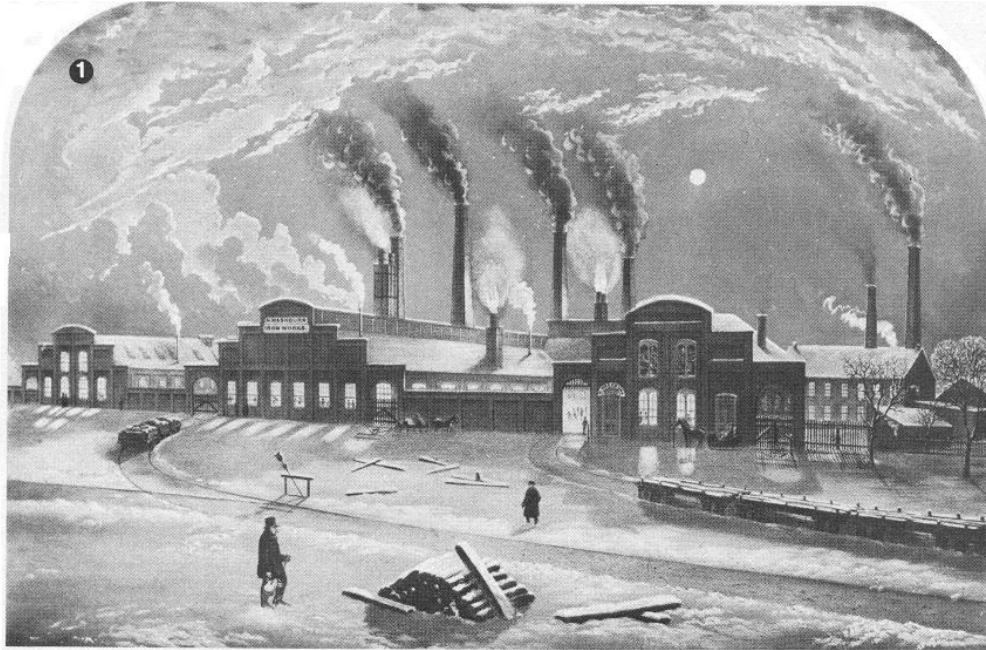
The information in the chart below was reported by the Secretary of the Treasury of Massachusetts to the House of Representatives of Massachusetts on April 9, 1810.

GENERAL SUMMARY OF THE MANUFACTURES OF MASSACHUSETTS (1810)

	Estimated value		Estimated Value
54 Cotton factories	\$931,906	1,666 dozen brushes	\$5,000
1 Woolen cloth factory	\$2,060,576	49,905 dozen combs	\$80,625
4 Wool carding factories	\$78,998	123 tons ashes	\$20,619
180 Carding machines	\$236,193	44,460 gallons oil mills	\$46,982
221 Fulling mills	\$442,401	Wire Factories	\$24,912
9 Spinning jennies	\$28,600	Soapstone factory	\$13,000
6,393 Spinning wheels	\$17,982	Ores, ocher and nitrous bed	\$1,350
142,645 Hats	\$415,167	Wrought iron	\$521,718
261,800 Moroccan skins	\$130,160	Lead mines	\$200
174,596 Hides	\$1,022,661	Edge tools	\$44,000
65,888 Calves' skins	\$129,078	Small and wrought nails	\$70,595
62,536 Sheepskins	\$52,140	Earthenware	\$18,700
105,276 Sheep	\$399,182	Lace for coaches	\$10,000
2,800 Hog skins	\$9,100	Glass	\$36,000
63,307 pairs leather boots	\$412,509		
844,864 pairs men's shoes	\$973,033	23,600 Saltpeter	\$9,303
1,310,500 pairs women's shoes	\$816,250	334,238 pounds Glauber's salt	\$13,369
3,225 pieces hemp	\$86,813	2,043,720 pounds hardsoap	\$239,697
60,000 yards bagging and tow cloth	\$33,000	4,190 barrels softsoap	\$18,400
35,000 pounds sheep's wool	\$14,175	6,000 gallons essence of turpentine	\$18,000
37,951 pairs woolen stockings	\$28,453	1,250 pounds spruce essence	\$2,500
103 pounds sewing silk	\$618		
4,875 dozen gloves	\$14,625	716,805 Breweries	\$86,450
1 year's supply spectacles	\$10,000	316,480 gallons cider	\$181,386
Steel thimbles	\$10,000	118,757 bushels salt	\$79,526
Straw bonnets	\$551,988	422,000 pounds loaf sugar	\$82,400
Buttons	\$20,000	255,500 pounds chocolate	\$73,100
		49,054 bushels corn and oats	\$35,273
1 Rake factory	\$1,870	2,472,000 gallons molasses	\$1,404,350
1 Steel factory	\$4,000	460,476 bushels wheat and rye	\$350,896
1 Fire engine factory	\$4,000	63,730 gallons grain	\$42,590
6 Powder mills	\$72,000	5,400 barrels mackerel	\$44,550
16 Marble works	\$38,000		
25,295,000 Bricks	\$139,067	10,725,000 feet pine	\$80,480
19,095 Muskets	\$229,085	490,000 feet oak	\$6,855
12,976 Brass guns	\$7,136	2,851-1/10 tons twine and cordage	
32,159 Copper	\$22,828	ropewalks	\$1,068,044
11,000,000 Tacks	\$2,000	23,410 tons shipbuilding	\$1,656,095
2,260 Wagons	\$43,600	1,694 dozen chairs	\$96,060
667 Coaches and chaises	\$122,674	Cabinet work	\$318,622
70,000 Corn brooms	\$4,000	Clocks and watches	\$46,185
1,901,550 Wax	\$217,060	Catgut	\$2,000
327,424 Whale oil	\$240,510		
440 tons anchors	\$92,712	6,000 pounds printing ink	\$3,000
2,925½ tons cut nails	\$664,990	95,129 reams writing paper	\$257,451
21,410 pounds bells	\$8,555	63,000 rolls hanging paper	\$33,500
99,288 pounds brass and pewter	\$41,700	251,503 pounds composition	\$109,781
978 tons bar iron	\$121,930	118,400 pounds snuff	\$37,281
37,995 casks cooperage	\$69,318	Musical instruments	\$17,880
2,340½ tons hollow ware	\$132,200	Playing cards	\$97,500
7,050 dozen whips	\$7,990		

Business life in the Northeast:

- 1 A Massachusetts factory
- 2 The South Street port in New York City, where trading ships docked



American author James Fenimore Cooper described Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania countryside in 1828:

Philadelphia resembles a good English town. It is well-constructed, and quiet, with architecture superior to New York.

New York is a great commercial town; but Philadelphia is more devoted to manufacturing and is likely to remain so. There is plenty of investment money, and it is probable that it shall soon become a modified or improved Manchester or Birmingham. Its present population is about 140,000.

Instead of following the river south out of Philadelphia, we went by an interior road. This first day's journey was through one of the most highly cultivated and richest agricultural districts of this or of any other part of the world. The countryside looks much like that in England, though I have seen no part of England where such farmhouses and barns are to be seen as we saw here. The villages are few and small, though there are two or three market towns of some size on the route.

The Susquehannah River was crossed by a noble wooden bridge, which was said to be a mile long. This was the twentieth of these immense constructions in wood that I have seen since my landing. The great enterprise and inventiveness of the people are here shown very well. It is only necessary to mention the need for a bridge, or a canal, and someone will try, usually successfully, to build it. A bridge a mile long is no problem for a people who live in a country that was wilderness 40 years ago.

Charles Dickens, a famous English author, visited the United States in 1842. Here he describes Boston:

Boston is a beautiful city. It cannot fail to impress all strangers very favorably. The private dwelling-houses are, for the most part, large and elegant; the shops extremely good; and the public buildings handsome.

The intellectual refinement and superiority of Boston is probably due to the quiet influence of the University of Cambridge [Harvard], which is within three or four miles of the city. The professors at that university are gentlemen of learning and varied accomplishments. They are men who, without exception, would shed grace on and do honor to any society in the civilized world. Many of the gentry in Boston and its neighborhood and many who are professional men have been educated at this same school.

Henri Herz, a French traveler in America, gave this description of a well-to-do Philadelphia lady's day:

Mrs. G., as is the custom in Pennsylvania, gets up very early through the year, and does not leave her bedroom unless fully dressed, as if for going out. Her daughters, well brought up and elegant without affectation, come down a little later. Promptly at eight, whether in January or July, breakfast is on the table. Eight times in ten they will have ham fried with eggs, and drink coffee in large cups.

After breakfast the girls take their books and go by themselves to school. Mrs. G. then puts an apron, white as snow, around her waist, and gives her orders to the servants, setting an example by her own hard work. Every day the house is cleaned and set in order from cellar to attic.

After this Mrs. C. almost always goes out, either in a carriage or on foot, for two to five hours, touring the stores. Generally without any intention of making a purchase, she has 20 bolts of cloth pulled down, looks through box after box of ribbons and tries on a dozen shawls. This manner of passing time, to the despair of the salespeople, is usual among American women who have given it a special name, "shopping."

In his *Diary in America*, Frederick Marryat wrote this about New York City:

Fifty years ago [1789], New York was little more than a village. Now it is a fine city with 300,000 inhabitants. I have never seen any city so well suited for commerce. It is built upon a narrow island, between Long Island Sound and the Hudson River. Each street runs to the river, on which you can see a forest of masts.

New York is not equal to London, although the Americans compare them. Still, New York is very superior to most of England's less important towns.

New York has certainly great capabilities and every chance of improvement as a city; for, about one house in twenty is burnt down every year, and is always rebuilt in a superior manner.

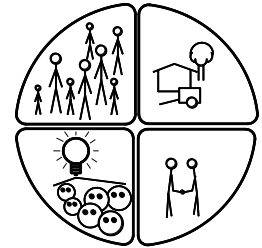
Keywords for Internet/library investigation: New England textile mills, New England whaling history, clipper ships.

Workers in the Northeast, 1840

Agriculture	64.2%
Manufacturing	7.3%
Commerce	4.2%
Navigation	2.1%
Learned Professions	1.8%
Mining	0.3%

Summarizing Northeastern Society

- Using your notes, summarize life in the Northeast in the period from 1800 to 1850. Include information on the four Model categories you have investigated.*
- Describe the opinions and attitudes you'd expect the average person in the Northeast to have had about:*
 - Slavery*
 - A high tariff on goods manufactured in other countries and sold in the United States*
 - Working as a laborer*
 - Cheap land for sale in the West*
- Describe the opinions and attitudes you'd expect a factory owner in the Northeast to have had about:*
 - A high tariff on goods manufactured in other countries and sold in the United States*
 - Immigrants*
 - Cheap land for sale in the West*
- In what ways do you think the Northeast from 1800 to 1850 was the same as it was before 1800? In what ways was it different? What caused the changes? What characteristics of the Northeast in the late 1700s led to the development of factories in the 1800s?*



Investigation: The Northeastern Environment

Throughout the data you've just studied is information about the natural environment in the Northeast—the land, rivers, climate, etc.

1. *Use atlases and other resources to find out more about the northeastern environment.*
2. *Trace or draw a simple outline map of the Northeast, showing mountains, navigable rivers, waterpower, farmland, soil quality, harbors, growing season, natural resources, and other information you think affected life in the region.*
3. *In your journal, describe relationships between environment in the Northeast, and the ideas and ways of acting of the people who lived there in the period from 1800 to 1850.*

Follow-Up: The Northeast Today

The Northeast is still different from other parts of the United States. *From an almanac or the Internet, gather statistical data for Northeastern States (Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey), regarding at least two of the following characteristics:*

- Population density
- Employment distribution (service, trade, government, manufacturing)
- Per capita income
- Educational achievement
- Crime Rate

Save your results for comparison with other regions of present-day America.

Acknowledgements/Sources:

Pages 2 thru 5: Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*.. **5t:** Charles A. Murray, *Travels in North America*, 1839. **5b:** Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America*, 1839. **9t:** James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans*, Volume 1, 1828. **9b:** Charles Dickens, *American Notes*, 1842. **10t:** Oscar Handlin, *This Was America* (New York: Harper & Row) pp. 194-195. **10b:** Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America*, 1839. **11:** *Statistical Abstract*, U.S. Census, 1840.

Notes for teachers and mentors:

This is the first of three units investigating society and culture in the three main regions of the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century. The three units provide data for the four primary elements of the Model—environment, demography, action patterns, and shared ideas—in each major region of the U.S.

Both in historical and conceptual sequence, these units “fit” after completion of the investigations in Part 7 of *Investigating American History*.

The expected sequence for the three units is “Northeastern Region, 1800-1850” first, then “Southern Region, 1800-1850,” followed by “Western Region, 1800-1850.”

The investigations in Part 8 of *IAH* could follow the three; there is some overlap in data between “Western Region...” and Part 8.

A final unit, “Comparing Regions, 1800-1850,” may be used after Part 8 to enhance and evaluate learners’ understanding of regional differences in society and culture. An understanding of these differences will help them grasp events leading to the Civil War.

Using the data: Almost every piece of data included here has either direct or inferential information about demography, occupations, social structure and organizations, etc. For example, Timothy Dwight’s account gives a picture of the structure of New England—many small communities, each with one or more schools and churches—which also suggests occupations (farmers, ministers, teachers), organizations (church membership, town-appointed officials), and social status (egalitarian educational opportunity).

Working in small groups or individually, learners should apply the Model categories to each piece of data. One point of confusion may be the significant differences between rural and urban areas. It may be helpful to point out that data for both is included.