

Name _____

Land & Livelihood



The thirteen American colonies were divided into three regions: New England, the Middle Colonies, and the Southern Colonies. Each region had different geography and natural resources, which influenced how people worked, traded, and lived.

New England Colonies: Rocky Land & Coastal Trade

The New England Colonies—Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire—had rocky soil and a cold climate. This made it hard to grow crops, so farming was small-scale. Instead, New Englanders relied on the ocean for their economy. Fishing, shipbuilding, and trading were major industries. The forests provided wood for ships, and the coastline made trade with Europe easy.

Middle Colonies: The Breadbasket Region

The Middle Colonies—New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware—had fertile soil and a mild climate, which was perfect for farming. Farmers grew wheat, corn, and other grains, earning the region the nickname “The Breadbasket.” The Middle Colonies also had rivers that helped transport goods, and large cities like Philadelphia and New York became busy trade centers.

Southern Colonies: Warm Weather & Cash Crops

The Southern Colonies—Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia—had rich soil and a warm climate, which allowed for large farms, or plantations. They grew cash crops like tobacco, cotton, and rice, which were sold to other colonies and Europe. The Southern economy depended on enslaved labor to farm these crops. Unlike the other regions, the South had few large cities, and most people lived on farms or plantations.

How Geography Shaped Colonial Life

The geography of each region shaped how people lived and worked. In New England, families often fished or built ships. In the Middle Colonies, people traded and farmed. In the South, plantations made farming the most important industry. These differences helped create unique cultures and economies in each colonial region.

Even today, geography affects jobs, cities, and trade around the world!