

times change

A Few of the Differences Between Life in 1950 and 2000

	1950	2000
On the Road		
Registered passenger cars in U.S.	40,339,000	133,621,000
Cars per 1,000 people	265.6	473.6
Miles of interstate highway ¹	0	46,677

¹America's first long-distance superhighway, the Pennsylvania Turnpike (originally 160 miles), opened in 1940, 16 years before Congress created the Interstate Highway System. Before that, the only multi-lane, limited access highways in the U.S. were the Henry Hudson Parkway (11 miles) and the Bronx River Parkway (25 miles) in New York, the Merritt Parkway in Connecticut (37.5 miles), and Arroyo Seco Parkway in Los Angeles (9.5 miles).

At Home

Rate of homeownership (percent)	55	66
% U.S. households with a television	9	98.2
% U.S. households with a telephone	61.8	94.6
% U.S. households with central heat	50	94.3
% U.S. households with air conditioning	<1	74.6

On the Job

% of workforce in manufacturing	34.0	14.0
Union membership		
% of private sector workers	31.6	13.5
% of all workers	34.6	9.0

Getting and Spending (see Glossary)

GDP per capita (in 2000 dollars)	\$11,179	\$34,759
Disposable personal income*	\$7,863	\$25,472
Personal consumption expenditures*	\$7,192	\$23,862
Personal consumption - durable goods*	\$554	\$3,057
Personal consumption - nondurable goods*	\$3,075	\$6,895
Personal consumption - services*	\$3,356	\$13,911

*per capita in 2000 dollars.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics

*Home computers?
Cell phones?
iPods?
The Internet?*

*Forget about it!
They didn't exist
in 1950.*

Getting and Spending Glossary

GDP per capita – “Average real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita” is the generally accepted measure for standard of living. It tells us how big each person's share would be if we were to divide total GDP equally among all citizens. The assumption is that if real GDP per capita is growing, there's a strong likelihood that more goods and services are available to us, and we're in a better position to buy them.

Disposable income – Wages or salary you have available for spending or saving after paying your taxes

Personal consumption expenditures – A broad category that includes products and services intended primarily for individual use or consumption—things like restaurant meals, rent, movie tickets, and personal care products

Durable goods – Things that aren't consumed quickly and can be expected to last at least three years—things like cars, refrigerators, and couches

Nondurable goods – Things you buy often and use fairly quickly—things like food, clothing, and cosmetics

Services – Things like landscaping, day care, and health care