

1950

United States

By 1950, the country was in the midst of the post-World War II business cycle (1948-1953), which brought nearly full employment. Unemployment averaged a mere 4 percent during this 5-year period.

The population had surpassed 150 million, a gain of 10.4 percent since 1940. The median age had increased to 30.2 years (29.9 for men and 30.3 for women).

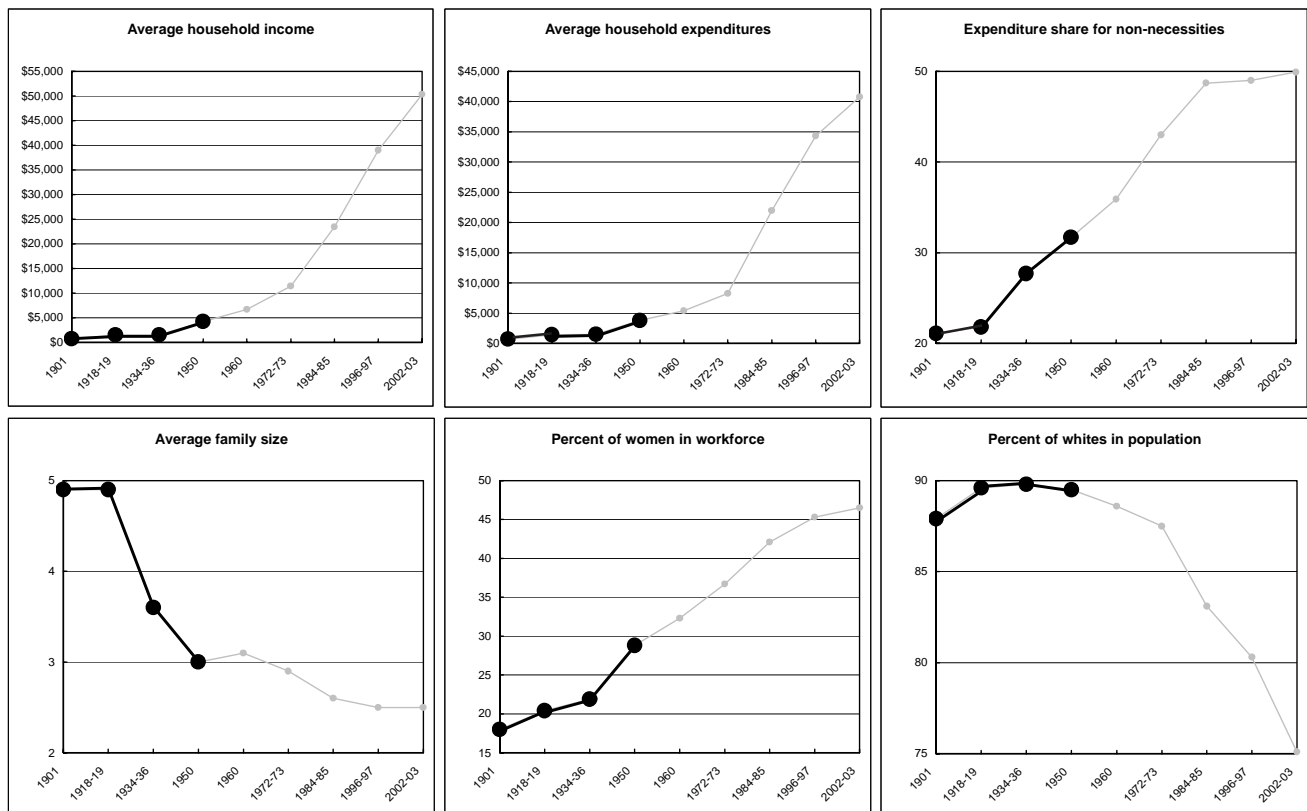
The under-15 cohort had continued to decrease, to 26.9 percent. The percentage of the population that was white had remained constant at 89.5, and the male-to-female ratio had dropped further, to 98.6 men for every 100 women. There were 46.0 million housing units in the country, of which 51.3 percent (32.8 million) were owner occupied. Average family size had decreased to 3.0. (See chart 13.)

In 87.1 percent of families, both a

husband and a wife were present, with the wife employed in 19.8 percent of these families. In 58.2 percent of families, there were children younger than 18 living at home. In 42.1 percent of households, the head of the family was employed as a craftsman or a machine operator.

In 1950, with wages double or triple what they had been in 1935 (see table 12), labor force participation for women (33.9 percent) and for men (86.4 per-

Chart 13. Economic and demographic indicators, United States, 1950



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

cent) reached new highs. While more women continued to join the labor force, the participation rate for men started what was to become a slow decline. At this time, women made up 28.8 percent of the U.S. workforce.

Retail food prices had risen sharply from 1934–36 levels. The price of a pound of butter had doubled, from 32 cents to 73 cents. Meat prices also had risen sharply, with a pound of round steak increasing from 28 cents to 94 cents and pork chops from 26 cents to 75 cents per pound. (See table 13.)

The average U.S. family’s income of \$4,237 had increased by 178.0 percent since 1934–36. As for income distribution, 53.4 percent of U.S. families had incomes less than \$5,000, with 25.0 percent earning less than \$3,000. The median family income was \$3,216.

Average family expenditures during the same timeframe had increased 151.9 percent, to \$3,808. This amount would have purchased \$2,171 worth of goods and services in 1935 dollars, reflecting inflationary forces. (Expenditures in 1935 were \$1,512.)

Food, clothing, and housing accounted for 68.4 percent of total spending, a decrease from their combined share in 1934–36.

The share for food, 29.7 percent and the single largest expenditure category, was less than the 1934–36 allotment. The average American in 1950 consumed 3,260 calories per day compared with 3,250 calories a day in 1934–36, although individuals consumed 12.6 percent more food in 1950. During the Depression, the American diet was high in calories. By the 1950s, a greater selection of foods and widespread use of refrigeration had contributed to a change in dietary habits.

New York City

By 1950, residents of the State of New York numbered 14.8 million, equal to 9.8 of the country’s population, a decrease from the 1930 census. Of that number, 7.9 million people, 53.2 percent of the State’s population, lived in New York City, a slight percentage decrease from 1930.

The city contained 2.4 million households, and average family size was 2.9, slightly below the national average. (See chart 14.) Demographically, 66.6 percent of New Yorkers were adults (aged 21 or older), 20.8 percent were aged 15 or younger, and 7.7 percent were 65 or older. The median age in the city was 34.5, which was notably older than that for the country as a whole. The male-to-female ratio was 93.9 men for every 100 women, 90.2 percent of the population was white, 22.6 percent of people were foreign born, and 9.2 percent of married couples lived with their parents.

In terms of education, 86.7 percent of children aged 14 to 17 attended school. The median number of school years attained by New York City residents was 9.1, with 11.6 percent of the population having attended school for less than 5 years.

As for jobs, 51.7 percent of New Yorkers aged 15 and older were employed, with the unemployment rate at 6.9 percent—7.6 percent for men and 5.6 percent for women. Men consti-

Table 12. Hourly wages for selected industries, United States, 1950

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
1950	1.59	1.66	1.60	1.79	1.61	1.46	1.55	1.05	1.45

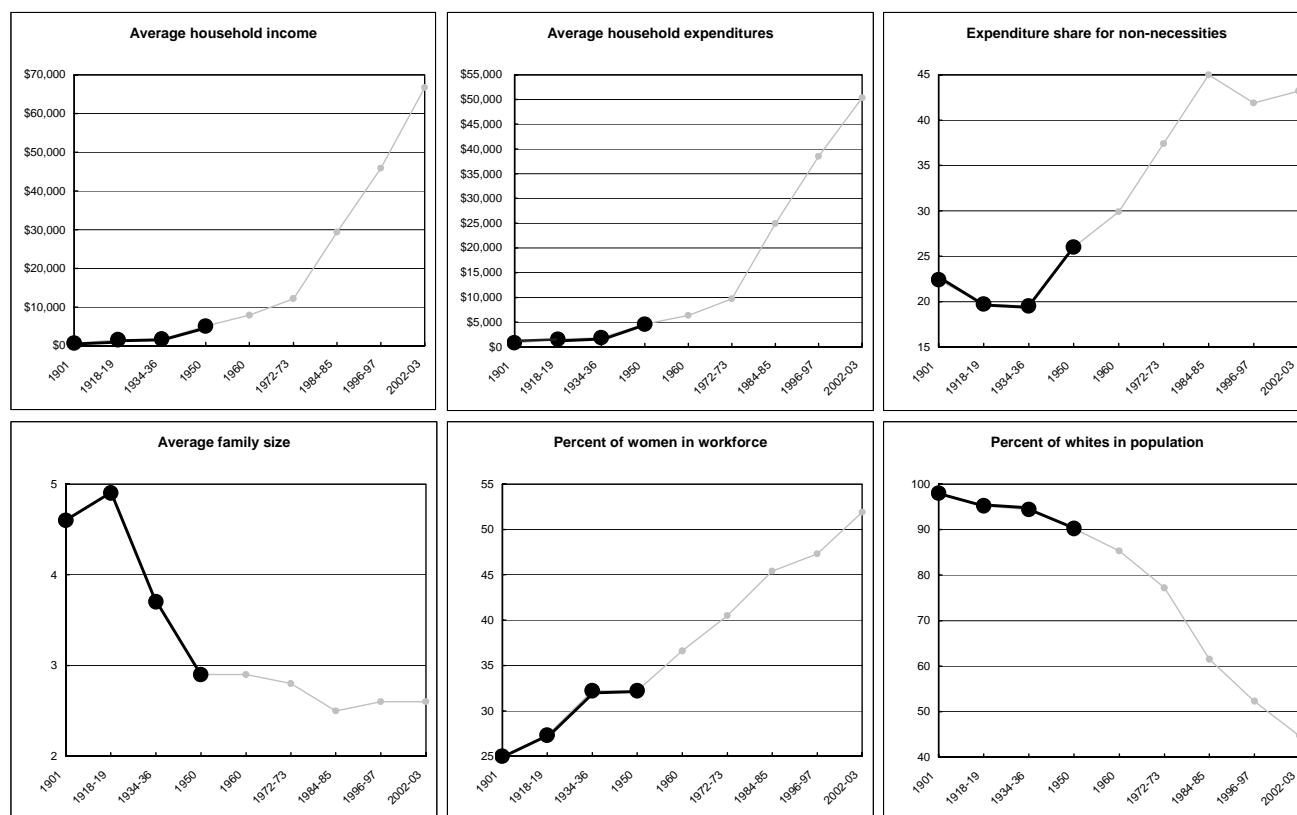
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey

Table 13. Retail prices of selected foods in U.S. cities, 1950

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
1950 .....	.49	.94	.75	.64	.73	.60	.41

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

Chart 14. Economic and demographic indicators, New York City, 1950



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

tuted 67.8 percent of the labor force. Of persons not seeking work, 60.9 percent were housekeepers. Four out of five New Yorkers (79.2 percent) worked in the private sector, 9.6 percent worked for government, and 11.0 percent were self-employed.

More than half of all New York City jobs were in manufacturing and trade (28.0 percent and 23.1 percent, respectively). The other industries with the highest levels of employment were transportation, communications, and utilities (9.4 percent); professional and related services (8.9 percent); finance and real estate (7.4 percent); and personal services (7.1 percent). An additional 4.4 percent of jobs were associated with construction.

The occupational groups with the largest shares of city workers were equipment operators (20.9 percent) and clerks (19.2 percent). Other large occu-

pational groupings were craftsmen (12.2 percent); professionals, officials, or proprietors (11.6 percent); service workers (10.4 percent); professionals or technicians (10.3 percent); salespersons (7.7 percent); and laborers (3.9 percent).

Average family income had risen to \$5,105, 20.5 percent higher than the national level and an increase of 192.6 percent from the 1934–36 level in the city. However, 54.7 percent of New York City households earned less than \$3,500.

Average family expenditures had increased 148.7 percent to \$4,574, 20.1 percent greater than the average U.S. family's expenditures. This sum would have purchased \$2,607 worth of goods and services in 1935 dollars.

The average New York City household allocated 73.9 percent of its expenditure budget for food, clothing,

and housing—a greater percentage than that allocated by the average U.S. family.

At 33.4 percent, food was the largest expenditure category. Housing, including expenses for shelter, light, refrigeration, and water, had an expenditure share of 28.3 percent, while the share for clothing was 12.2 percent. Of the clothing allocation, 52.0 percent was for women's and girls' clothing, 34.1 percent for men's or boys' clothing, 1.0 percent for infants' clothing, and the remainder for clothing materials and services.

Additionally, 18 percent of New York City families owned their own home, and 39 percent of city families owned a car. Buying and operating a car accounted for 5.7 percent of household spending. Compared with those in other large U.S. cities—cities with populations of at least 1 million—New

York City households gave the most money to charity: \$251.

Boston

In 1950, 3.8 percent of Americans (4.7 million people) lived in Massachusetts, an increase from the 1930 census, with 17.0 percent of these residents (800,000 people) residing in Boston, a decrease from 1930.

Boston contained 220,000 households with an average family size of 3.1—slightly larger than that for New York City. Demographically, 65.3 percent of Boston residents were adults, 22.2 percent were aged 15 or younger (a significantly higher percentage than recorded for New York City), and 9.7 percent were aged 65 or older (also a higher proportion than in New York City). The median age in Boston was 32.6, younger than in New York City,

but older than in the country as a whole. The male-to-female ratio was 93.9 men for every 100 women, and 94.7 percent of residents were white. (See chart 15.) Only 18.0 percent of people were foreign born, and 8.6 percent of married couples lived with their parents.

In terms of education, 86.0 percent of children aged 14 to 17 attended school, and the median number of school years completed in Boston was 11.0 (higher than in New York City). Additionally, only 8.6 percent of the population had less than 5 years of schooling.

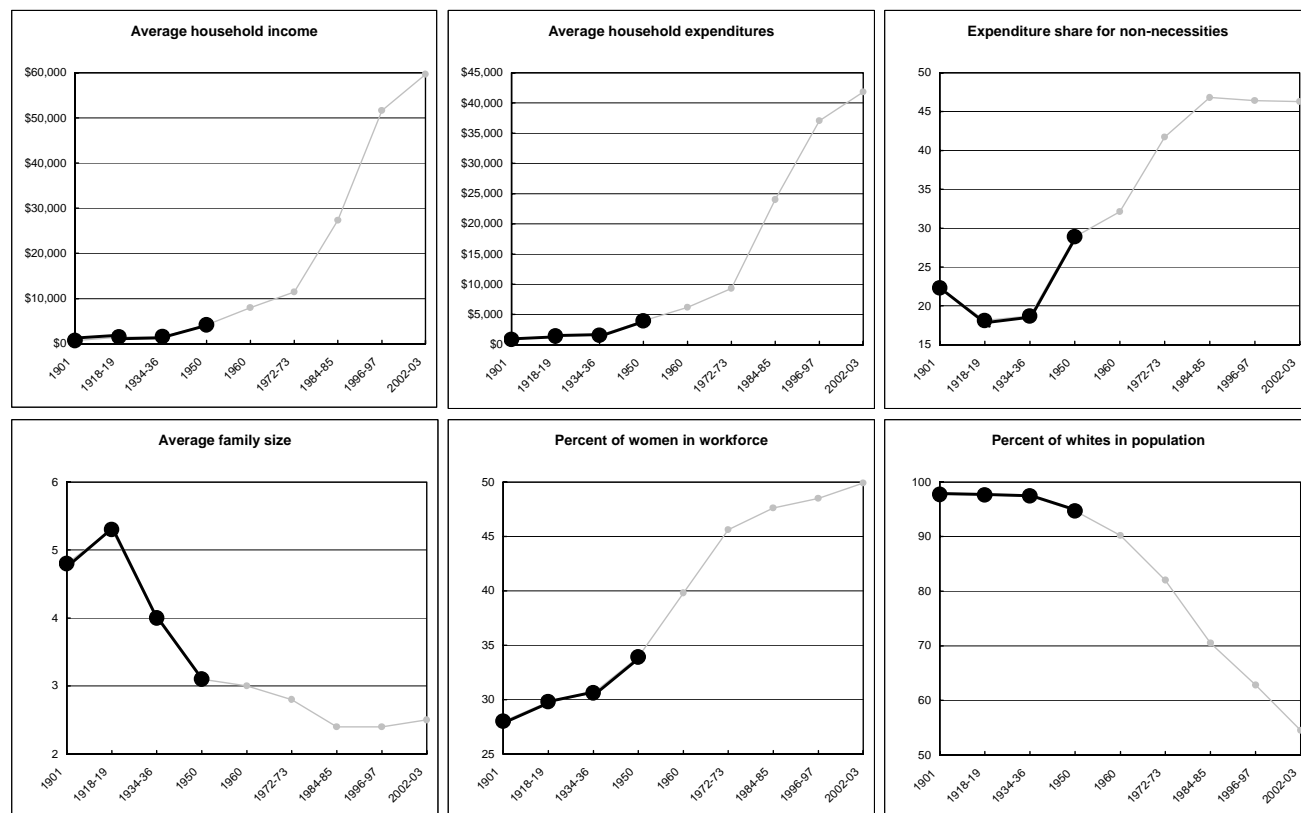
Boston's overall unemployment rate (7.4 percent of those aged 15 and older) was slightly higher than New York City's. The rate for men was 8.8 percent, and for women, 4.8 percent. Nearly half (49.2 percent) of Bostonians were employed. Men made up 66.1 percent of the Boston workforce. Of resi-

dents not seeking employment, 44.9 percent were homemakers, a significantly lower proportion than in New York City. In Boston, 78.6 percent of residents worked in the private sector, 13.9 percent worked for government, and 7.4 percent were self-employed.

Almost half of all Boston jobs were in retail or wholesale trade and in manufacturing (24.3 percent and 23.7 percent, respectively). An additional 35 percent were in the following industries: Professional and related services (11.2 percent); transportation, communication, and utilities (10.0 percent); public administration (7.4 percent); and personal services (6.9 percent). Construction accounted for an additional 5.1 percent of jobs.

As in New York City, the two biggest occupational groups were equipment operators (19.6 percent) and clerical workers (19.4 percent). Additional

Chart 15. Economic and demographic indicators, Boston, 1950



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

occupational groupings included craftsmen (13.5 percent); service workers (12.8 percent); professionals and technicians (10.4 percent); sales workers (8.4 percent); managers, officials, or proprietors (7.6 percent); and laborers (5.7 percent).

In Boston, average family income had increased 166.1 percent to \$4,178, but was still 1.4 percent less than the income of the average U.S. household. Moreover, 51.2 percent of Boston households earned less than \$3,000.

Average household expenditures had increased 151.3 percent to \$3,946, 3.6 percent higher than those for the average U.S. family. This amount would have purchased \$2,368 worth of goods and services in 1935 dollars.

The average Boston family allocated 73.1 percent of spending for food, clothing, and housing. This was slightly less than in New York City. The single largest category of spending was food (32.9 percent), followed by housing (29.1 percent) and clothing (11.1 percent).

In the allocation for clothing, 52.0 percent (equal to the New York City share) was for women's and girls' cloth-

ing, 34.2 percent (also equal to New York City's share) was for men's and boys' clothing, 1.6 percent (more than in New York City) was for infants' clothing, and the remainder was allocated for clothing materials and services.

Twenty-six percent of Boston families owned their own home, and 42 percent owned an automobile. The purchase and maintenance of an automobile accounted for 7.6 percent of household spending.

Perspective

Halfway through the 20th century, the U.S. economy was expanding. Household income had increased 178 percent since 1934–36 and was nearly six times greater than in 1901. In the country as a whole, and in New York City and Boston, overall standards of living continued to improve.

Nationwide, average hourly wages in manufacturing had risen from 58 cents an hour in 1935 to \$1.59 in 1950. Women continued to join the labor force, and their participation rate had increased to 34 percent. Retail prices, however, also had risen sharply since

1935: the cost of a pound of butter had risen from 32 cents to 73 cents, and a pound of round steak had increased from 28 cents to 94 cents.

Family size had continued to decline nationally and in New York City and Boston to an average of about three people per family.

Household expenditures for necessities had declined to 68 percent nationally. In New York City and Boston, however, food, housing, and clothing still accounted for almost 75 percent of total household spending (although this share was down from 80 percent in 1934). In both regions, food remained the largest expenditure category, with a share of approximately 33 percent. Housing was next, with a share of roughly 29 percent, followed by clothing, which averaged 12 percent. (See table 14 and chart 16.)

Nationally, home ownership had increased, with 48 percent of all families owning their own home. Home ownership lagged considerably, however, in New York City—where only 18 percent of families owned their home—and in Boston—where 26 percent were homeowners.

Table 14. Expenditures and expenditure shares, United States, New York City, and Boston, 1950

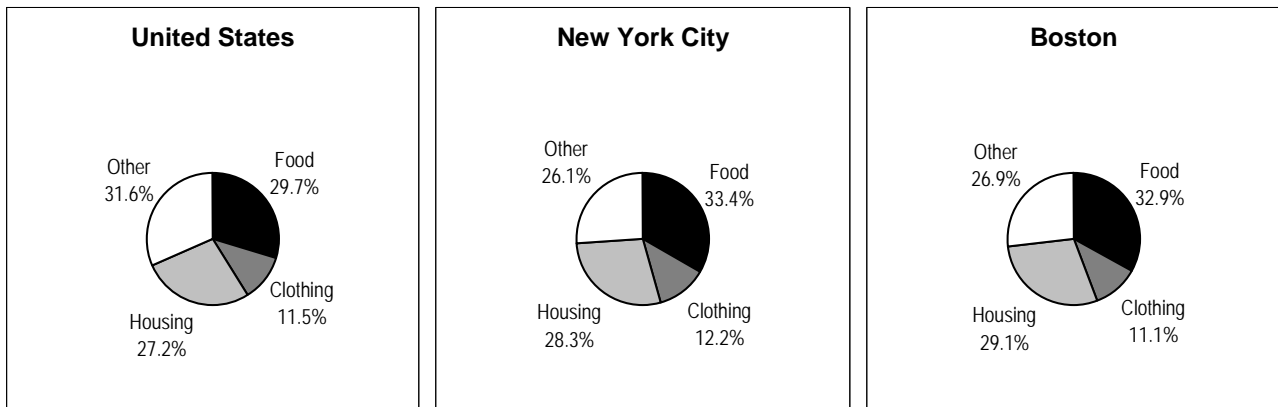
Item	United States		New York City		Boston	
	Expenditures	Shares	Expenditures	Shares	Expenditures	Shares
Food	\$ 1,130	29.7	\$ 1,527	33.4	\$ 1,300	32.9
Alcoholic beverages	65	1.7	(¹)	(¹)	(¹)	(¹)
Housing	1,035	27.2	1,296	28.3	1,147	29.1
Apparel and services	437	11.5	560	12.2	439	11.1
Transportation	510	13.4	377	8.2	395	10.0
Healthcare	197	5.2	264	5.8	180	4.6
Entertainment	168	4.4	223	4.9	184	4.7
Personal care products and services	85	2.2	94	2.1	90	2.3
Reading and education	58	1.5	89	1.9	67	1.7
Tobacco	68	1.8	76	1.7	90	2.3
Miscellaneous	55	1.4	68	1.5	55	1.4
Cash contributions	165		253		195	
Personal insurance	177		195		160	
Average income per family	4,237		5,105		4,178	
Expenditures, all items	3,808		4,574		3,946	

(¹) Alcoholic beverages are included in food for both New York City and Boston.

NOTE: Itemized expenditures are not all-inclusive and may differ from total expenditures. Cash contributions and personal insurance are not included in expenditure shares.

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

Chart 16. Expenditure shares, United States, New York City, and Boston, 1950



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

Similarly, with widely available public transportation in both cities, 39 percent of New Yorkers owned an automobile, as did 42 percent of Bostonians. Nationwide, 59 percent of households

owned an auto. Buying and operating a car accounted for 6 percent of household spending in New York City and about 8 percent in Boston.

New York City families allocated

higher proportions of their spending for healthcare, recreation, and reading and education than did Boston families, who allocated a larger share for personal care. ■