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INTER-CITY DIFFERENCES IN THE COST
OF LIVING

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RESEARCH BULLETIN

INTER-CITY DIFFERENCES IN THE COST OF LIVING

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Preface

The present bulletin provides a preliminary summary of the most important findings of the survey of living costs conducted in 1935 in 59 cities. It is contemplated that a full report on the study will be released later in the year presenting both the detailed budget upon which the survey was based, the summarized price data, and the aggregate costs resulting. The widespread demand for information on inter-city differences in living costs made the preliminary release of the data in this bulletin seem advisable. The aggregate costs in terms of dollars are not to be issued prior to the publication of the final report since they cannot be properly interpreted without a detailed statement upon the underlying analysis.

INTER-CITY DIFFERENCES IN THE COST OF LIVING

Preliminary figures showing the relative cost of living in 59 cities in the United States are presented in this bulletin. These costs are expressed as percentages of the cost in Washington, D. C. They relate to the requirements of the four-person family of an industrial, service or other manual worker of small means, based on the maintenance of a specified standard of living. Thus, the study is an analysis of the cost of a fixed list of goods and services required at this standard, rather than an investigation of family consumption and expenditures.

In order that all costs might be as nearly as possible on a comparable basis, an itemized budget of family needs was constructed and priced in each of the 59 cities. Certain adjustments were made in the fuel, ice and transportation lists, to take account of climatic and other purely local conditions, but except for these and a few differences in standards which could not be eliminated through use of specifications for the commodities and services priced, the resulting cost relatives are based on reasonably comparable qualities and quantities of the necessities in each city.

The standard family whose cost of living is portrayed consists of a moderately active man and woman, a boy age 13, and a girl age 8.¹ The man wears overalls at his work; no household assistance of any kind is employed; social opportunities are simple. This family's food is an adequate diet at minimum cost. They live in a house or apartment with water and sewer

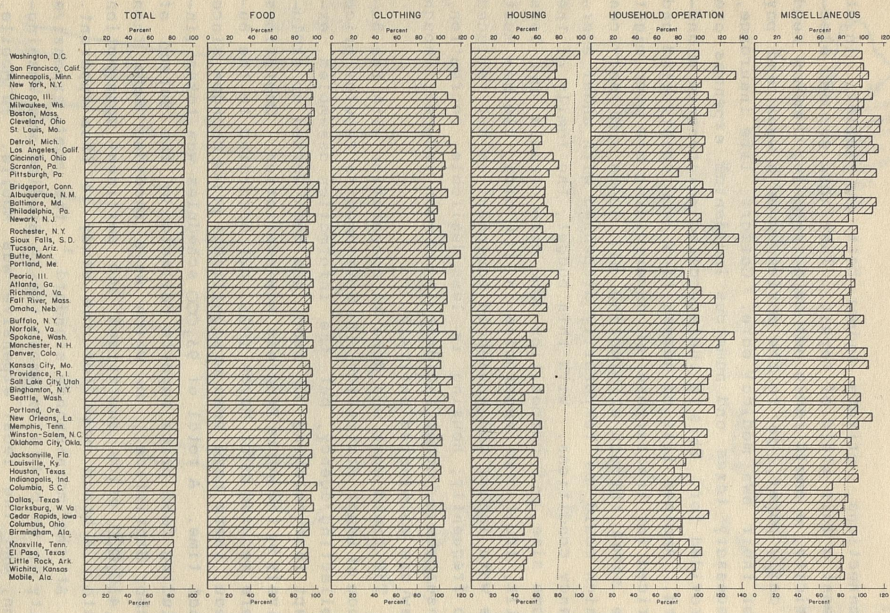
¹ Goods and services were priced for children of both sexes between the ages of 2 and 15, inclusive; these prices will be worked up later to provide cost estimates for families of any size and composition within the ages specified.

connections, private indoor bath and toilet, in at least a fair state of repair. They have gas and electricity, a small radio but no automobile; they may read a daily paper, go to the movies once a week and pay for their own medical care. Carfare, life insurance, necessary taxes and numerous incidental expenses are provided for. This is the so-called maintenance standard. Another list of necessities was constructed and priced for the purpose of ascertaining how much might be saved through eliminating all goods and services which could be temporarily dispensed with under emergency conditions. With this budget, the family of the same size and composition has more cereals and less milk, fruit and vegetables in its diet; clothes must be worn longer and household equipment is not replaced so frequently; housing is less desirable; recreation, insurance and other incidentals are much reduced, though few are eliminated entirely.

The field work was done in cooperation with the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Government's regular price collecting agency, but the information assembled, except that relating to food, has been worked up exclusively by the Works Progress Administration. Quotations were secured as of March 1935, but according to the Bureau, there have been no significant price changes since that time. A total of 93,000 schedules was taken (including food price reports collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics), on which were recorded more than 1,430,000 price quotations and pertinent consumption data. A broad base for the study is thus apparent.

At the maintenance standard,¹ the most expensive city in which to live among the 59 studied was Washington, and the least expensive was Mobile. In Mobile, the cost of all the essentials of life was relatively low, while in Washington, rents and the cost of food and miscellaneous items accounted for the high total cost.

¹ At the emergency standard a few shifts in rank occur, as can be seen by reference to Table II. These are not important, however, in most instances.



NOTE: The dotted line represents the cost of living in Washington, D.C. The vertical line indicates the cost of living in Washington, D.C. as a percentage of the cost of living in Washington, D.C.

COST OF LIVING IN 59 CITIES, 1935, EXPRESSED AS PERCENTAGES OF THE COST OF LIVING IN WASHINGTON, D.C. (MAINTENANCE STANDARD)

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As a matter of fact, only in rents was Washington at the top of the list. Food costs were highest in Bridgeport; clothing costs, in Butte; household operation costs, in Sioux Falls; and miscellaneous costs, in Cleveland. Rents were lowest in Portland, Ore., food costs, in Cedar Rapids; clothing costs, in Dallas; household operation costs, in Houston; and miscellaneous costs in Sioux Falls.

The figures indicate that, with a content of living held reasonably constant, inter-city differences in the cost of a balanced list of goods and services are not great. Among the 59 cities studied, the lowest-cost city was only a little more than 20 percent below the highest. A sales or similar consumer's tax was levied in 19 of the 59 cities. This varied from 3 percent on a large part of the budget, including certain services, in Louisville, to 1 cent on motion picture admissions in New Orleans. Elimination of the sales tax, making the comparison exclusively on a price basis, would change the rank of the cities only slightly.

Lowest food costs averaged about 14 percent less than highest food costs, and the difference in clothing costs was only 24 percent. The difference between the highest and lowest rents, on the other hand, was approximately 54 percent; costs of household operation, 44 percent and miscellaneous costs, 39 percent.

The most important causal factors in this spread of living costs, therefore, are seen to be connected with the purely local circumstances affecting housing, household operation and miscellaneous needs. These differences, in turn, are least susceptible of accurate quantitative measurement. The type of house in which people live at comparable standards is by no means identical from city to city; the kind of fuel available and the quantity required for home heating in various sections differ widely. The difficulty of standardizing medical services and of allowing for a variety of transportation needs complicates the problem. Nevertheless, the relatives show better than any hitherto collected information inter-city differences in the cost of maintaining the standard of living described.

TABLE I
COST OF LIVING IN 59 CITIES, 1935,
EXPRESSED AS PERCENTAGES OF THE COST OF LIVING
IN WASHINGTON, D.C.^a

MAINTENANCE STANDARD

City	MAJOR ITEMS OF FAMILY EXPENDITURE					
	Total	Food	Clothing ^b	Housing ^c	Household operation ^d	Miscellaneous ^e
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Washington, D. C.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
San Francisco, Calif. ^a	98.0	96.3	116.4	78.9	118.3	101.6
Minneapolis, Minn.	97.8	91.6	110.7	77.2	134.1	105.9
New York, N.Y. ^a	97.0	100.1	96.8	87.7	102.6	100.0
Chicago, Ill. ^a	95.6	97.1	107.9	70.2	109.0	109.6
Milwaukee, Wis.	95.6	90.2	115.0	78.9	116.2	101.7
Boston, Mass.	95.3	98.3	105.5	77.2	108.1	98.8
Cleveland, Ohio ^a	95.1	93.3	117.7	68.4	93.9	117.5
St. Louis, Mo.	94.3	94.1	100.2	78.9	83.8	116.3
Detroit, Mich. ^a	92.8	93.2	109.1	64.9	106.0	109.2
Los Angeles, Calif. ^a	92.5	92.8	115.1	57.9	103.6	114.8
Cincinnati, Ohio ^a	92.4	94.2	103.4	75.1	91.4	104.3
Scranton, Pa.	92.1	94.0	105.2	80.7	93.9	93.6
Pittsburg, Pa.	92.0	93.9	102.8	71.9	81.0	113.3
Bridgeport, Conn.	91.7	102.3	101.2	68.4	104.0	89.3
Albuquerque, N.M. ^a	91.6	101.8	107.5	67.9	113.4	80.9
Baltimore, Md.	91.6	94.9	95.0	66.7	94.1	113.5
Philadelphia, Pa.	91.4	93.9	98.0	70.2	91.0	109.6
Newark, N.J.	91.2	99.5	94.9	75.4	102.3	87.7
Rochester, N.Y.	90.6	92.8	101.0	65.8	119.2	95.4
Sioux Falls, S.D.	90.6	88.7	106.4	79.3	136.5	71.8
Tucson, Ariz. ^a	90.6	97.2	105.4	64.9	118.3	86.0
Butte, Mont.	90.4	94.0	119.7	61.4	122.3	83.6
Portland, Me.	90.3	94.5	112.7	59.6	121.8	89.1
Peoria, Ill. ^a	89.7	94.2	105.6	80.2	86.1	85.5
Atlanta, Ga.	89.4	97.1	94.5	71.9	91.0	93.7
Richmond, Va.	89.3	93.8	106.6	69.0	101.6	88.7
Fall River, Mass.	89.2	95.3	106.8	64.9	115.1	82.9
Omaha, Neb.	88.9	93.1	102.9	69.6	99.4	90.9
Buffalo, N.Y.	88.9	92.7	103.2	61.4	99.8	101.4
Norfolk, Va.	88.6	95.7	97.9	69.6	98.6	88.4
Spokane, Wash.	88.1	89.7	115.5	50.9	132.7	88.9
Manchester, N.H.	87.9	97.3	101.4	54.4	118.5	87.9
Denver, Colo. ^a	87.8	91.3	101.8	59.6	93.8	104.8

TABLE 1 (Continued)

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City	MAJOR ITEMS OF FAMILY EXPENDITURE					
	Total	Food	Clothing ^b	Housing ^c	Household operation ^d	Miscellaneous ^e
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Kansas City, Mo.	87.7	94.1	101.0	57.9	87.0	105.8
Providence, R.I.	87.6	96.5	95.3	63.2	111.2	84.8
Salt Lake City, Utah ^a	87.6	90.7	111.4	57.0	108.8	92.9
Binghamton, N.Y.	87.2	93.9	100.6	66.7	102.0	84.3
Seattle, Wash.	86.9	92.8	107.8	49.1	108.6	98.4
Portland, Ore.	86.6	91.4	113.7	46.3	114.5	95.8
New Orleans, La. ^a	86.6	90.7	96.4	57.9	86.7	109.4
Memphis, Tenn.	86.0	90.8	96.8	64.9	86.9	96.5
Winston-Salem, N.C. ^a	86.0	95.5	100.0	61.1	107.4	79.3
Oklahoma City, Okla. ^a	85.9	93.1	102.2	60.0	95.8	89.9
Jacksonville, Fla.	85.6	96.1	96.5	57.9	101.3	86.5
Louisville, Ky. ^a	85.5	93.1	99.8	61.3	87.7	92.1
Houston, Texas	84.8	90.7	101.1	61.4	77.0	97.6
Indianapolis, Ind.	84.4	88.1	99.0	58.8	92.2	96.1
Columbia, S.C.	83.9	100.7	93.1	57.9	99.9	72.4
Dallas, Texas	83.8	95.0	90.4	63.0	83.5	86.5
Clarksburg, W. Va. ^a	83.7	97.4	103.1	56.1	83.3	82.2
Cedar Rapids, Iowa ^a	83.5	87.7	104.9	58.9	109.9	78.2
Columbus, Ohio ^a	83.0	93.2	103.8	56.1	84.4	84.4
Birmingham, Ala.	82.2	93.6	95.3	48.8	84.4	94.7
Knoxville, Tenn.	82.1	88.7	95.8	60.2	90.9	84.3
El Paso, Texas	81.0	92.5	93.6	56.1	102.8	71.9
Little Rock, Ark.	80.1	93.0	96.3	50.9	82.5	82.6
Wichita, Kansas	79.6	89.6	97.3	48.2	96.5	80.8
Mobile, Ala.	79.4	90.8	91.8	47.8	93.6	83.5

a Sales or similar consumer's tax included where levied.

b Includes clothing, clothing upkeep and personal care.

c Includes rent and water.

d Includes coal or wood, gas, electricity, ice, household supplies, etc., refuse disposal, furniture, furnishings and equipment. In those cities where water is a direct charge on the tenant, this cost has been added to the rent.

e Includes medical care, transportation, recreation, school attendance, church and other contributions, life insurance and personal taxes.

TABLE II
 COST OF LIVING IN 59 CITIES, 1935,
 EXPRESSED AS PERCENTAGES OF THE COST OF LIVING
 IN WASHINGTON, D.C.^a

City	EMERGENCY STANDARD					
	MAJOR ITEMS OF FAMILY EXPENDITURE					
	Total	Food	Clothing ^b	Housing ^c	Household Operation ^d	Miscel- laneous ^e
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Washington, D. C.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Minneapolis, Minn.	99.7	93.8	112.3	76.7	139.0	110.3
San Francisco, Calif. ^a	98.3	98.7	116.5	79.1	118.7	98.7
New York, N.Y. ^a	96.5	100.6	96.8	86.0	102.9	99.2
Milwaukee, Wis.	95.6	91.0	113.9	79.1	117.7	101.7
Chicago, Ill. ^a	95.5	97.8	108.0	69.8	109.8	111.7
Cleveland, Ohio ^a	94.8	94.6	116.7	68.6	92.8	122.5
Boston, Mass.	94.1	97.9	105.7	76.7	107.6	94.6
St. Louis, Mo.	93.9	94.7	100.3	79.1	82.1	120.2
Albuquerque, N.M. ^a	93.3	105.6	108.6	70.2	114.1	75.2
Detroit, Mich. ^a	92.7	93.0	109.2	65.1	107.4	112.8
Los Angeles, Calif. ^a	92.3	94.2	114.7	57.0	103.5	119.8
Sioux Falls, S.D.	92.1	92.3	107.3	79.5	140.6	63.2
Cincinnati, Ohio ^a	91.8	95.1	103.4	75.1	89.8	104.1
Butte, Mont.	91.6	97.2	121.3	64.0	122.8	77.0
Portland, Me.	91.2	96.2	114.0	60.5	125.2	86.1
Scranton, Pa.	91.1	95.7	103.9	80.2	91.2	88.7
Pittsburgh, Pa.	91.0	94.3	102.8	70.9	79.0	115.9
Baltimore, Md.	91.0	95.5	94.4	67.4	92.4	115.4
Bridgeport, Conn.	90.9	101.8	101.0	67.4	104.6	86.6
Rochester, N.Y.	90.8	93.2	102.2	65.1	122.0	94.4
Philadelphia, Pa.	90.8	95.5	98.0	69.8	89.5	109.5
Tucson, Ariz. ^a	90.3	100.0	105.6	64.0	117.4	79.0
Newark, N.J.	89.9	99.8	95.0	74.4	101.2	80.2
Spokane, Wash.	89.8	93.8	115.5	51.2	136.1	88.3
Omaha, Neb.	89.7	95.2	104.0	70.2	99.8	89.9
Peoria, Ill. ^a	89.7	95.8	106.2	80.7	83.7	82.0
Atlanta, Ga.	89.6	97.3	93.9	73.3	91.0	94.3
Richmond, Va.	89.4	94.7	106.2	70.5	101.2	86.0
Buffalo, N.Y.	88.6	93.3	103.8	60.5	98.9	103.8
Kansas City, Mo.	88.3	94.9	101.0	58.1	85.4	114.9
Fall River, Mass.	88.2	94.5	106.1	65.1	113.9	78.0
Norfolk, Va.	88.2	95.8	98.3	69.0	99.0	86.1
Salt Lake City, Utah ^a	87.5	93.0	113.5	55.8	107.1	91.2

TABLE 11 (Continued)

City	MAJOR ITEMS OF FAMILY EXPENDITURE					
	Total	Food	Clothing ^b	Housing ^c	Household Operation ^d	Miscellaneous ^e
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Manchester, N.H.	87.3	97.6	102.8	53.5	119.3	82.9
Seattle, Wash.	87.2	95.2	107.6	48.8	109.6	98.5
Portland, Ore.	87.2	93.8	115.5	46.3	112.5	97.1
Denver, Colo. ^a	87.0	92.7	102.7	58.1	91.9	105.0
Providence, R.I.	86.8	95.5	94.7	62.8	111.7	81.4
New Orleans, La. ^a	86.7	92.8	96.9	57.0	85.4	114.0
Binghamton, N.Y.	86.2	94.1	100.5	66.3	103.0	77.0
Memphis, Tenn.	86.1	93.2	95.9	65.1	85.9	96.9
Oklahoma City, Okla. ^a	86.1	95.7	102.8	60.9	96.1	84.6
Winston-Salem, N.C. ^a	85.7	95.8	100.0	61.2	108.5	74.3
Jacksonville, Fla.	85.3	96.6	97.2	58.1	101.8	81.9
Louisville, Ky. ^a	85.0	94.7	99.7	62.7	85.5	87.7
Houston, Texas	84.8	92.1	101.5	61.6	76.0	99.9
Indianapolis, Ind.	84.3	89.5	98.9	60.5	90.7	95.5
Clarksburg, W. Va. ^a	84.0	99.6	102.8	58.1	79.9	79.5
Dallas, Texas	83.9	96.1	91.1	63.7	82.8	84.2
Cedar Rapids, Iowa ^a	83.4	89.2	105.2	59.5	110.3	71.5
Columbia, S.C.	82.9	100.9	92.1	58.1	99.5	63.1
Knoxville, Tenn.	82.9	91.5	96.1	61.2	91.9	81.6
Columbus, Ohio ^a	82.5	95.5	102.9	55.8	81.4	81.7
Birmingham, Ala.	82.1	94.4	95.7	49.6	84.0	94.8
El Paso, Texas	81.4	95.3	94.6	58.1	102.3	62.0
Little Rock, Ark.	80.5	95.3	96.8	52.3	81.5	79.4
Mobile, Ala.	80.0	92.6	91.2	49.4	94.1	82.0
Wichita, Kansas	79.4	90.5	98.6	47.7	96.7	78.0

a Sales or similar consumer's tax included where levied.

b Includes clothing, clothing up-keep and personal care.

c Includes rent and water.

d Includes coal or wood, gas, electricity, ice, household supplies, etc., refuse disposal, furniture, furnishings and equipment. In those cities where water is a direct charge on the tenant, this cost has been added to the rent.

e Includes medical care, transportation, recreation, school attendance, church and other contributions, life insurance and personal taxes.

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