

CONNECTICUT'S POPULATION: AN EXAMINATION OF THE NUMBERS

OVERVIEW:

The census figures for 1790-1870 demonstrate dramatic changes in population numbers, directly related to industrialization, urbanization, and immigration and show the shift from rural areas and small towns to urban centers where larger factories were located. (See **CHANGES IN CONNECTICUT'S SOCIAL ORDER**, pp. 73-77.)

OBJECTIVES:

- Analyze population trends in Connecticut: 1790-1870
- Compare population trends in two Connecticut regions/counties
- Compare changes in Connecticut's population to changes in other states

MATERIALS:

1. Blank outline map of Connecticut with town borders and county labels
2. Graphs, charts, and statistics from pp. 73-ff.
3. University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Center. *United States Historical Census Data Browser*. Online. University of Virginia. 1998. Available at <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/>
4. On-line Census Browser Instructions

PROCEDURE:

1. Introduction:

Because this activity relies heavily on data from the U.S. census, it is important to introduce the lesson with a discussion of the census, including some of the following topics:

- a. How do historians find out about people from the past, whose names do not appear in history books?
- b. What is a census?
- c. Why does the United States government collect census data?
- d. What information did the government collect in the most recent census?
 - e. Why and how has the information collected changed over the

- years?
- f. What questions about Connecticut history may be asked using the census?
 - g. In what ways and for what reasons is the census data incomplete or misleading?

An essay on the historical background and evolution of the census may be accessed at the following web-site:

<http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/background/>.

2. Connecticut Statistics:

Divide the class into pairs of students, providing each pair with the following charts (pp. 73-ff.):

- a. Series A195-209, Population of States by Sex, Race, Urban-Rural Residence, and Age: 1790- to 1970-Con.”
- b. Table 1. Ethnicity -- 1790
- c. Table 2. Ethnicity -- 1870

Allow students a few minutes to examine the charts and collect data to explain changes in either total population, population density, or ethnicity. Ask students to create a visual representation of one category of statistics. This could be in the form of a pie chart, bar graph, or line graph, depending on which category of statistics the students decide to illustrate. Below the graph have students write an explanation of what the illustrated data reveals about Connecticut’s population. Once they are complete, post the graphs and used them to enhance a discussion of changes in Connecticut’s population between 1790 and 1870.

3. Comparison of County and State Statistics:

Census data going back to the 1790 census is available on-line in an easy-to-use form-based format. The on-line data is broken down by county, in addition to state.

For this portion of the lesson, students will need access to the internet, specifically:

<http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/>.

Before using the internet for research, provide each student with a copy of the blank outline map of Connecticut with town borders and county labels. Once pairs of students have chosen a county to examine, they should label the county’s towns, using an atlas, phonebook, or the internet.

Inform students that their mission is the following: ***To explain how their county's population changed between 1790 and 1870, using the data from the 1790-1870 census.*** Ask younger or less advanced students to describe their county over a specific decade. Encourage more advanced students to examine change over a longer time period, 1830-1870, for example. This would allow students to make much more specific comparisons. Encourage the most advanced students to compare changes in two counties.

Before any serious research can be done, students need practice using the on-line census browser. It is easy to use although few instructions can be found on the web-site. Provide students with a copy of "On-line Census Browser Instructions." Lead the entire class through the instructions and a few sample queries. Also demonstrate to students how to record data and conclusions in their notes.

At least two class periods are needed to complete this kind of research. Use the first period primarily for becoming accustomed to using the on-line census browser. For homework after the first class period ask the students to write five questions they would like to ask using the categories available. After doing research use another class period to organize the results of the research, deciding what data should be used to complete the assignment.

The assignment may be accomplished using several methods:

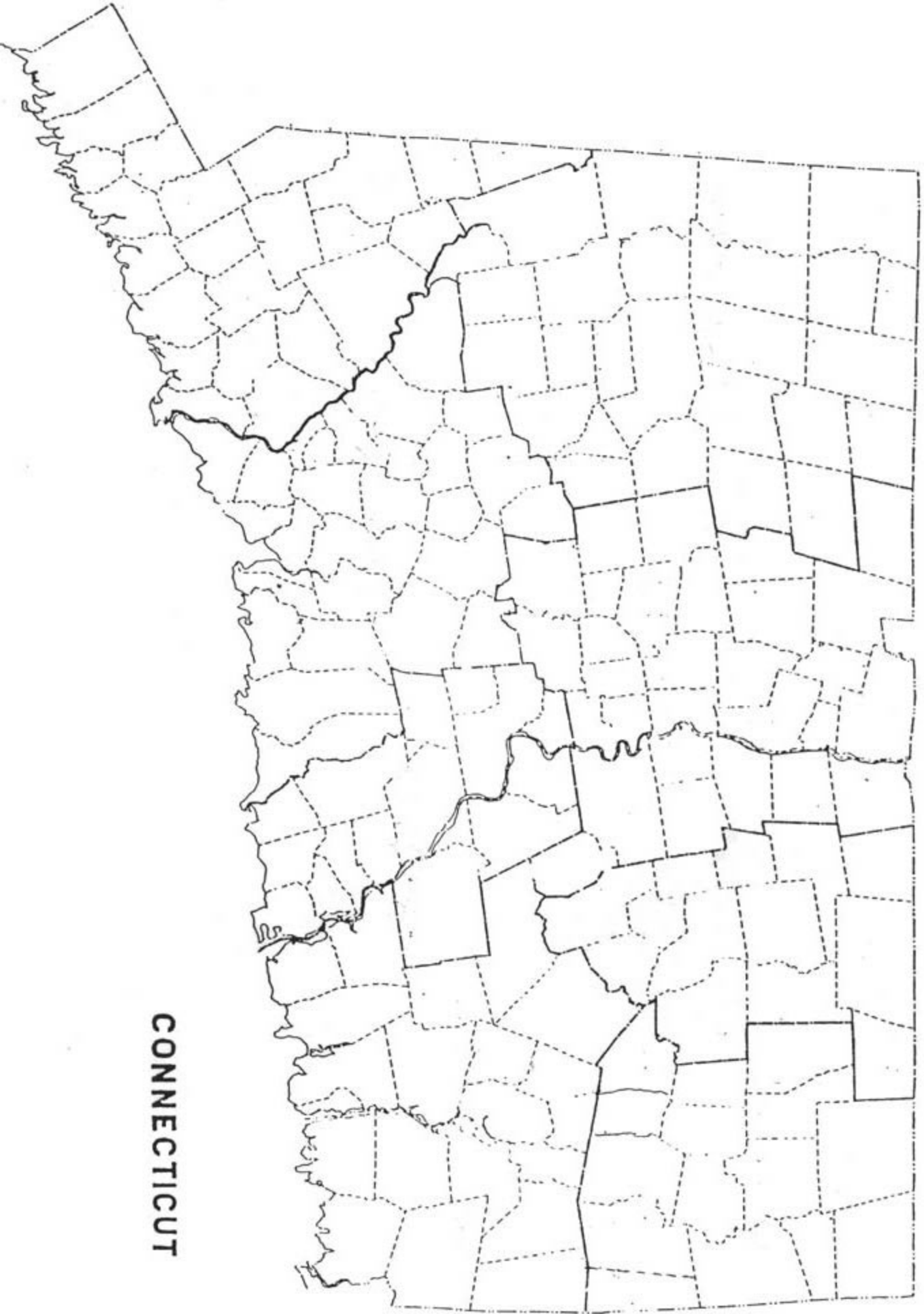
1. Ask students to write a paragraph focusing on one specific area of change.
2. Ask students to write an essay explaining three areas of change.
3. Ask students to develop a poster highlighting major areas of change with a combination of written visual explanation.

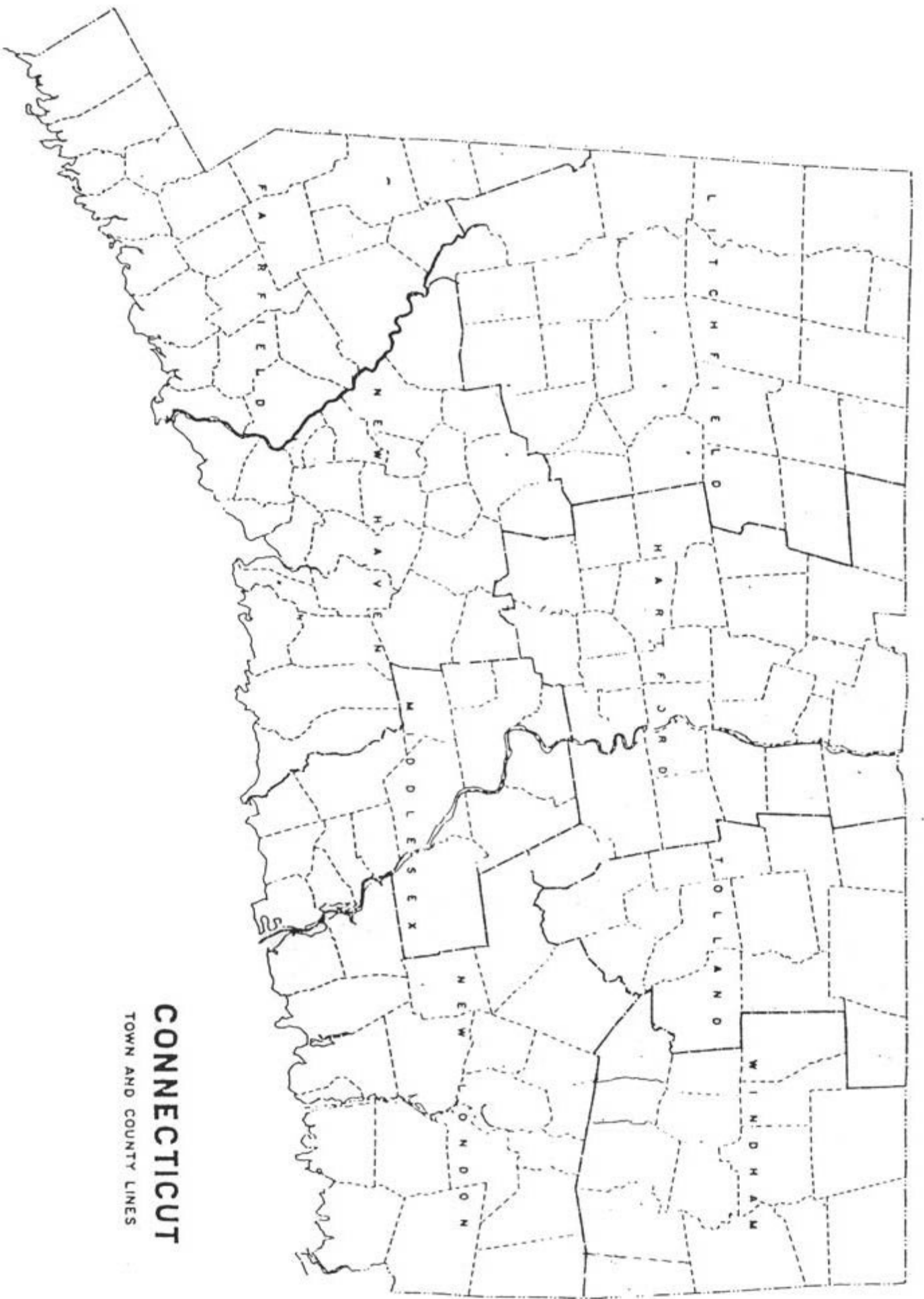
Whatever method is used, have the class discuss and compare their findings with each other during an entire class discussion, developing a chart on the board to highlight areas such as population growth percentages and changes in ethnicity.

ASSESSMENT:

1. Population change graph with written explanation
2. Paragraph, essay, or poster analyzing county changes

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CONNECTICUT
TOWN AND COUNTY LINES

ON-LINE CENSUS BROWSER INSTRUCTIONS

1. Go to <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/>
2. Click on the button labeled 1790. The screen has some instructions and a menu of options. The list of options contains all of the different categories of data collected in the 1790 census.
3. To start doing research, click on several categories. To do this hold down the control as each item is clicked. Be sure to select "total population" to ensure computing percentages.
4. After selecting several categories (also known as fields), click on the "Browse 1790 Data" button to view the requested information. The request for information is known as a query. The computer may take a few minutes before giving back information because the request for information has to be processed by several computer programs.

The screen will be divided into two sections. The top section is used for asking additional information. The bottom screen contains the requested information. This information is organized by state and whenever possible by the entire United States. In order to view statistics based on county, checkmark the box in the right column labeled "Connecticut." At the bottom of the same column, click "View Counties." This will provide a list of the statistics according to county.

Some of the numbers may already be useful. For example, the population of the country and individual states is important for understanding the size of the country and where its people live; however, most of the information will require a bit more work before it reveals anything. Often this means converting numbers into percentages.

5. To compute a percentage, choose a numerator and denominator from the upper left-hand corner of the screen. Next click on the button labeled "Revised State Table." The answer will be in the form of a percentage in the last column of the page that loads. Allow a few seconds for this.

The top half of the page also allows the user to do several things with the data. Graphing, resorting, and viewing information by state or even county are also possible. Before trying to ask real questions about the country in 1790, play with the tools. Be sure to understand what all of the buttons and checkboxes do before asking specific questions. Because the site does not do all of the needed math, be prepared to do some computations by hand.

Useful Tips:

- The browser's back button is useful for starting over when the page gets too crowded or confusing with statistics.
- When dealing with percentages, you will usually want to use "Total Population" as the denominator.
- Later decades include much more detailed information, but they will be impossible to compare to 1790.
- Getting results is exciting and leads to more questions, but don't forget to record and label data in a notebook before moving on to the next question.