The North and the South

An underlying reason for the Civil War was that for the first hundred or so years of America’s existence, the North and the South developed along different lines both socially, politically and agriculturally. The American South in the 1800s was characterized by fertile soil and warm weather, which was well-suited to the production of crops like tobacco and cotton. While the North was focused on industry, agriculture in the South was so profitable that Southerners had little interest in industrial development. New Orleans was the only large city, and all other densely populated areas were located along the rivers and coasts. Eighty percent of working people in the South worked on farms. Few Southerners lived in urban areas, and transportation between cities was challenging, with the quickest and most reliable routes being by water. Southerners were slightly less literate than Northerners, and their children spent less time in school. Southern men tended towards affiliation with the Democratic party, and gravitated towards careers in either the military or agriculture, while Northerners favored the Republicans. Additionally, while the North had abolished slavery one state at a time, slavery was inextricably tied to the South’s culture and economy. Although relatively few southerners actually owned slaves, slavery was part of the economic equation in the south, where they were used to maintain the large plantations. They were also a form of currency; they could be rented or traded or sold to pay debts. Owning slaves was also a sign of belonging to a higher class of people. Slaves often constituted the bulk of an individual’s personal and corporate wealth. Thus, different social cultures and political beliefs developed between these two areas of the country, and these conflicting beliefs eventually culminated in disagreements about taxes, tariffs, internal improvements, the issue of state versus federal rights, and the future of slavery.

1. What comparison is the author making?

2. What is purpose of making the comparison?