

1934-36

United States

Trends identified in earlier decades, such as the aging and urbanization of the U.S. population, continued into the 1930s. In 1930, the population exceeded 122 million, a gain of 16.1 percent since 1920. The median age in the country had increased 1.2 years to 26.5 (26.7 for men and 26.2 for women). At this time, 29.3 percent of Americans were younger than 15, 89.8 percent were white, and the male-to-female ratio had dropped to 102.5 men for every 100 women. Av-

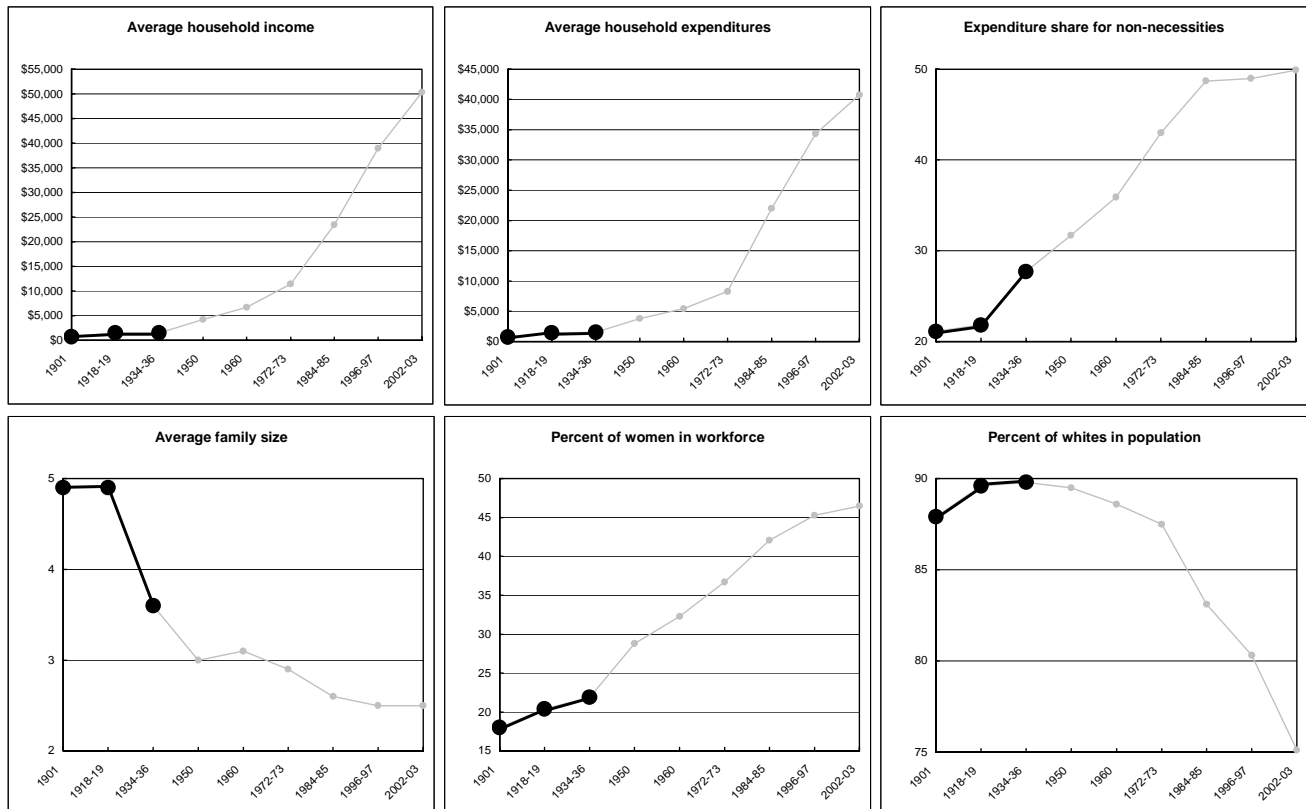
erage family size had decreased markedly, to 3.6. (See chart 9.)

Following the stock market crash in late 1929, the country entered its worst economic depression in history. Unemployment was 15.9 percent in 1931 and rose to 23.6 percent in 1932. Thereafter, it averaged more than 20 percent until 1936, when it dropped to 16.9 percent. In the 1930s, women made up 21.9 percent of the U.S. workforce.

In the 15-year period following World War I, average family income had remained flat, rising only \$6 to \$1,524.

(See hourly wages in table 9.) Meanwhile, average family expenditures had risen 5.4 percent to \$1,512. These dollars would have purchased \$1,387 worth of goods and services in 1918 dollars, compared with the \$1,434 that families in 1918 spent, demonstrating the deflationary effect of the Depression on the dollar's value. According to the Consumer Expenditure Survey for 1934-36, 59.2 percent of families recorded a yearly surplus (\$149 on average), 37.8 percent recorded a deficit (\$203 on average), and 3.0 percent broke even. Av-

Chart 9. Economic and demographic indicators, United States, 1934-36



SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey, and U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*

erage annual family savings were \$11.

Technological developments over the previous 20 years had changed the kinds and types of goods in the marketplace and their cost. For example, prices for food and clothing were significantly lower than in 1918–19, while rents and furnishings were slightly lower. Electric light and power rates were lower, but coal prices had increased as the wartime controls on prices had been lifted.

Food, clothing, and housing occupied a 76.2-percent share of household spending, a decrease from 1918–19. Food, at 33.6 percent, was still the single largest category of expenditure. (See retail prices of selected foods in table 10.) A large proportion of U.S. families, however, “did not spend enough to secure the amount and kinds of food needed for good health for all the family and for normal growth of the children. Although most of them had sufficient food to avoid actual hunger . . .”⁸

⁸ Faith M. Williams and Alice C. Hanson, “Money Disbursements of Wage Earners and Clerical Workers, 1934–36, Summary Volume,” Bulletin No. 638 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941), p. 3.

The expenditure share for housing was 32.0 percent, which translated into an average annual expenditure of \$485. Housing included expenses for fuel, light, refrigeration, and rent or the rental value of owned homes. The number of owner-occupied housing units had increased to 14 million. Forty percent of families lived in one-family detached homes; 25 percent lived in apartments; and the remainder in semidetached, row, or two-family homes. Seventy-eight percent of families lived in homes that had electric lights, gas or electricity for cooking, and a bathroom with an inside flush toilet and hot running water.

Clothing represented 10.6 percent of family spending. Employed women spent the most on clothing, followed by employed men. For both men and women, outerwear—coats, sweaters, suits, shirts, dresses, and blouses—represented the major expenditure. The second major clothing category was footwear, which included shoes, slippers, rubber overshoes, hose, and silk stockings.

Forty percent of families owned automobiles, almost all of which were pur-

chased secondhand rather than new. Of families owning autos, 2 percent owned more than one automobile, and practically all of them had pooled the earnings of grown sons and daughters to purchase the second auto. The average net purchase price (gross price minus trade-in allowance) was \$300.

New York City

By 1930, 12.6 million people or 10.3 percent of the U.S. population lived in New York State, an increase from the previous decade. With a population of 6.9 million, New York City accounted for 55.1 percent of the State’s residents, a decrease from 1920.

Demographically, 51.1 percent of the city’s population was male, 94.4 percent was white, 40.4 percent was foreign born, and 18.4 percent was younger than 15. Of all adults, 15.0 percent were naturalized citizens, and 5.4 percent were illiterate.

Average family size in the city, 3.7, was equivalent to that nationwide. (See chart 10.) However, 53.0 percent of all households contained at most three people. Thirty-eight percent of city

Table 9. Hourly wages for selected industries, United States, 1935

Year	Manu- facturing	Mining	Con- struction	Transpor- tation	Communi- cations and public utilities	Trade	Finance, insurance, and real estate	Services	Govern- ment
1901	\$ 0.23	\$ 0.26	\$ 0.28	\$ 0.24	\$ 0.24	\$ 0.25	\$ 0.50	\$ 0.17	\$ 0.28
1918 .....	.53	.67	.57	.61	.42	.45	.69	.31	.49
1935 .....	.58	.55	.49	.72	.71	.61	.78	.42	.62

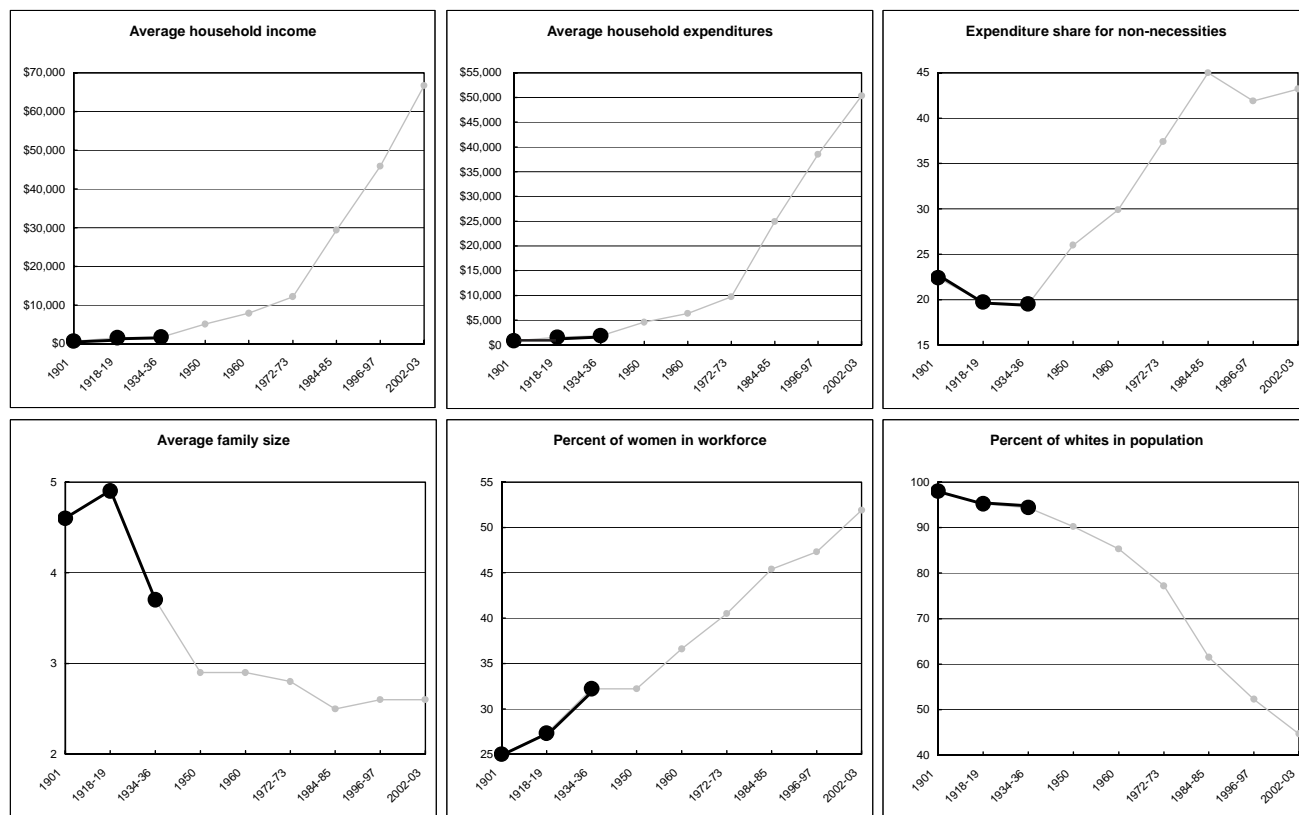
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey

Table 10. Retail prices of selected foods in U.S. cities, 1934

Year	Flour 5 lb.	Round steak lb.	Pork chops lb.	Bacon lb.	Butter lb.	Eggs dozen	Milk 1/2 gallon
1901	\$ 0.13	\$ 0.14	\$ 0.13	\$ 0.16	\$ 0.27	\$ 0.22	\$ 0.14
1918 .....	.34	.37	.39	.53	.58	.57	.28
1934 .....	.25	.28	.26	.29	.32	.33	.22

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey

Chart 10. Economic and demographic indicators, New York City, 1934–36



SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey, and U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*

families had children younger than 10, and 59.5 percent had children younger than 21. Almost half (49.8 percent) of New Yorkers were married, 40.2 percent were single, 8.3 percent were widows or widowers, and 1.0 percent were divorced.

School enrollment was higher than it had been in 1918: 97.2 percent of children aged 7 to 13 went to school in the mid-1930s. Among older children, 93.1 percent of those aged 14 to 15, 55.7 percent of those aged 16 to 17, and 17.5 percent of those aged 18 to 20 received an education.

The city's workforce was 67.8 percent male and 32.2 percent female. Although women made up about one-third of the workforce, in 85.8 percent of households the homemaker (the woman of the house in survey terminology) was not employed outside the home. In 59.0 percent of all households, there was only one worker, while

in 21.8 percent, there were two workers; in 9.3 percent, three workers; and in 5.5 percent, four or more workers.

As for the occupational makeup of the city's workers, 14.5 percent provided domestic or personal services, 13.8 percent worked in trade, 8.8 percent worked in hotels and restaurants, 8.7 percent were professionals or semi-professionals, 6.1 percent worked in the clothing industry, 6.1 percent worked in the building industry, and 3.9 percent worked in general manufacturing.

Average yearly family income in the city was \$1,745, an amount 14.5 percent higher than the national average. Average family expenditures were \$1,839. Besides exceeding family income by 5.4 percent, expenditures were 21.6 percent higher than the national average.

When compared with 1918–19 levels, household spending had increased 20.5 percent (to \$313), countering the

national experience. This sum would have purchased more than \$1,765 in goods and services in 1918 dollars.

New York City families allotted 36.4 percent of their total spending for food. This was a decrease from the 1918–19 level, probably due to the decline in food prices that occurred throughout the country from 1925 to 1934. Yet, New York City families allocated a greater proportion of their spending for food than did their counterparts in any other major city. This was because of the large proportion of families (70.1 percent) reporting expenses for meals at work, which accounted for 10.8 percent of their total food expenditures.

To eat at home, New Yorkers spent \$12.80 a week, with 28.2 percent allotted for meat, poultry, and fish; 19.7 percent for fruits and vegetables; 11.3 percent for milk, cheese, and ice cream; 5.6 percent for eggs; and 4.9 percent for butter, among other items.

After spending on food, housing—which included expenses for fuel, light, and refrigeration—was the next largest expenditure category, at 32.0 percent. In the 1933-34 Consumer Expenditure Survey, a Bureau of Labor Statistics program expert noted:

The concentration of shipping, manufacturing, and trade around the harbor on which New York City is situated, combined with the limitation of usable land by the rivers and marshes, have brought about a competition for living space in this area not duplicated in any other part of the United States. The result is a level of rents which taxes the expenditures of families...for relatively small dwellings.⁹

There were over 1.7 million families living in more than 500,000 dwellings. The majority of these structures (52.8 percent) were single-family homes, 24.5 percent were for two families, and 22.7 percent housed three or more families. Only 17.1 percent of the population lived in a single-family home, while 15.9 percent lived in two-family structures, and 67.1 percent lived in three-or-more-family buildings. Larger families, those averaging 4.0 people, tended to own their homes; smaller families (averaging 3.2 people) tended to rent. On average, yearly rent for apartments, which typically had four or fewer rooms, was \$385. The estimated rental value of owned homes, which had an average of six or fewer rooms, was \$493 per year. Of rented apartments, 90.6 percent had a bathroom inside the unit, 94.3 percent had hot running water, and 12.1 percent had a telephone.

Clothing was the third highest expenditure category. Its share was 11.0 percent.

With the nearly 20 percent of the budget left after purchasing necessi-

ties, New Yorkers were able to buy items that made their lives more convenient. In the city, 15.2 percent of families owned an automobile.

Boston

The percentage of Americans living in Massachusetts, 3.5, continued its decline from previous years, although the number of Bay Staters actually grew, to 4.2 million. Boston, with a population of over 780,000, made up 18.6 percent of the Commonwealth's population, also continuing the decline noted in previous decades.

Demographically, 49.1 percent of Boston's population was male, 97.4 percent was white, 28.4 percent was foreign born, and 24.8 percent was younger than 15. Of adults, 22.5 percent were naturalized citizens, and 3.2 percent were illiterate.

In Boston, average family size had decreased significantly, to 4.0, but still was larger than that recorded for New York City or for the country as a whole. (See chart 11.) However, 51.3 percent of all Boston households contained at most three people. In the city, 36.3 percent of families had children younger than 10, and 56.7 percent had children under 21. More than half (50.5 percent) of Bostonians were married, while 40.1 percent were single, 8.2 percent were widows or widowers, and 1.0 percent were divorced.

In terms of the education of the city's youths, 98.5 percent of children aged 7 to 13 went to school. Among older children, 95.5 percent of those aged 14 to 15, 65.2 percent of those aged 16 to 17, and 26.6 percent of those aged 18 to 20 received an education—all higher percentages than were noted for New York City.

As in New York City, Boston's workforce was overwhelmingly (69.4 percent) male. Also, as noted in New York City, in 85.1 percent of households, the homemaker was not employed outside the family. In 56.8 percent of all households, there was only one worker; in 21.0 percent there were two workers;

in 9.6 percent, three workers; and in 6.3 percent, four or more workers.

Boston had a greater share of its workforce in trade than did New York City. Of all workers in Boston, 16.4 percent were employed in trade, 8.0 percent were professionals or semiprofessionals, 7.5 percent worked in the building industries, 7.3 percent were employed as domestics or in personal services, 5.8 percent worked in hotels and restaurants, 4.9 percent worked in general manufacturing, and 4.1 percent worked in the iron and steel industry.

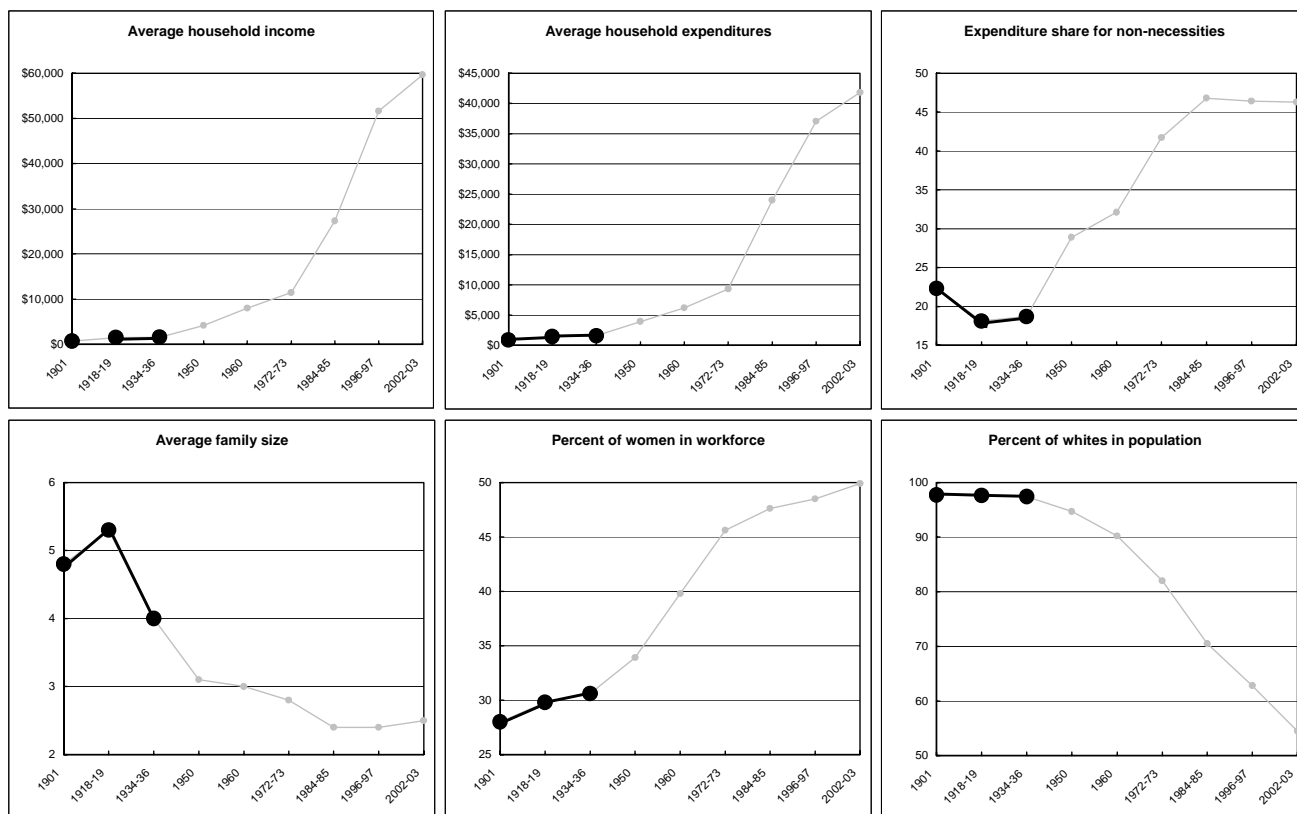
The average Boston family's income had increased 6.3 percent, to \$1,570. That amount was about even with average income for the country as a whole, but markedly below the New York City average. In Boston, average family expenditures exactly equaled income. When compared with 1918-19 levels, expenditures had increased by 9.6 percent, about half the rate of the New York City increase. In 1918 dollars, these expenditures would have bought \$1,429 in goods and services.

The share for food had dropped to 35.7 percent, reflecting a nationwide decline in food prices. The average Boston family spent just under \$11 a week for food, with meat, poultry, and fish and other seafood representing about 25 percent of all food expenditures. Spending for fruits and vegetables accounted for another 19 percent of the average family's food budget. Meals at work accounted for about 3.5 percent of the food budget, significantly lower than the share recorded for New York City families.

On average, Boston families allocated a greater share of yearly expenditures (35.8 percent) for housing than did families in New York City or nationwide. There were 180,000 families living in 90,000 dwellings. As in New York City, single-family homes made up the largest proportion of dwellings, 49.5 percent; two-family homes accounted for 25.5 percent; and three-or-more-family homes made up 25.0 percent. However, only 24.6 percent of Boston households lived in a single-family

⁹ Faith M. Williams and Alice C. Hanson, "Money Disbursements of Wage Earners and Clerical Workers in the North Atlantic Region, 1934-36," Bulletin No. 637, Volume 1 - New York City (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939), p.10.

Chart 11. Economic and demographic indicators, Boston, 1934–36



SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey, and U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*

home; 25.3 percent lived in two-family structures, and 50.1 percent lived in three-or-more-family buildings.

Large families (those exceeding four people) tended to own their home, while small families (averaging 3.3) tended to be renters. The yearly rental value for apartments, which averaged five or fewer rooms, was \$312. The estimated rental value of owned homes, which averaged six or fewer rooms, was \$419. Of owned homes, all had an inside flush toilet, 53.9 percent had a phone, 84.1 percent had running hot water, and 36.3 percent had a garage.

Bostonians allocated 9.8 percent of their expenditures for clothing, a lower proportion than that reported for New York City consumers or for the country as a whole.

Perspective

In the 15 years after the end of World

War I and following the worst economic depression in U.S. history, the economic setting changed drastically for the average household. With unemployment in the country averaging more than 16 percent during 1934–36, U.S. families faced severe economic difficulties.

Demographics in the country had begun to change. The size of the average U.S. family, as well as that of families in New York City and Boston, had decreased dramatically. Foreign-born citizens, as a percentage of the total population, also had declined in New York City and Boston after the war. Additionally, women made up about 22 percent of the U.S. workforce, continuing a slow, but upward trend.

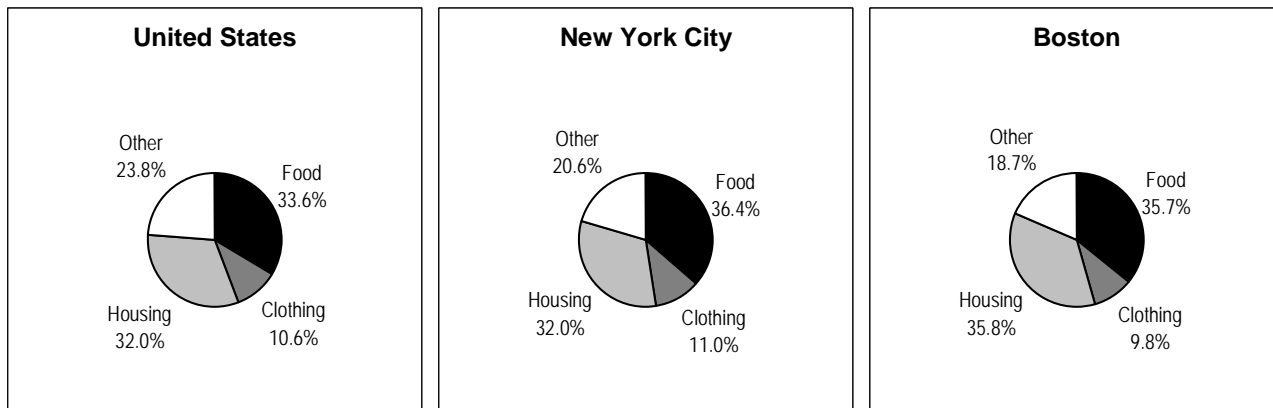
Family income was virtually unchanged from 1918–19, as falling prices coupled with soaring unemployment had held wages in check. Despite the widespread economic turmoil, spend-

ing shares for necessities among households in New York City and Boston were similar to those recorded in 1918–19 and accounted for over 80 percent of household expenditures.

Food remained the largest category of expense. (See chart 12 and table 11.) However, food's expenditure share had decreased notably, especially in New York City and Boston, reflecting significantly lower retail prices. For example, a pound of bacon, which cost 53 cents in 1918, cost only 29 cents in 1934. Retail prices increased for the first time in 1934, following 4 years of decline.

New York City residents allocated a greater proportion of their spending for food than did their counterparts in any major city. This was the result of a large proportion of New York City families incurring expenses for meals at work, which accounted for 10.8 percent of total food spending. By con-

Chart 12. Expenditure shares, United States, New York City, and Boston, 1934-36



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey

Table 11. Expenditures and expenditure shares, United States, New York City, and Boston, 1934-36

Item	United States		New York City		Boston	
	Expenditures	Shares	Expenditures	Shares	Expenditures	Shares
Food	\$ 508	33.6	\$ 670	36.4	\$ 561	35.7
Housing	485	32.0	589	32.0	562	35.8
Apparel and services	160	10.6	202	11.0	154	9.8
Transportation	125	8.3	93	5.1	90	5.7
Healthcare	59	3.9	64	3.5	49	3.1
Entertainment	82	5.4	114	6.2	72	4.6
Personal care products and services	30	2.0	35	1.9	25	1.6
Reading and education	7	.5	6	.3	7	.4
Miscellaneous	32	2.1	37	2.0	35	2.2
Cash contributions	24	1.6	30	1.6	18	1.1
Average income per family	1,524		1,745		1,570	
Expenditures, all items	1,512		1,839		1,570	

NOTE: Itemized expenditures are not all-inclusive and may differ from total expenditures.
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey

trast, for Boston families, meals at work accounted for only 3.5 percent of the total food budget.

With the slight increase in home ownership—to 30 percent—and falling food prices, housing expenditure shares had risen notably in both New York City and Boston and accounted for about one-third of all household

spending. Falling apparel prices also had decreased clothing expenditures for families in these cities.

Automobile ownership had increased dramatically during the 1920s and early 1930s, reaching 40 percent in 1934–36. As a result, transportation costs exceeded 8 percent of family spending in the country. However, re-

flecting extensive mass transit systems, such spending was less than 6 percent in both New York City and Boston. New York City families allocated a greater share of their spending for entertainment than did their Boston counterparts, who spent slightly more for reading and education. ■