

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF  
**COMMERCE**

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ADVANCE REPORT ON RETAIL TRADE, DECEMBER 1956

The Department of Commerce announced today that December 1956 retail store sales totaled \$19.5 billion, bringing sales for the full year 1956 to a record high of more than \$191 billion, 3 percent above sales for the year 1955. December 1956 sales, after adjustment for seasonal factors and trading day differences, showed no change from November, but were about 4 percent above December a year ago.

The December sales figures are based on the Advance Report on Retail Trade, a monthly survey of the Bureau of the Census conducted in cooperation with a representative cross-section of about 1,700 retail firms which, in total, operate some 35,000 stores in the United States. The firms which are cooperating in the early reporting of sales are part of a larger group which furnishes figures at a later date. The advance estimates are preliminary and subject to revision, but the revision of the total seldom exceeds  $1\frac{1}{2}$  percent.

The preliminary Census figures for December 1956 and the full year 1956 are shown in table 1 on the reverse side. The Office of Business Economics noted that after allowance for seasonal variations, December trade activity was strong, with sales in all major lines of trade showing modest changes from November. Sales for most major groups were near record rates.

Retail store sales for the full year 1956 set new highs for all the major kind-of-business groups except the automotive and lumber, building, hardware groups (sales in 1956 for the automotive group were exceeded only by 1955 sales, sales for the lumber group were virtually the same as in 1955). The largest gains percentagewise, compared with 1955, were made by nondurable store groups: gasoline service stations, 11 percent; drug and proprietary stores, 10 percent; and apparel stores, 8 percent. Food store sales in 1956 reached a total of almost \$46 billion.

(more)

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ADVANCE RETAIL SALES REPORT--PRELIMINARY ESTIMATES FOR  
DECEMBER 1956

Table 1.--SALES OF RETAIL STORES IN THE UNITED STATES, BY KIND-OF-BUSINESS GROUP  
(NOT ADJUSTED for seasonal factors and trading day differences)

Kind-of-business group	Sales (millions of dollars)				
	12 months		December 1956 (Advance estimate)	November 1956	December 1955
	1956	1955			
Retail stores, total <sup>1</sup> .....	191,390	185,484	19,451	16,641	19,268
Food group.....	45,959	43,638	4,198	4,024	4,168
Grocery stores.....	39,173	36,919	3,566	3,435	3,542
Eating and drinking places.....	14,307	13,663	1,190	1,158	1,182
General merchandise group.....	20,768	20,103	3,041	2,030	3,011
Department stores <sup>2</sup> .....	11,329	10,882	1,630	1,132	1,617
Apparel group.....	11,607	10,790	1,690	1,095	1,598
Furniture and appliance group.....	10,663	10,055	1,191	1,003	1,163
Lumber, building, hardware group <sup>3</sup> ..	13,750	13,839	1,017	1,103	1,100
Automotive group.....	36,083	38,226	3,084	2,907	3,118
Gasoline service stations.....	13,734	12,412	1,178	1,184	1,104
Drug and proprietary stores.....	5,775	5,233	632	470	590

See footnotes below table 2.

Source: Bureau of the Census

Table 2.--SALES OF RETAIL STORES IN THE UNITED STATES, BY KIND-OF-BUSINESS GROUP  
(ADJUSTED for seasonal factors and trading day differences)

Kind-of-business group	Sales (millions of dollars)			Percent change, Nov. 1956 from--	
	1956		November 1955	October 1956	November 1955
	November	October			
Retail stores, total <sup>1</sup> .....	16,358	16,050	15,808	+2	+3
Durable goods stores, total <sup>1</sup> .....	5,664	5,490	5,689	+3	0
Nondurable goods stores, total <sup>1</sup> ..	10,694	10,560	10,119	+1	+6
Food group.....	3,925	3,915	3,728	0	+5
Eating and drinking places.....	1,188	1,184	1,164	0	+2
General merchandise group.....	1,760	1,674	1,700	+5	+4
Apparel group.....	1,004	982	916	+2	+10
Furniture and appliance group.....	912	864	838	+6	+9
Lumber, building, hardware group <sup>3</sup> ..	1,126	1,156	1,164	-3	-3
Automotive group.....	3,159	3,035	3,261	+4	-3
Gasoline service stations.....	1,179	1,150	1,078	+3	+9
Drug and proprietary stores.....	488	492	447	-1	+9

Source: Office of Business Economics

<sup>1</sup> Totals include data for kinds of business not shown separately.

<sup>2</sup> Based on preliminary estimates supplied by Federal Reserve Board.

<sup>3</sup> Includes farm equipment dealers.