VOLUME I | ISSUE I MAY 2026

LEADING PERSPECTIVES
FOR BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

The
Meridian
FINANCIAL REVIEW

WHO'S AFRAID OF *SAM* ALTMAN?

OpenAI's CEO and the future of business, at the center of the most consequential technology shift of the century.

BY J. BENJAMIN LOUIS PAGE 02

ALSO INSIDE

COVER STORY · TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Who's Afraid of Sam Altman?

• J. BENJAMIN LOUIS '27 • REGIS HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

> "
> *AI will not just automate research, it will reshape how every industry makes decisions and delivers products and services.*
> J. BENJAMIN LOUIS '27

In 8th grade, I took a religion class. The class was very straightforward, and because there were often no notes to take, you could find my classmates and I playing games on our Chromebooks or staring at the Google Classroom dashboard for hours on end. Still, there was one part of the class that everybody dreaded: our religion papers. Every two months, we would all be forced to write papers on a topic assigned by the teacher, in a class that prioritized lectures that few people listened to.

Many months into the school year, and a few days before one of those papers was due, I asked a friend of mine if he had completed his, knowing that he never began his papers until the night before. Imagine my surprise when he told me that his entire paper had already been completed. I took a look, and lo and behold, the paper had proper grammar, punctuation, and a style of writing that astounded me with its professionalism.

When I asked him his secret, he soon told me that "there's this thing out there... it can literally write entire papers for you in a second!" I had to see for myself. As soon as I got home, I searched "chatbot" into my Google search bar, and was introduced to a trove of information I would never otherwise be able to fully discover in a lifetime.

SAM ALTMAN · OPENAI CEO & CO-FOUNDER OF CHATGPT

From the meaning of life, to the importance of religion in one's childhood, to "who invented homework," this engine seemed to have an answer for every question I asked it. After a long and thorough conversation, my mind began to wander, and I thought: What is ChatGPT, who created it, and why?

ChatGPT is an AI tool created by OpenAI that generates human-like text, by predicting the most likely next words based on patterns learned from massive amounts of data. Launched publicly in November 2022, "chat" can write essays, emails, code, and reports, summarize long documents, translate languages, explain concepts, and generate ideas based on previous man-made data.

The co-founder of OpenAI, Sam Altman, founded the company and helped create ChatGPT to position himself at the center of what he believes will be the most important technology shift of the century: humanity's shift towards artificial intelligence.

Sam's vision for artificial intelligence is contradictory for good reason: he believes that AI will one day achieve AGI (artificial general intelligence), or human-level intelligence across tasks, and therefore seeks to both accelerate the development of AI, while managing artificial intelligence's existential risk to the rest of human society.

Sam sees AI in the same way he sees the internet or electricity, as a productivity multiplier, except that this productivity multiplier could reshape how every industry makes decisions and delivers products and services. Sam advocates for governments across the world to create a system of regulations for advanced AI.

The impact of Sam Altman and OpenAI's new artificial intelligence systems will surely first be felt in the world of business. I see AI as affecting the future of business in five key ways. First, AI will automate research, not just manual labor. Tasks once handled by analysts, customer service agents, and junior employees can now be completed faster and more cheaply by AI. Second, AI will drive companies to have higher margins. Companies that adopt the software aggressively will cut costs at an unprecedented rate and likely scale faster.

Third, AI will create entirely new business models. AI-using companies can operate with smaller teams and rely on automation, while also delivering more personalized products and services at scale. Fourth, data and distribution will become the main sources of company advancement. Finally, I see AI as a tool which could reorder entire industries. Sectors like healthcare, finance, and manufacturing will be rebuilt around faster, data-driven decision making.

It is important to note that Sam Altman's beliefs regarding the access and spread of artificial intelligence are not the only ones in the industry. In fact, Anthropic (OpenAI's competitor) prioritizes building AI that is tightly regulated, interpretable, and prioritizing the safety of humans, even at the cost of the speed of AI development, while OpenAI focuses on deploying well developed, widely accessible AI at a rapid pace. This raises two possible pathways for AI development: one in which companies slow deployment to prioritize strict safety and control, and another in which they push rapid innovation and mass adoption while managing risks along the way.

A PRODUCTIVITY MULTIPLIER

> *"Healthcare, finance, and manufacturing will be rebuilt around faster, data-driven decision making."*

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND ECONOMICS

Economics in the Prison Industrial Complex

• AIDEN PARK '27 • REGIS HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

The American prison system, a magnificently large and complicated system, houses more than 1.2 million inmates between federal and state prisons. In the years following Reagan's tough-on-crime attitude, a new sector of the corrections industry emerged: private prisons. According to the New York Times, corporations such as GEO Group and CoreCivic are major players in the $4 billion industry. The way these corporations make money is a fascinating question of penny pinching and government funding.

For this article, we will focus on the GEO Group, the largest private prison corporation with a market cap of $2.26 billion. As of 2022, 9% of the 1.2 million inmates, around 91,000, are housed in private facilities, not run by the government. According to The GEO Group, it operates 51 facilities in the US with a total of 62,000 beds. Of these 62,000 beds, 26,000 are utilized by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

// THE BIDEN ERA COLLAPSE

Believe it or not, private detention facilities were on the brink of collapse just over a year ago. Joe Biden famously issued an executive order telling the Bureau of Prisons and the U.S. Marshals Service to end the use of for-profit detention facilities. The GEO group's stock prices plummeted from a high of $33 during Trump's first term to $5 after Biden's executive order. Stock prices began to stabilize as the U.S. Marshal did not fully comply with Biden's order, instead using loopholes to circumvent it. One important note is that for-profit immigration detention facilities were not banned under Biden's order, keeping GEO Group from going completely under.

// THE TRUMP REVIVAL

There was light at the end of the tunnel, the 2024 Presidential Election. On October 21st, GEO stock sat at $15. On November 11th, after Trump won a second term, it soared to $27. By mid 2025, GEO Group was contracted to house ICE detainees at four facilities with a capacity of 6,000, staving off an extinction-level event.

// GEO GROUP THRIVES

In fact, GEO Group thrived. It brought in over $2.6 billion in revenue for FY2025, with over $250 million in income over the same period. Some practices the GEO group uses to reduce costs include using prison labor to run the prisons, while paying inmates 50 cents per day for an entire day's work. This is estimated to help the company save millions of dollars on hiring external labor.

At a GEO Group-run ICE detention facility in Aurora, Colorado, immigrants were paid $1 a day for "voluntary work programs," and if they refused to work, they would be punished. Using these tactics, the facility was paying only $1,680 per month for labor that would have cost $125,000 if outside labor had been used.

AURORA, CO: LABOR COST COMPARISON

Actual monthly cost using inmate labor	**$1,680**
Market-rate monthly cost with external labor	**$125K**

// LITIGATION AND OUTLOOK

GEO Group's conduct has led to litigation and fines. In Washington state, a judge ruled that GEO Group did not comply with the state's minimum wage law by paying workers only $1 per day. GEO Group was ordered to pay $17.1 million in back pay.

Today, GEO Group's stock is at $17, about $10 below the peak reached when Trump's victory was announced. While the new administration has created new contracts and opportunities for GEO Group, unnecessary negative press has emerged at the same time, preventing explosive growth. With Apis Capital Advisors, LLC pulling the plug on its $17.6 million investment, it signals a fundamental issue with GEO Group and its business practices.

KEY FIGURES

$2.26B
GEO MARKET CAP

26K
ICE BEDS OPERATED

91K
IN PRIVATE FACILITIES

$0.50/day
INMATE WAGE RATE

FY2025 FINANCIALS

REVENUE	$2.6B
NET INCOME	$250M
STOCK PEAK	$27
STOCK NOW	$17

WA: $17.1M back-pay ruling

SPORTS AND GLOBAL FINANCE

Saudi Arabia's Soccer Spending Spree

• MATEO GIRAND '27 • KENT HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

Over the last few years, Saudi Arabia has quickly transformed itself into one of the most impactful epicenters of global soccer, not through tradition or cultural development, but through an unprecedented wave of financial investment. Backed by the country's Public Investment Fund (PIF), Saudi clubs have spent billions of dollars to attract some of the world's most recognizable players, such as Cristiano Ronaldo, reshaping the sport's landscape while sparking debate about its future.

// VISION 2030

The purpose of this transformation is in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative. The focus of this vision is to create a national strategy to diversify the economy beyond oil. Sports, and particularly soccer, have become an important foundation of this vision. By investing heavily in the Saudi Pro League, the government seeks to achieve three fundamental goals: increase global visibility, boost tourism, and position the country as a major hub for international soccer viewership. Soccer offers a unique opportunity to achieve these goals due to its global reach, impact, and cultural significance.

// THE 2023 TURNING POINT

The main turning point came in 2023, when global superstar Cristiano Ronaldo signed with Al-Nassr in a deal reportedly worth over $200 million per year. His move announced to the football world that Saudi Arabia was serious about competing with Europe's top leagues. Soon after, a wave of high-profile players from Europe followed, including Karim Benzema, Neymar Jr., and N'Golo Kanté. These signings were therefore not just about improving the quality of play the country has to offer; they were strategic moves designed to bring attention, credibility, and commercial value to the league.

// FINANCIAL SCALE

From a financial standpoint, the scale of spending has been uncertain. Transfer fees, wages, and commercial incentives offered by Saudi clubs more often than not exceed what top European clubs are willing to pay. This trend has disrupted the transfer market, which forces clubs across Europe to reconsider their financial strategies.

// CONTROVERSY AND SPORTSWASHING

However, Saudi Arabia's spending spree has not been without controversy. Critics argue that Saudi Arabia is engaging in "sportswashing," which uses high-profile sporting investments to improve the quality of its international image and shift from human rights concerns. Others question the long-term sustainability of such heavy spending. There are also concerns about the impact on competitive balance in global soccer, since wealth increasingly dictates players' movement.

// REAL EFFECTS EMERGING

Despite these criticisms, there are signs that Saudi Arabia's investment is beginning to have real effects. The quality of the Saudi Pro League has improved, international viewership has increased, and sponsorship deals have grown drastically. Additionally, the country's successful bid to host major sporting events, including the potential hosting of a future FIFA World Cup, suggests that its strategy is gaining traction on the global stage.

// LONG-TERM LEGITIMACY

Furthermore, the key question is whether Saudi Arabia can convert short-term financial power into long-term legitimacy. This will require more than just star signings; it requires and demands developing youth academies, building competitive structures, and fostering a genuine football culture. If successful, Saudi Arabia could reshape the global soccer hierarchy. If not, its spending may be remembered as a bold but ultimately unsustainable experiment.

In sum, Saudi Arabia's soccer spending spree represents a significant shift in the economics and geopolitics that are required for football. It highlights how the sport is increasingly intertwined with national strategy, global branding, and financial power. Whether this model becomes a blueprint for the future or a cautionary tale will depend on what comes next.

$200M

RONALDO PER YEAR

KEY FIGURES

2023
YEAR SAUDI SURGE BEGAN

PIF
PUBLIC INVESTMENT FUND

2030
VISION 2030 TARGET YEAR

FIFA WC
POTENTIAL HOST BID

> *Saudi Arabia could reshape the global soccer hierarchy.*
> MATEO GIRAND '27

FINANCIAL CRIME

Greed, Hype, and the Belfort Story

• RYAN GOLDEN '29 • TRINITY HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

The name Jordan Belfort, commonly known as "The Wolf of Wall Street," is familiar to most through his numerous autobiographies or the 2013 film. Most people know him for his infamous life, in which he lived lavishly and partied constantly. Nevertheless, his film did not explain how he became so successful or what conditions led to it. Although the movie portrays his success through his magnetic personality and cleverness, there was much more to his success.

During the 1990s, the over-the-counter regulations were much more relaxed on the New York Stock Exchange, and enforcement relied heavily on investigations triggered by suspicions rather than on consistent surveillance. Belfort's environment, combined with his incredible sales systems, made him one of the most prominent names on Wall Street. However, his run would not last forever. After nearly 7 years of booming success, he eventually pleaded guilty to penny-stock fraud and manipulating stock prices. It is important to note that although some parts of the movie are true, Mr. Belfort's crimes are not solely cinematic exaggeration; they were real violations of the law.

At its peak, Stratton Oakmont, Belfort's firm, employed over 1,000 people and invested more than $1 billion in the market. To understand how such a high level of breakthrough was accomplished, we have to start at the beginning of Mr. Belfort's story in Bayside, Queens.

// EARLY LIFE

Jordan Belfort never stood out academically compared to his peers, but his parents recognized that he had a deep obsession with making money. Both of his parents were accountants and made a steady income, although nothing compared to Jordan's later years. He grew up in a small Jewish household and, during his summers, operated an Italian Ice cart in Queens, earning upwards of $20,000 one year.

After being accepted to American University, he transferred to the University of Maryland to study biology and pursue a career in dentistry. However, after learning that becoming a dentist did not come with its fair share of financial upsides, he quit and took an entrepreneurial route. This led him to start a meat and seafood business on Long Island, where demand was high at the time. Unfortunately, this "side hustle" went bankrupt after a few years.

// WALL STREET ENTRY

Nevertheless, Mr. Belfort moved on to the next opportunity, which in this case was Wall Street. He began working at L.F Rothschild, where he learned traditional brokerage skills. In 1987, after the firm crashed, he worked at a small penny stocks firm. After realizing that by using a refined sales script and commissions on penny stocks were incredibly high, he recruited a few of his friends and founded the firm Stratton Oakmont. Contrary to popular belief, the people he recruited did not specialize in stock brokerage. In fact, many of them were high school and college friends who had no experience.

// STRATTON OAKMONT

Belfort's flashy style, which included the best clothes, houses, and cars, lent him an air of legitimacy. Through this, he convinced many, including his own employees, that his firm was legitimate. He was able to turn these average college graduates into master sales associates in a short period, a crucial aspect of his success.

Initially, the firm took many companies public, in which it owned large stakes. Most famously, the shoe company Steve Madden, from which Stratton Oakmont made over $20 million. Stratton Oakmont was most famously known for its "pump and dump" scheme. Using cold sales tactics and manipulating buyers, Oakmont would convince investors to buy a company in which they held stock and then take it public. Then they would sell the stock at a high price, and it would typically collapse immediately afterward.

As if that were not enough, Oakmont frequently engaged in insider trading. Most famously, Steve Madden himself was even accused of securities fraud and later served time in prison. All this is to say: it was, put simply, highly illegal.

JORDAN BELFORT · "THE WOLF OF WALL STREET"

// THE PENNY STOCK SCHEME

To get a better perspective on Stratton Oakmont's business model, it's helpful to understand how a typical penny-stock scam works. Penny stocks are extremely low-priced shares of small businesses typically traded over-the-counter (OTC). Because trading volume is very low, even small buying activity can trigger large price swings. Stratton's brokers promoted these companies, often making false statements or selectively disclosing information to incentivize clients to buy the stocks.

As client demand increases and the desire to purchase shares grows, the price rises. Once the stock price is sufficiently high, the Stratton brokers would sell their shares at that inflated price and make substantial profits. Typically, after the promotion ended and demand diminished, the stock price would crater. But by then, the people holding the stocks were no longer the Stratton brokers but the clients they preyed on. Investopedia describes Stratton Oakmont's structure as a "boiler room," a high-pressure sales environment in which brokers are forced to follow scripts and make repeated calls to sell risky securities.

STRATTON OAKMONT AT PEAK

1,000+
EMPLOYEES

$1B+
INVESTED IN MARKET

7 yrs
BOOMING SUCCESS

$20M
STEVE MADDEN TAKE

THE PUMP AND DUMP CYCLE

- **Step 1** ACQUIRE PENNY STOCK
- **Step 2** BROKERS "PUMP" HYPE
- **Step 3** INVESTORS BUY IN
- **Step 4** SELL AT INFLATED PRICE
- **Step 5** STOCK COLLAPSES, CLIENTS LOSE

KEY PLAYERS

FOUNDER	J. BELFORT
CO-FOUNDER	D. PORUSH
FIRST JOB	L.F. ROTHSCHILD
FIRM TYPE	BOILER ROOM
ERA	1990S OTC
FAMOUS IPO	STEVE MADDEN

THE LURE · CASH IN THE TRAP

CONTINUED

Greed, Hype, and the Belfort Story

• RYAN GOLDEN '29 • TRINITY HS • ISSUE I, 2026

// AGGRESSIVE SALES CULTURE

Many famous scenes in the movie depict Belfort and his employees using aggressive, manipulative language to influence investors.

// SEC CHARGES AND LEGAL RESPONSE

There is a legal response to the actions described above that demonstrates the extent of the offenses. The SEC charged Stratton and its top executives in March 1992 with fraudulent transactions, including, but not limited to, concealing key risks of securities, selling shares at inflated prices, and manipulating at least one stock. The firm was ordered to pay more than $2 million into a fund to return illegally obtained profits to investors and to pay an additional $500,000 in civil penalties.

Subsequently, on March 17, 1994, the SEC issued an order to Stratton to appoint an independent consultant, Carl Loewenson, to evaluate the firm's internal procedures. He issued a whopping 95-page report on August 18, 1994, following his detailed investigation. Mr. Loewenson gave Stratton a series of recommended changes to implement by November 18, 1994. Stratton failed to do so, prompting the SEC to seek a temporary restraining order and later a preliminary injunction to prevent further violations.

The proceedings above demonstrate that Belfort's downfall did not occur overnight but resulted from an ongoing regulatory process and continued failure to adhere to financial regulations.

// CONVICTION AND SENTENCE

In 1996, after continued pressure from regulators, Stratton Oakmont suspended its operations. In 1999, Belfort and his business partner, Danny Porush, were convicted of securities fraud and money laundering. According to Investopedia, this fraud may have cost investors approximately $200 million. Belfort received a four-year prison sentence and served 22 months. The judge ordered him to pay $110 million to investors, but he only repaid $12.8 million by November 30, 1999.

// LIFE AFTER PRISON

After being released, Belfort became a motivational speaker and corporate sales training consultant. He went on to publish multiple memoirs, which he is famous for today. As of 2026, Mr. Belfort continues to repay the $50 million he owes investors from previous transactions, but has only raised $15 million. To continue his efforts, he promotes his "Straight Line" selling system to companies worldwide. He continues to monetize his past experiences through different public speaking events and uses his story to educate others.

// LEGACY AND CRITICISM

After multiple lawsuits, but eventual freedom and rebranding, Mr. Belfort has received much criticism. Many viewed his movie as a glamorization of success that motivated the younger generation towards an unrealistic version of investing. Furthermore, the fact that he has succeeded financially and continues to do so. Many are too soon to forget the numerous families, and especially older people, who were manipulated and lost large sums of money. It is important not to forget that many of these people were put into debt because of Oakmont. Mr. Belfort has since profited from rights to more than $1 million in different productions. The film star himself, Leonardo DiCaprio, defended the film but still called it a "cautionary tale."

// THE LESSON

Belfort's story serves not only as a warning but also a lesson to all future investors. The valuable lesson of avoiding shady business practices and always being transparent about them is evident in his story. Very often, it can backfire. On the contrary, for readers today, his story shows how far personality and confidence can get you. His rise and fall serve as a reminder to exploit others and use power and responsibility wisely.

THE LURE · A FRAGILE LADDER OF COINS

STRATTON OAKMONT BY THE NUMBERS

INVESTOR LOSSES	~$200M
COURT-ORDERED REPAYMENT	$110M
REPAID (1999)	$12.8M
OWED TODAY	$50M
RAISED TO DATE	$15M
PRISON SENTENCE	4 YEARS
TIME SERVED	22 MONTHS

RISE AND FALL

"Stratton Oakmont cost investors $200 million. As of 2026, Belfort has repaid $12.8 million."

GEOPOLITICS AND TRADE

Business with China in an Uncertain Geopolitical Climate

• CULLEN BRENNAN • REGIS HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

145%

PEAK US TARIFF RATE
Effective tariff on China at peak of Trump trade war.

CHINA'S REFINING SHARE

COBALT	70%
LITHIUM	58%
REE REFINING	88%
GRAPHITE	80%

SECTOR RISK

DEFENSE	CRITICAL
TECHNOLOGY	HIGH
AI CHIPS	HIGH
RETAIL/IMPORTS	MED

USMCA UPDATE
This summer, the Trump administration is set to meet with Mexico and Canada to discuss the terms of the re-negotiated NAFTA, now renamed the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

TRADE CROSSROADS · TRUMP V. XI

As of late, China has been increasingly willing to use its economic heft as a foreign policy tool. Its most potent tool is export controls, specifically on Rare Earth Minerals (REMs), which it frequently applies to other countries. A recent diplomatic dispute with Japan over Taiwan, for example, has spilled over into the economic realm, with China now applying export restrictions on over 20 Japanese companies. Needless to say, the intricacies of international geopolitics remain largely outside of the control of private companies, so doing business with China can carry risks for international corporations.

// TRUMP'S TRADE WAR

President Donald Trump's trade war with China has complicated matters for American businesses. His repeated imposition of tariffs has made business highly uncertain for any corporation that imports goods. At one point, the effective tariff rate on China reached a staggering 145%, a drastic spike largely unprecedented in recent history. Corporations that deal in the importation of goods have to pay these tariffs as an additional importation duty based on the value of whatever goods they're importing.

Mr. Trump also removed the de minimis exemption, a policy that exempted certain low-value imports from tariffs; the move was damaging to corporations like Temu and Shein, who source most of their famously (or infamously) cheap wares from China.

// POLICY VOLATILITY

Additionally, the volatility surrounding Mr. Trump's trade policy has made the Chinese response equally unpredictable; it is, after all, predicated on Washington's often-rapid policy changes. This additional complication has caused significant consternation for companies that not only import from China, but also export to China. (Admittedly, there are only a few industries that do this, A.I. chips, dominated by the American corporation Nvidia, are perhaps the most notable example.) Finally, the trade war has also led to additional export restrictions from China, especially on REMs, which threaten the efficacy of entire sectors.

// THE REM VULNERABILITY

The defense and technology sectors are among the most at risk due to China's export controls. Understanding this unique vulnerability requires a foundation in REM supply chains. REMs, like lithium, cobalt, and other metals, are vital components of modern technology. Computer chips, cameras, and modern military hardware all depend on REMs to function.

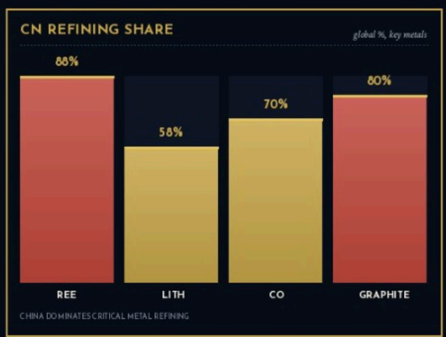
China has a unique dominance over the REM supply chain. While it does not control as large a share of the world's untapped REM reserves, it does control a vast majority of refining capacity, allowing it to effectively monopolize the global REM supply chain. REMs need to be refined before they have any practical application, which effectively means they must go through China first.

> "
> *REMs need to be refined before they have any practical application, which effectively means they must go through China first.*
> CULLEN BRENNAN '27

REMS IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN
Lithium, cobalt, graphite, and rare earth elements are essential to chips, batteries, defense systems, and EVs. Without REMs, modern technology stalls.

88%
REE REFINED IN CN

20+
JP COMPANIES BANNED



CONTINUED ON PAGE VIII

"Production lines can shut down in mere days because of an offhand remark by a national leader."

CONTINUED

Business with China in an Uncertain Geopolitical Climate

• CULLEN BRENNAN '27 • REGIS HS • ISSUE I, 2026

// CPC ECONOMIC POWER

China's economic power is heavily concentrated in the hands of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which controls several state-run enterprises and can marshal private enterprise to its cause through a potent mix of incentives and threats. In short, the government controls the economy almost completely.

This dynamic has created a market risk for many countries. Although China has tended to do business with all nations to grow its own economy, it has not hesitated to use its economic heft as diplomatic leverage against geopolitical rivals (chiefly the United States) or as a pressure tactic in geopolitical disputes.

Because REMs are so integral to a wide variety of technologies, especially in the defense and technology sectors, companies in those industries based outside of China are inherently vulnerable to a serious supply chain risk. This risk will remain outside their control and beyond their ability to mitigate for the foreseeable future, despite efforts to invest in REM mining and processing outside China.

// INVESTOR IMPLICATIONS

Investors, even those who invest in a personal capacity, must also be well-informed about these issues. Geopolitical events over the last few years have made it clear that market conditions can change at the whim of a single person.

Ultimately, the success of industrial and financial mainstays like Lockheed Martin, Nvidia, and others depends on the CPC's decisions. Production lines can shut down in mere days because of something happening on the other side of the world, or because an offhand remark by a national leader upset Chinese officials, which in turn often craters stock prices.

// BUY LOW, SELL HIGH

That is both a risk and an opportunity. No matter how much jargon bogs down the practice of investing, the reality is that making a profit is always about "buy low, sell high." Prudent judgment and a strong understanding of the facts will help investors make informed decisions when confronted with a geopolitical event that affects stock prices.

Is it better to snap up a stock while prices are falling because of a dispute that will eventually be past, or will that simply be a case of "catching the falling knife"?

// THE ROAD AHEAD

Such questions can only be answered by staying on top of the facts and being informed about China, which will only become more important as its meteoric rise into a global superpower continues.

TRADE WAR · CHRONOLOGY

2018	2020	2022	2024	2025	2026
Trump I	Phase 1 deal	Chip Act	Trump II	145% peak	Truce

TARIFF ESCALATION

EFFECTIVE RATE

US tariffs on Chinese imports, 2025–26

PEAK 145% · APRIL 2025

EXPORT CONTROLS

CHINA → JAPAN

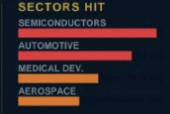
Companies hit by REM curbs over Taiwan dispute

20+

JAPANESE FIRMS

Subject to export curbs

SECTORS HIT



TRIGGER · TAIWAN DIPLOMATIC DISPUTE

A reminder that policy can shift overnight

TRADE BY THE NUMBERS

2025–26

US TARIFF PEAK *modern-era high*	145%
REE REFINING *global share, China*	88%
JP COMPANIES *banned over Taiwan*	20+
REM IMPORTS *US 2024 dependency*	$3.4B
KEY RISK *most exposed sectors*	DEF + TECH

THE FALL · DIGGING ONE'S OWN GRAVE

MARKET AND ECONOMIC HISTORY

The Pandemic that Shook the Markets

• CAROLINE WORAM '27 • KELLENBERG MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

MARCH 2020 · MARKETS IN TURMOIL

March 13th, 2020, marks the day when the familiar rhythm of daily life abruptly dissolved into uncertainty for the entire world. When I was 10, my school announced that it was closing as the covid outbreak began to escalate. At the time, I was unable to grasp the magnitude of the situation. Acting like the child I was, I optimistically believed that Covid-19 would serve as a break from the predictable cadence of my life. However, as the days drifted by, I grew bored of idling at home with nothing to do. I remember lying on the couch, refreshing my email over and over. When would school reopen? Was my lacrosse season on? When will my life resume?

From a global standpoint, COVID-19 not only struck health systems but also caused widespread unemployment. According to the World Bank, more than 100 million jobs were lost globally in 2020, forcing the vast majority of people to resort to their retirement savings just to cover daily necessities. Dinner conversations slowly shifted from weekend plans to budgeting and saving.

// THE SPREAD AND THE SHUTDOWN

COVID-19 is an extremely contagious respiratory virus that is primarily spread from person to person through close contact. Due to global travel, the virus spread rapidly. The first confirmed case was in December 2019, originating in Wuhan, China. By March, cases within Europe and North America rose sharply. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, every country began shutting down its economy and implementing a global quarantine to prevent further spread of the virus. To reduce the risk of exposure to the virus, schools transitioned from in-person education to virtual learning, positions that could be completed online continued operating remotely, restaurants closed, and numerous concerts and large events were either canceled or postponed indefinitely.

// MARKETS IN FREEFALL

As numerous businesses shut their doors due to COVID-19, financial markets swiftly responded with significant selling of stocks and treasury bonds. This was due to increasing uncertainty over the pandemic's impact on corporate earnings. For example, the Dow Jones Industrial Average declined by approximately 37% between February 12 and March 23, 2020, reducing the index's value by more than a third in just over one month.

The S&P 500 declined similarly as COVID-19 spread across the United States. What was unique to this downturn was not only the speed at which it happened, but the extent to which investors sold their shares. Most expected to earn substantially less than they had anticipated from their investments during the pandemic. The heightened fear among investors compounded their decisions, leading to increased selling. The effect was so widespread that, when daily losses exceeded certain thresholds, circuit breakers halted trading for a time.

// WINNERS AND LOSERS

The downturn severely impacted all industries. The economic downturn shifted demand, negatively affecting some industries while creating new opportunities for others. Research published on ScienceDirect found that in March of 2020, several industries, including healthcare, food, software, and natural gas, experienced monthly price increases of more than 20%. Healthcare companies held a crucial position. They played a key role in testing, treating infected patients, and developing COVID-19 vaccines.

PANDEMIC MARKETS · AT A GLANCE

KEY TAKEAWAYS

-37%	100M+	+76%
DOW JONES DECLINE	**JOBS LOST GLOBALLY**	**ONE-YEAR RECOVERY**
Feb 12 to Mar 23, 2020	*Per the World Bank, 2020*	*Mar 2020 to Mar 2021*

"NOBODY PREDICTED THE SPEED OF THE COLLAPSE, OR THE RECOVERY."

Per Everhart Advisors · Pandemic markets defied all forecasts

CONTINUED

The Pandemic that Shook the Markets

• CAROLINE WORAM '27 • KELLENBERG MEMORIAL • ISSUE I, 2026

// SURPRISE BENEFICIARIES

Food and grocery stores benefited as households stockpiled essential supplies for use during the lockdown. Software companies also saw a significant uptick in business as a result of the transition to remote work. Tools used for video conferencing, cloud-based storage, and cybersecurity became essential services for companies and schools to conduct business and provide instruction virtually. Similarly, natural gas producers saw gains due to lower crude oil production and subsequent supply chain adjustments. As investors recognized the changing dynamics across industries, they repositioned their investments toward natural gas and other industries expected to profit from the pandemic.

// HARDEST-HIT INDUSTRIES

Conversely, several industries suffered very steep declines in response to COVID-19. ScienceDirect also found that the market capitalization for crude oil and oil services declined by 76% during the worst month of the Covid stock market collapse. This was due, in part, to the pandemic's travel restrictions, which greatly reduced fuel demand. Travel restrictions led to a dramatic decrease in fuel consumption. Airlines had to ground their fleets, and cruise lines had to stop operating altogether. The hotel industry experienced low occupancy due to the collapse of tourism. Real estate companies faced uncertainty regarding the demand from their commercial tenants.

ScienceDirect reported that, during some of the worst-performing industry segments, daily stock price volatility was nearly 20%. Volatility reflects the differences and uncertainties among investors regarding the future. Therefore, very wide price swings indicate rapidly changing investor expectations.

// THE FEDERAL RESPONSE

The economy continued to decline until about the end of March; however, the markets started to stabilize earlier. The primary driver of market stabilization was policy intervention. CNBC reported that the Federal Reserve had lowered interest rates to near 0 percent and had launched a stimulus program that included an injection of $700 billion into the financial markets. Congress passed additional relief programs for suffering businesses and individuals, adding liquidity to the market.

As funds became available, investors started to believe that the combined effort of ongoing monetary and fiscal policies would limit the long-term damage. According to Statista, from March 23, 2020, to March 23, 2021, the Dow and S&P 500 each rose about 76%, while the Nasdaq Index rose 95%. These changes shocked the public because unemployment remained high, and severe travel restrictions remained in place.

// FORWARD-LOOKING MARKETS

Nevertheless, markets during the Covid era were forward-looking; they did not rely solely on the current economic conditions. Research from Stanford University indicated that investor expectations for short-term returns were significantly cut from February to April 2020 during the market crash. However, most individual investors did not significantly alter their long-term portfolio allocations. Confidence began to return among consumers and investors as the vaccine rollout continued and reopening plans took shape.

// LESSONS FOR INVESTORS

This crisis provided investors with many long-term lessons. First, timing the market is extremely difficult. According to Everhart Advisors, almost no one predicted such a rapid market decline, and even fewer predicted the speed of the market recovery. Second, diversification, the strategy of reallocating investments across many industries and asset classes, is still the name of the game. Third, emergency savings provide stability to individual family finances during periods of financial difficulty. Responsible investing requires investors to understand their risk tolerances, plan for volatility, and think long-term.

37%

DOW JONES DECLINE

Feb 12 to Mar 23, 2020. One-third of value lost in just over a month.

INDUSTRY IMPACT (MAR 2020)

HEALTHCARE	+20%
SOFTWARE	+20%
NAT GAS	+20%
CRUDE OIL	-76%
AIRLINES	-65%
HOTELS	-60%

RECOVERY NUMBERS

+76%
DOW / S&P (1 YR)

+95%
NASDAQ (1 YR)

$700B
FED STIMULUS INJECTION

~0%
FED FUNDS RATE CUT TO

3 LESSONS FOR INVESTORS

TIMING	DON'T TRY
DIVERSIFY	ALWAYS
EMERGENCY	SAVINGS
HORIZON	LONG-TERM

DOW: ONE COVID YEAR *FEB 2020 → MAR 2021*

INDUSTRY IMPACT (MAR 20) *MONTHLY CHANGE*

FEDERAL RESPONSE

~0%
FED CUT TO

$700B
STIMULUS

+76%
1YR DOW

+95%
1YR NASDAQ

TECHNOLOGY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Incorporation of AI into Cybersecurity

• HENRY FELDMAN '27 • REGIS HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

JOHN F. KENNEDY · RICE UNIVERSITY

"If you condense the 50,000 years of man's recorded history in a time span of but half a century… Only 5 years ago, man learned to write and use a cart with wheels."

THE ENCRYPTION PROBLEM

15145999654243

= ???? × ????
Answer: 5941213 × 2549311

Human: ~238,000 yrs to crack
Computer: ~2 hours
AI/Quantum: seconds

KEY DATES

- **1969** MOON LANDING — KENNEDY'S VISION
- **2023** NSA AI SECURITY CENTER LAUNCHED
- **2030** US GOV WARNS QUANTUM THREAT IS REAL

AI CYBER STATUS

ENCRYPTION	AT_RISK
QUANTUM	DEVELOPING
NSA AI	ACTIVE 2023
DEFENSE	CRITICAL

// THE QUANTUM HORIZON

China is actively developing quantum computing capabilities. AI-integrated supercomputers can crack contemporary encryption systems in seconds, with the US government warning the threat is real by 2030.

"

AI solves the problem it helps to create.

HENRY FELDMAN '27

On the grounds of Rice University, John F. Kennedy delivered one of the most foundational speeches of the twentieth century: "If you condense the 50,000 years of man's recorded history in a time span of but half a century… Only 5 years ago, man learned to write and use a cart with wheels." By the same metric, only minutes after man first went to the moon in 1969, we built computers that could design the rocket and then go to the moon on their own. Artificial intelligence has changed the landscape of all facets of life.

Yet this rapid advancement creates new ills as it dispels old ones. Artificial intelligence has made processes within the digital ecosystem much easier: streamlining once time-consuming tasks and enabling a digital assistant to serve any current-day user with the entire internet catalog at their immediate disposal. However, such power poses serious threats to the safety of our digital ecosystem. The threat of brute-force AI systems to weaken once-secure encryption methods looms larger than ever.

// THE ENCRYPTION PROBLEM

Here's how AI can threaten current encryption systems: the following number, 15145999654243, has only two factors that are not one or itself. It is the product of two prime numbers. Asking a human being to figure out what these two prime numbers are is basically impossible. There are infinitely many prime numbers, and there exist over 3.1 trillion prime numbers less than the example answer above.

To my knowledge, nobody knows the answer to this question, except for me. 15145999654243 is the product of 5941213 and 2549311, two seven-digit prime numbers. I did not know this because I am some math prodigy or some superintelligent cyber threat, but rather because I simply looked up two large prime numbers and wrote down their product.

Conceptualize it in this way: I have the key to the answer, and now, by you reading this, you have a key to decrypt and see the answer for yourself. However, if someone had access to only the number 15145999654243, it would be impossible for them to determine its factors. Theoretically, it should be possible because one could seemingly just try all 3.1 trillion prime numbers, however even if such a person were able to try each different prime number after another at an unrealistically fast pace of five seconds, it would still take them about 238 thousand years before they would get through all of them.

// THE AI THREAT

This is the threat AI poses. If the quickest human ever could work at an unrealistic pace of five seconds between each number, a computer can work at a pace over a billion times faster. Now, all of a sudden, a computer could solve our example above in only about two hours. AI has the power to further transform this process by prioritizing the data most helpful to our goal.

Encryption used in our everyday lives is exponentially more complex than the example I provided above, but the same principle remains. As computers continue to evolve, become faster, and become more efficient with AI, encryption will become increasingly susceptible to cracking. Quantum computing is being developed, with the United States government warning that the threat may very well be real by 2030. China is actively developing quantum computing capabilities, and these AI-integrated supercomputers can crack contemporary encryption systems in seconds.

// REAL-WORLD CONSEQUENCES

The threat of cyberattacks is concerning. Attacks on power grids, security infrastructure, and markets can cause economic shocks and supply chain disruptions, leaving populations vulnerable. To protect ourselves against growing threats, we need to develop stronger encryption to match the capabilities of new cyberattacks.

// AI AS THE SOLUTION

Fortunately, AI solves the problem it helps to create. In 2023, the National Security Agency launched an artificial intelligence security center to learn how to use AI to detect threats efficiently and accurately, thereby improving the US digital security infrastructure. AI is now listed as a critical component of national defense and US intelligence capabilities.

It is impossible to know what tomorrow's challenges will bring. Five years ago, our biggest threats were wild beasts and heavy loads to carry. Now we face the challenge of quantum supercomputing destroying our digital ecosystem in mere seconds. Yet, with the powers at our disposal and the depth of our domestic security infrastructure, we should move forward boldly into a new age of digitalization.

AN ARMS RACE IN CODE

"Many millennia ago, our biggest threats were wild beasts. Now we face quantum supercomputing destroying our digital ecosystem in mere seconds."

MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT

How Paramount Stole Warner Bros Right Out Of Netflix's Hands

• CONNOR GARUTTI '27 • REGIS HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

In a deal that has rattled Hollywood to its core, Paramount Skydance Corporation has agreed to acquire Warner Bros. Discovery (WBD) in a staggering $110 billion transaction, snatching the prize away from Netflix in one of the most dramatic boardroom reversals the entertainment industry has ever seen. Even more remarkably, no one in Hollywood believed Paramount was still in the race.

The story began in December of 2025, when Warner Bros. Discovery entered into a merger agreement with Netflix, which would have transferred its studios and streaming assets to the streaming giant while spinning off its linear networks business (including CNN, TBS, TNT, truTV, and more). It looked like a done deal. Netflix was the obvious buyer, and WBD shareholders seemed set. But Paramount had other plans.

// PERSISTENT PURSUIT

Paramount persisted in its attempts to acquire WBD, launching offer after offer, each one sweeter than the last. Due to Paramount's heavy debt load and the risk associated with its investors, including Saudi, Qatari, and Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth funds, Warner rejected its bids. Nine offers in, Paramount did give up. Industry insiders largely dismissed Paramount's pursuit as a long shot, a desperate play by a company that had only recently completed its own merger with Skydance Media and was already managing significant financial baggage. The conventional wisdom was that the WBD board would never flip.

// THE TURNING POINT

The turning point came in February of 2026. Netflix declined to match Paramount's latest $31-per-share offer, which Warner deemed superior to Netflix's $27.75-per-share agreement. Just a day after Netflix pulled out of the bidding war, Warner formally signed the agreement with Paramount, setting the stage for one of the most consequential media mergers in recent history.

// WHY THE BOARD FLIPPED

The full 180 stunned the media world. A deal that seemed set in stone for months collapsed nearly overnight, and it came down to one simple reason: the offer was just too sweet. The WBD board has a legal and fiduciary obligation to act in the best interests of its shareholders. At $31 per share, Paramount's offer presented a premium that the board could not, in good conscience, walk away from. To do so would have opened them up to serious shareholder litigation. When the math is that clear, the boardroom stops debating.

// WHAT PARAMOUNT GETS

So what does Paramount actually get? Quite a lot. The merged company will boast a film library of over 15,000 titles, including popular franchises such as Game of Thrones, Mission: Impossible, Harry Potter, and the DC Universe. It also gives Paramount a streaming powerhouse in HBO Max, setting up a potential combination with Paramount+ to challenge Netflix directly for the top streaming service.

The combined streaming platform would instantly become one of the largest in the world by content volume, giving the new company a fighting chance in an industry that Netflix has dominated for over a decade. For Paramount, landing HBO's prestigious library, home to some of the most critically acclaimed films ever made, is the kind of asset that cannot be built overnight. It has to be bought.

// THE DEBT PICTURE

As for the stock reaction, WBD shares jumped to nearly $28.50 following the merger announcement. However, they continue to trade at an 8% discount to the offer price, reflecting investor skepticism about the Q3 closing timeline. On a call with analysts, Paramount's David Ellison acknowledged that the combined company will be saddled with $79 billion in debt, while remaining hopeful that $6 billion in cost savings through synergies would be achieved. It is a high-wire act, and everyone on Wall Street knows it.

The deal is expected to close in the third quarter of 2026, pending regulatory approval. Whether Ellison's gamble pays off, or buries the new media giant under a mountain of debt, will be Hollywood's defining story for years to come.

DEAL ECONOMICS

Q3 26
CLOSE

$31
SHARES

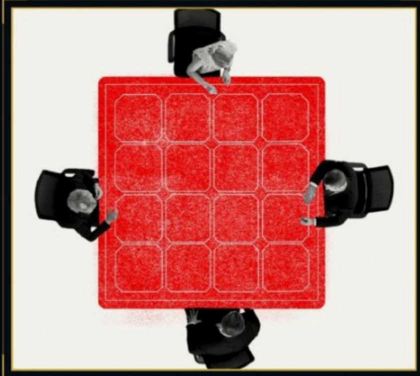
$79B
DEBT

$6B
SYNERGY

$110B

TOTAL TRANSACTION VALUE

Paramount Skydance acquires Warner Bros. Discovery.



FOUR PLAYERS · ONE BOARD · ONE DECISION POINT

KEY FIGURES

$31
PARAMOUNT PER SHARE

$27.75
NETFLIX PER SHARE

$79B
COMBINED DEBT LOAD

15K+
FILM LIBRARY TITLES

DEAL TIMELINE

- **Dec 2025** WBD + NETFLIX AGREEMENT
- **Feb 2026** NETFLIX DROPS OUT
- **Feb 2026** PARAMOUNT SIGNS
- **Q3 2026** EXPECTED CLOSE

REGULATORY OUTLOOK

APPROVAL	PENDING
ANTITRUST	SCRUTINY
SYNERGIES	$6B TARGET
STOCK POP	$28.50

STREAMING WARS · A GLOBAL CONTEST

TECHNOLOGY AND FINANCE

How AI Is Redefining Entry-Level Finance

• MARCOS VARKEY '27 • REGIS HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

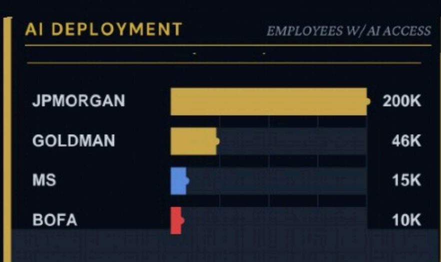
Artificial intelligence is restructuring entry-level finance at a record pace. Drawing on recent institutional disclosures and labor market data, we predict that AI will not only eliminate junior finance roles across most major finance corporations, but will divide the talent market into those who can deploy AI strategically and those who cannot, while compressing the traditional apprenticeship pipeline that built the industry's senior talent.

For generations, the entry-level Wall Street analyst role operated on an unwritten contract: endure years of brutal hours and repetitive work in exchange for credentials, compensation, and mentorship. That contract is being torn up. AI tools can now complete entry-level tasks, such as sensitivity tables, comparable company analyses, pitch deck updates, and meeting summaries in mere minutes, while previously, those tasks consumed analyst teams for days.

// SCALE OF DEPLOYMENT

The scale of deployment is striking. Goldman Sachs has switched on its GS AI Assistant across all 46,500 knowledge workers firm-wide. JPMorgan Chase has given more than 200,000 employees access to generative AI tools. Morgan Stanley's Debrief tool automatically summarizes client meetings and drafts follow-up emails, saving advisors an estimated 15 hours per week. Bank of America has found that its AI drafting tools save "tens of thousands of hours" per year in investment banking alone, hours that previously fell to junior analysts.

The vulnerability of entry-level finance is structural, not incidental. These roles are dominated by data-intensive, template-driven, rule-bound work, the exact cognitive domain where large language models perform best. Shawn DuBravac, CEO of the Avrio Institute, estimates that within a year, firms will automate 60–70% of the time analysts currently spend on lower-level tasks.



OPENAI POACH

100+

JR BANKERS HIRED

For Project Mercury · $150/hr

// PROJECT MERCURY

The most consequential development may not be what banks are building internally, but what is happening outside their walls. OpenAI recruited more than 100 junior investment bankers, primarily from financial giants JPMorgan, Goldman Sachs, and Morgan Stanley, paying them $150 per hour under the project "Mercury" to write prompts and build financial models covering restructurings, IPOs, and M&A transactions. The objective is to train AI systems to replicate the work that those analysts were hired to perform.

// DIMON'S WARNING

JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon acknowledged the displacement directly at an investor meeting in February 2026: the bank has already moved workers out of roles affected by AI. It is running "huge redeployment plans" to place them elsewhere. Operations staff declined 4%, while client-facing roles expanded 4%, illustrating the shift from process execution toward relationship- and judgment-based work. Dimon also called on governments and businesses to begin planning for the potential societal repercussions, warning:

> "
> *Society's got to think through what it wants to do if this becomes that kind of problem. Now is the time to start thinking about it.*
>
> JAMIE DIMON · JPMORGAN CEO

// THE FUTURE LANDSCAPE

The emerging consensus is that AI will restructure rather than eliminate entry-level finance roles. The World Economic Forum projects 39% of key workplace skills will change by 2030, with AI and data literacy at the top of the list. Finance leaders surveyed in 2026 identified the highest-demand roles as AI Process Specialists, Data Engineers, and AI Systems Analysts, professionals who configure, govern, and regulate AI, oftentimes across financial workflows.

The tasks AI cannot yet replicate well, including contextual judgment, client relationship management, ethical reasoning in never previously seen scenarios, and creative deal structuring, remain human-oriented. Nevertheless, the risk is compounding: if AI automates the repetitive work that historically served as the training ground for future senior bankers, the industry faces a long-term talent development deficit with no obvious solution.

The ladder into finance is shifting, not disappearing. Still, the rungs are being rearranged, and those who adapt earliest will be best positioned to climb.

AI ECON 2026

MERCURY PROJECT	**$150** PAY/HR
60-70% AUTOMATE	**4%** SHIFT

CLIMBING THE LADDER · THE RUNGS REARRANGED

60–70%

LOWER-LEVEL TIME TO BE AUTOMATED

Within one year, per Avrio Institute estimates.

AI DEPLOYMENT ACROSS BANKS

JPMORGAN	200K+
GOLDMAN	46,500
MORGAN ST.	15H/WK
BOFA	10KS H/Y

HIGHEST-DEMAND ROLES BY 2030

- #1 AI PROCESS SPECIALIST
- #2 DATA ENGINEER
- #3 AI SYSTEMS ANALYST

39%

SKILLS CHANGING BY 2030

100+

JUNIOR BANKERS HIRED BY OPENAI

$150/hr

PROJECT MERCURY PAY

"

The rungs are being rearranged.

MARCOS VARKEY '27

AGRICULTURE AND GLOBAL MARKETS

The Financial Impacts of Honeybees on National Produce Markets and the Global Crop Economy

• ALEXANDER SCHILLER '27 • REGIS HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

"To bee or not to bee?" This was the question buzzing through my mind as I examined the pamphlet for my school's beekeeping club. In sixth grade, my knowledge of bees was limited to their stinging, honey-making capabilities, and their starring role in a 2007 animated film with Jerry Seinfeld. Beekeeping was, by every available metric, pure chaos, so naturally I signed up. Indeed, what I found inside those hives altered the way in which I viewed the world insofar as I came to understand the profound importance honeybees hold. In this article, I will outline both the notable economic value that honeybees provide to global markets and the concerning financial cost of their decline.

// APICULTURE AND POLLINATION

According to the USDA, beekeeping, also known as apiculture, is the science of raising or maintaining colonies of bees and their hives, often practiced to collect the bees' resources. Today, approximately 115,000 to 125,000 beekeepers manage roughly 2.6 million colonies across the United States alone, extending from backyard apiarists to large-scale commercial operations. In fact, in correlation with the amount of honey sold in the United States, honeybees add an estimated $4.74 billion to the U.S. economy annually.

Nevertheless, their primary commercial contribution lies in pollination, a service that bolsters billions of dollars in the American agricultural sector. Honeybees contribute over $20 billion annually to U.S. crop production and over $120 billion globally, sustaining crops such as apples, blueberries, almonds, and even coffee. California's almond industry is almost entirely dependent on its honeybee pollination, wherein roughly 60% of all U.S. colonies produce 80% of the world's almond supply.

// COLONY COLLAPSE AND COST

Yet as colony collapse disorder accelerates alongside rising environmental dangers, this dependence is becoming increasingly costly. Hive rental prices for almond pollination alone tripled between 2003 and 2009, and cumulative colony losses have cost the industry over $600 million in production, pollination income, and replacement. Without pollinators, the world stands to lose around $577 billion in crop production every single year.

> "
> *So perhaps "To bee or not to bee" is not the question, but rather an economic dilemma humanity grapples with each day. In the end, if we do choose "to be," our lives may be a whole lot sweeter.*

$577B
ANNUAL CROP LOSS RISK
Global crop value at risk per year without pollinators

$120B
GLOBAL VALUE
Annual contribution to global crop production

$20B
U.S. CROP VALUE
Annual contribution to American agriculture

$4.74B
HONEY ECONOMY
U.S. honey contribution annually

// THE BIGGER PICTURE

Honeybees are economic infrastructure: they pollinate the food supply, sustain rural livelihoods, and underwrite billions in agricultural output. Their decline is not just an ecological loss but a financial liability. From the California almond groves to the apple orchards of New York, billions of dollars in agricultural output rest on a workforce that no human can replace at scale.

POLLINATOR DEPENDENCY BY CROP

ALMONDS	100%
BLUEBERRIES	90%
APPLES	80%
COFFEE	70%
COTTON	50%

AN ECONOMIC DILEMMA

"$577 billion in global crop value depends on a workforce no human can replace at scale."

DIGITAL FINANCE AND BLOCKCHAIN

Cryptocurrency: A Beginner's Guide to Digital Money

• SEBASTIAN FERNEGEL '27 • REGIS HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

Cryptocurrency began with the launch of Bitcoin on January 3rd, 2009. Since then, it has exceeded $65,000 and $70,000 in early 2026. Cryptocurrency uses cryptography for security and operates on decentralized networks based on blockchain technology.

Cryptocurrency is a digital currency, meaning it exists exclusively in electronic form with no physical counterpart, such as paper banknotes. It operates on a decentralized network, unlike traditional systems such as the banking system. For a cryptocurrency to work on a decentralized network, no single individual, company, or government can control it. Instead, the network is run by thousands of independent computers, called nodes.

A node keeps a copy of the blockchain's history and verifies that every transaction follows the rules. Because so many nodes independently verify transactions, the system becomes highly secure and resistant to manipulation, as no single entity can alter the record without the rest of the network disagreeing.

// HOW BLOCKCHAIN WORKS

Simply put, blockchain technology is an advanced database system. As the name suggests, it stores data in blocks that are linked together in a chain. A block typically contains three key elements: the data itself, the timestamp that represents the time when the data was added to the chain, and the cryptographic hash of the previous block.

A blockchain is immutable, it is extremely difficult to alter the data in a block already in the chain without detection due to the cryptographic hash system. This structure makes blockchain technology highly secure, allowing users to trust the system without relying on a central authority.

// TYPES OF CRYPTOCURRENCY

Now that you have a better understanding of how cryptocurrency works, let's delve into what cryptocurrency actually is and the different types of it. There are so many different types of cryptocurrencies, so here are some of the simplest and most commonly used ones.

// STORE OF VALUE

Store-of-value cryptocurrencies are assets that retain value over time. They are what most people think when they hear "crypto." Store-of-value assets are quantifiable and have a limited supply. For example, Bitcoin has a limit of 21 million coins. Store of value assets such as bitcoin are durable as they do not degrade or lose their form over time, they have a virtually unlimited "shelf life." This type of cryptocurrency can also be easily bought and sold globally. People trust and recognize the asset as valuable, without this, the asset has no real value. Despite these qualities, cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin are highly volatile, which challenges their effectiveness as a stable store of value.

// MEMECOINS

Memecoins are another, particularly interesting, subcategory of cryptocurrency. Viral internet trends and pop culture references inspire memecoins. They work similarly to other cryptocurrencies. Memecoins are especially useful for beginners, as they can help you learn about blockchain and cryptocurrency while being less expensive than other cryptocurrencies. However, long-term investment prospects for memecoins are low and are characterized by high volatility. Common examples of memecoins are Dogecoin (DOGE), based on the meme of a Shiba Inu dog, and Pepe (PEPE), based on the meme of Pepe the Frog.

// STABLECOINS

The most widely adopted stablecoins are designed to mirror fiat currencies (government-issued money not backed by physical commodities such as gold). They aim for a 1:1 value with their underlying currency. For example, USD Coin (USDC) is pegged to the U.S. dollar at a 1:1 ratio. Another example is Tether Euro (EURT), which attempts to mirror the Euro. Stablecoins offer a bridge between traditional finance and decentralized finance. They also tend to be more stable due to their connection to fiat currency. However, stablecoins pose risks. A stablecoin can "de-peg," where the price significantly deviates from the value it is intended to match. USDC briefly de-pegged when it was revealed that a portion of its reserves was stuck in the failed Silicon Valley Bank.

// INFRASTRUCTURE CRYPTO

Not all cryptocurrencies are designed to store value or function as money. Infrastructure cryptocurrencies enhance the technology supporting the blockchain network of existing cryptocurrencies. They also allow developers to build apps and programs using smart contracts, self-executing digital agreements stored on a blockchain that automatically trigger actions (such as payments or asset transfers) when conditions are met, eliminating intermediaries. The introduction of smart contracts on the Ethereum blockchain allowed anyone to create a decentralized application. It is powered by the cryptocurrency Ether (ETH), which is a platform for financial services, games, and other apps.

// RISKS AND OUTLOOK

Despite its potential, cryptocurrency comes with many risks and advantages. Anyone with internet access can use it. However, cryptocurrencies are highly volatile. In March of 2020, the value of Bitcoin dropped by over 50% in a matter of hours, largely due to global panic after the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic. So before using cryptocurrencies, do your research.

HOW A BLOCKCHAIN WORKS

BLOCK #1
Data + Timestamp + Hash

BLOCK #2
Linked to #1's hash, immutable

CRYPTO TYPES

STORE OF VALUE
Bitcoin (BTC), 21M cap, durable
Ethereum (ETH), platform asset

STABLECOIN
USDC, EURT, 1:1 fiat peg
Low volatility, payments rail

MEMECOINS
DOGE, PEPE, viral, high risk

DIGITAL MONEY · THE NEW SOURCE

TRADE POLICY

NAFTA's Hidden Toll: Trade, Jobs, and Mortality

• THOMAS MCCARTHY '27 • REGIS HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

The North American Free Trade Agreement ("NAFTA") has always been a source of political controversy. Debates over the agreement often center on whether it has harmed or benefited Americans. A new research paper offers a surprising look at one of those harms. Economists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the University of Chicago have found that NAFTA led to increased mortality rates among manufacturing communities where the treaty most impacted American workers.

// WHAT WAS NAFTA

Enacted in 1993 (effective January 1, 1994), NAFTA was an agreement between the United States, Canada, and Mexico that eliminated most tariffs and other barriers to trade and investment among the three countries, effectively creating a single free trade zone in North America. At the time of its enactment, NAFTA's supporters, which included a bipartisan coalition of Presidents, claimed that NAFTA would create hundreds of thousands of U.S. jobs, increase sales of U.S. goods, and foster U.S. competitiveness in the global economy, by lowering production costs and boosting U.S. exports.

In support of NAFTA, President Clinton cited the globalization of commerce and the growth of technology, stating, "[t]he only way we can recover the fortunes of the middle class in this country…is to adapt to these changes which are occurring…. Our only realistic option is to embrace these changes and create the jobs of tomorrow."

// SUPPORTERS VS. CRITICS

In contrast, NAFTA's detractors argued that the legislation would, in fact, lead to massive job losses, particularly in the manufacturing sector, as well as lower wages in the U.S. Former presidential candidate H. Ross Perot warned of the severe impact to American manufacturing jobs, noting that NAFTA would create a "giant sucking sound" of American jobs and production facilities moving to Mexico.

In the years since NAFTA's enactment, both supporters and detractors have claimed victory. Proponents have argued that NAFTA had a beneficial, though small, impact on the U.S. economy, as household income and wages increased, consumer prices decreased, and U.S. competitiveness improved. Critics have argued, however, that the economic benefits of NAFTA have been relatively small: NAFTA negatively impacted areas of the U.S. where factories moved overseas, and union (higher-paying) jobs were lost.

// THE MORTALITY STUDY

In conducting this new study of NAFTA's impact on mortality, the researchers analyzed mortality rates in communities in labor markets affected by NAFTA, first examining areas of the U.S. with the most employment in industries that had tariffs lowered (especially manufacturing communities in the Southeast and Midwest). Then, the researchers compared the mortality rates in those areas with those of other labor markets in the country where NAFTA did not affect the local economy.

// FINDINGS

The researchers found that NAFTA's effects in manufacturing communities led to increases in mortality, for all ages and genders, with a more sizable impact on working-age men. According to the researchers, approximately 3% of 45-year-old men in manufacturing communities lost 1 year of their remaining life expectancy due to NAFTA. This increased mortality rate was due to higher rates of illness, drug overdoses, and suicides, as well as engaging in smoking and other harmful behaviors.

These negative health impacts not only affected the workers who lost their jobs, but also their entire families, as all mortality rates (across age and gender) increased in the former manufacturing communities where jobs were lost due to NAFTA. The researchers argued that these increases in mortality and negative health impacts were significant enough to erase any welfare gains that increased wages may have achieved due to NAFTA.

// CAVEATS AND CONTEXT

In an interview with The New York Times, one of the researchers, Matthew Notowidigdo, cautioned that the study did not review other potential benefits of NAFTA, such as technological innovation or increased U.S. competitiveness in the global economy. Mr. Notowidigdo also noted that manufacturing in the United States likely would have decreased even without NAFTA, as automation and technology have reduced manufacturing worldwide. However, according to Mr. Notowidigdo, it appears that NAFTA "accelerated" that job loss. Unfortunately, the United States did not invest in policies or programs to support or retrain workers who had lost manufacturing jobs, like other countries, such as Denmark, have.

> "
> *NAFTA accelerated job loss in ways no one anticipated.*
> THOMAS MCCARTHY '27

EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER LAW · PILLARS OF THE TREATY

1994

NAFTA TOOK EFFECT
Jan 1, 1994. 30+ years of trade debate began.

KEY STATISTICS

~3%
MEN LOSING 1YR LIFE EXP.

3
COUNTRIES IN AGREEMENT

SE+MW
MOST IMPACTED US REGIONS

USMCA
NEW AGREEMENT NAME

MORTALITY CAUSES IN AFFECTED AREAS

DRUG OD	HIGH
SUICIDE	HIGH
ILLNESS	HIGH
SMOKING	ELEV.
OTHER	ELEV.

TIMELINE

- **1993** NAFTA ENACTED
- **1994** TOOK EFFECT
- **2018** USMCA SIGNED
- **2026** RENEGOTIATION TALKS

LABOR ECONOMICS

The Gig Economy: Will It Be a Long-Term Success?

• REMY PICCIANO '27 • REGIS HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

There are some people in our society, not to be named, that are willing to pay a premium to have headphones, Uber Eats delivered to them, or energy drinks delivered to their house late at night. While this is, in fact, just laziness, it's also the gig economy at work. In fact, it is apps and services like Uber, Uber Eats, DoorDash, and TaskRabbit that have built an entire market around satiating our desire to be lazy.

Why would you ever get in your car and buy food yourself when you could sit on your couch, burn zero calories, and spend infinitely more than you would otherwise? Of course, such a business model benefits the worker as well by connecting consumers and employees directly, bypassing traditional intermediaries altogether. But that's the catch: an Uber Eats driver or DoorDash driver is not an employee; they're an independent contractor.

// THE INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR MODEL

A major benefit of this job classification is the ease of moving from gig to gig. You stop and start working whenever you want. Such fluidity has proven to increase wages over time. Traditional jobs, working a desk job or a cash register, all get baseline benefits that contractors do not have, including health insurance, maternity leave, and unemployment insurance.

Simply put, if you are a DoorDash driver and get injured, have a family emergency, or decide to become a mother, you are unable to work and will financially suffer from being restrained. As a gig worker, you feel the push and pull day in and day out. You could average 25 dollars an hour on one day and 5 dollars the next. For gig platforms, this is a fantastic model, as they provide a software app essentially while shifting all the risk onto their "contractors." The question remains, however, what legally and economically permits companies to do so?

// THE ATTORNEY ANALOGY

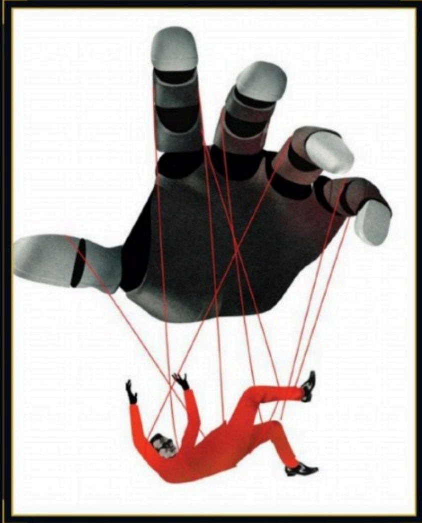
In similar situations, such as attorneys, they are also independent contractors. After all, they have flexible working hours (insofar as they arrange their own schedules), jump from firm to firm, and use their own property to conduct their work. However, the laws that dictate employer-employee relationships are extraordinarily nitpicky.

A Fifth Circuit court case in 2012 determined that an attorney, despite having free rein over his hours and the leisure to take and refuse cases as he saw fit, was actually an employee because the supposed "employees" had some form of economic dependence on their supposed contractor, such as letterheads, business cards, and legal research. It does not take much imagination to see how this could apply to an Uber Eats driver as well. While the attorney likely has access to legal databases, an Uber Eats driver has access to a digital database that matches him with work. Is this not a resource being provided by a parent company? Furthermore, what is the difference between a business card and when a driver displays a neon Lyft or Uber sign on their windshield?

// THE KEY CAVEAT

Of course, if it were that simple, then we'd have already reached a solution. The key caveat with something like a neon Lyft sign is that the driver deliberately purchased it themselves and put it there. While a company's app does the service of providing gigs to a driver, the actual hardware itself (the phone) is in the contractor's possession.

Still, as the gig economy grows into other markets beyond food, it's important to understand the nuances of this ever-growing job market. Issues remain. As a contractor, you are unable to negotiate your contract with Uber Eats. If you don't want to take that 10-dollar ride, the guy next to you will. There simply is no "how does 15 dollars sound?" as you would be able to do as an attorney or plumber.



PULLED ON STRINGS · THE CONTRACTOR'S BARGAIN

$25/h

PEAK GIG EARNINGS
vs. $5/hr on a slow day. Income volatility is the defining risk.

GIG PLATFORMS

UBER	RIDES + EATS
DOORDASH	FOOD
TASKRABBIT	TASKS
LYFT	RIDES
INSTACART	GROCERY

LEGAL GRAY AREA

ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE TEST
Does the worker depend economically on the company? If yes, courts may rule employee, not contractor.

THE APP QUESTION
Is a gig matching app equivalent to an employer-provided tool (like letterhead)? Courts have not yet settled this.

TRADITIONAL EMPLOYEE VS GIG WORKER

KEY DIFFERENCES

BENEFIT	EMPLOYEE	GIG WORKER
HEALTH INSURANCE	✓	✗
PAID LEAVE	✓	✗
UNEMPLOYMENT	✓	✗
NEGOTIATE WAGE	✓	✗
SCHEDULE FLEXIBILITY	✗	✓

GIG WAGE VOLATILITY

PEAK $25 / LOW $5

GIG PLATFORM SHARE

CONTRACTOR STATUS

HEALTH INS.	NONE
PAID LEAVE	NONE
NEGOTIATE	NO
SCHEDULE	FLEXIBLE
RISK	CONTRACTOR

PERSONAL FINANCE

Household Credit Card Balances Reach New Highs

• AVA DEMARTINO '27 • KELLENBERG MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

To say that household debt is increasing is an understatement. Household credit card balances in the United States have recently reached all-time highs. Over 55% of Americans rely on credit cards as their primary source of funding for everyday expenses. For adolescents, parents are also adding credit cards to their children's phones, giving them access to money at all times. In addition to excessive credit card use, the cost of goods and services is also increasing. All of these components have led to an astounding increase in credit card balances.

// THE NUMBERS

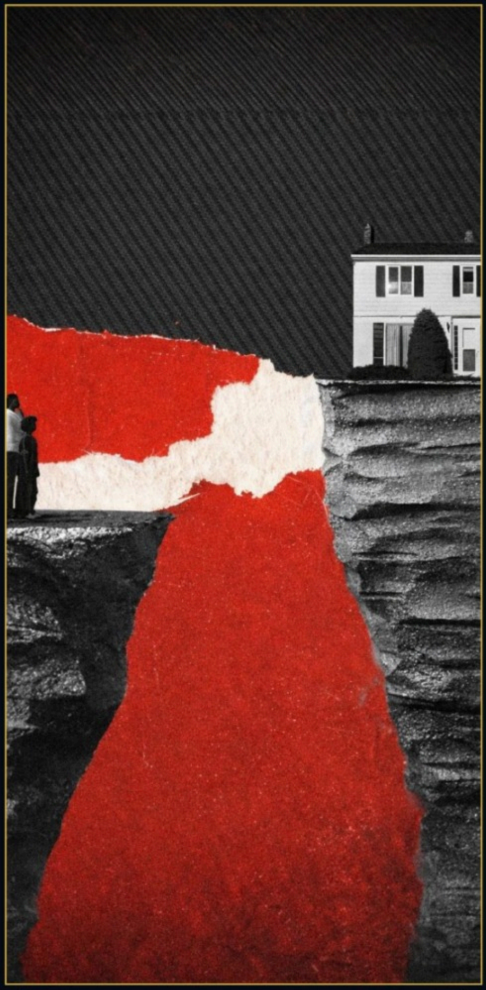
US credit card balances rose by $44 billion over three months, now standing at $1.28 trillion and continuing to increase. This data from the Federal Reserve sets the stage for even more economic issues in the future. As balances continue to rise, debt piles up, ultimately weakening the American economy.

// WHY CREDIT CARDS HIT HARDER

Some may wonder why this is really happening. Why are credit cards causing so much more damage to America's economy than cash? First of all, when using your credit card, you are not spending your own money. A credit card company pays for your purchase upfront, and you agree to repay them later, either in full at a given date or over time with interest. Oftentimes, Americans obtain credit cards with very high interest rates, then struggle to pay those cards back, leading to circles upon circles of debt. While on a small scale, the financial impact may be small, on a larger scale (like 22% of the US), there could be major repercussions for the US economy.

// THE DOPAMINE ECONOMY

Swiping a credit card is so simple that it is easy to spend money you may not really have. It is easy to push that thought away when the dopamine rush overpowers your rational thinking. While excessive credit card use has led to large card balances, so has the rise in prices. Rising prices, inflation, and tariffs also contribute to those numbers. For all of these reasons, Americans should now realize that we may need to restrict our spending and be more conscious about how we choose to spend the money we actually have. Though there are many other obstacles to overcome, such as inflation and tariffs, it is clear that by making more responsible decisions, credit card balances will cause fewer problems for the American economy.



A WIDENING RIFT · HOUSEHOLD DEBT MEETS HOME EQUITY

> "
> *The dopamine rush overpowers your rational thinking.*
> AVA DEMARTINO

$1.28T

TOTAL US CARD BALANCES (2026)
Rose by $44B over three months. New record high.

FEDERAL RESERVE — US CREDIT CARD BALANCES

2004	~$680B
2008	~$870B
2016	~$960B
2020	~$820B
2024	$1.14T
2026	$1.28T

KEY STATS

55%
USE CARDS AS PRIMARY SOURCE

22%
US CARRYING CARD DEBT

$44B
THREE-MONTH INCREASE

DRIVERS

INFLATION	UP
TARIFFS	UP
INTEREST	HIGH
RESTRAINT	NEEDED

A NEW RECORD HIGH

"U.S. household credit card debt has reached $1.28 trillion. One in five Americans cannot pay off the balance they personally owe."

PERSONAL FINANCE AND MEDICINE

Six Figures, Zero Security

• HENRY COLLINS '27 • REGIS HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

If you do enough digging, you'll find that the U.S. Bureau of Labor has a list of the twenty highest-paid jobs in America. The top seventeen are tied with a median income of $239,200. How many of these jobs are in the medical field? All seventeen of them. Given this statistic, many may conclude that all doctors are financially stable (or even quite well off) and can turn their yearly salary into a comfortable income much more quickly than in other professions. However, this is extremely far from the truth.

Shockingly, 28% of doctors have a net worth of under $500,000. That's right. Almost 1 in every 3 people making a median salary of nearly $250,000 is not worth two years of that pay.

// THE THREE CAUSES

Why this is the case comes down to several reasons. Still, Jim Dahle, founder of The White Coat Investor (the most widely read physician financial website), outlines the 3 most prevalent causes as a lack of financial training, extreme workload, and doctors specifically being targeted by the financial services industry.

// LACK OF FINANCIAL EDUCATION

First, a lack of financial education stems from medical training that lacks any focus on finances. A pre-med undergraduate education, along with med school and residency programs, almost guarantees that, from the ages of 18 to nearly 30, a doctor will not have the time or opportunities within their education to learn about finances when most people would. Beyond that, doctors' busy lifestyles prevent them from learning during their professional careers or even from focusing on finances.

// THE MICHIGAN STUDY

A University of Michigan study found that, on a test of personal finances, medical students scored an average of 38% (probably the lowest score many of them had ever gotten on any exam!). This can be extremely harmful because the National Center for Biotechnology Information explains that over 89% of doctors in their study regulated their finances entirely on their own, therefore making major decisions while lacking financial literacy.

// TARGETED BY INDUSTRY

Lastly, not only do most doctors face this overwhelming lack of financial literacy, with hundreds of thousands in student loan debt, but they are also targeted by those meant to help them with their finances. Jim Dahle explains that nearly all graduates of residency are qualified as "accredited investors," and that a plethora of investments are sold exclusively to them. He goes on to state that doctors are prime targets by virtue of their income, trusting nature, and lack of financial sophistication.

> " *Doctors are prime targets [for financial exploitation] by virtue of their income, trusting nature, and lack of financial sophistication.*
>
> JIM DAHLE · WHITE COAT INVESTOR

// THE MENTAL HEALTH TOLL

The impact of this financial illiteracy can be seen beyond purely numerical concerns, as the Journal of Risk and Financial Management explains that the debt doctors take on were associated with increased rates of emotional weariness, depersonalization, cynicism, depressive symptoms, and burnout.

// A PATH FORWARD

Doctors need help with financial literacy. One of the best ways to provide this help could be to add a required financial literacy course during medical school or to provide unbiased financial advisors to students during residency. Most importantly, however, the stigma around financial literacy in the medical community needs to go. A doctor concerned about money does not necessarily mean they are greedy; it simply means they are concerned about their financial security, which could not only help their future well-being but also their mental health.

// THE THREE CAUSES

- 1 LACK OF FINANCIAL TRAINING
- 2 EXTREME WORKLOAD
- 3 TARGETED BY INDUSTRY

// THE SOLUTION

MED SCHOOL	REQUIRED COURSE
RESIDENCY	UNBIASED ADVISORS
STIGMA	MUST END

UNDER THE WHITE COAT · FINANCIAL VITALS

28%

Almost 1 in 3 doctors making ~$250K/yr are not worth two years of that pay.

BY THE NUMBERS

$239K
MEDIAN TOP-17 INCOME

17/20
TOP US JOBS IN MEDICINE

38%
AVG. SCORE ON FINANCE TEST

89%
DOCTORS SELF-REGULATING

A STIGMA THAT MUST END

“28% of American doctors are worth less than $500,000, despite earning a median income of $239,200.”

LABOR MARKETS AND BANKING

A Wave of Layoffs Hits Finance: Morgan Stanley Cuts 2,500 Jobs

• KAMRYN MORAN '27 • KELLENBERG MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

In January alone, the job market added 126,000 jobs, with an expected 60,000 in February. However, there was a major decline that nobody accounted for, resulting in 92,000 jobs being unexpectedly lost. This set the unemployment rate to 4.4%. With the rise of AI, many people fear losing their jobs because they cannot compete with its efficiency. Despite a slight replacement with AI, this is not always the case during an extensive layoff.

// MORGAN STANLEY'S CUTS

For example, Morgan Stanley, a well-known U.S. investment bank, recently cut 2,500 jobs (roughly 3% of its workforce). The majority of layoffs were based in the Investment Banking and Trading, Wealth Management, and Investment Management units. Financial Advisors were not affected by the cut. Claims have been made that the layoff is due to a shift in business and location priorities, as well as individual performance.

Still, the layoffs confused many, as the company reported $70.6 billion in revenue for 2025, up from $61.8 billion the previous year. From a narrow perspective, the company's growth doesn't necessitate reducing its workforce. Looking at Morgan Stanley's employment history, it is clear why this cut was necessary.

// A POST-PANDEMIC CORRECTION

Backtracking to 2019, Morgan Stanley had about 60,000 employees. In the following years, they experienced a massive increase due to the pandemic and the uncertainty it brought. In 2025, they reported having 83,000 employees. This most recent layoff points to a necessary rectification after the aggressive job hiring rather than a replacement of AI or a decline in the market.

// AN INDUSTRY-WIDE TREND

While this may simply be a post-pandemic correction for the company, other companies have also been affected by a similar trend in workforce reductions. For instance, Citi has announced plans of a potential reduction to 20,000 employees to improve efficiency. Jack Dorsey's Block has cut roughly 40% of the company due to "intelligence tools" which have allowed the company to operate with a smaller team. Similarly, Crypto has laid off 12% of its staff because of a need for AI integration.

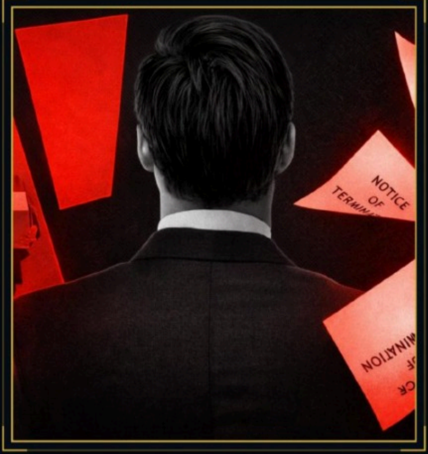
The recent layoff has affected companies across sectors, many of which cite operational restructuring as the reason. Whether it's to incorporate AI and replace certain functions or to improve their financial performance, the beginning of this year has been a challenge for many in the financial industry.

// MS HEADCOUNT TIMELINE

Headcount climbed from 60K (2019) to 83K (2025), then was cut by 2,500 in early 2026.

// THE BIGGER PICTURE

Operational restructuring across finance: AI integration, post-pandemic correction, and efficiency-driven cuts converging at the same moment.



NOTICE OF TERMINATION · THE PINK SLIPS RETURN

2,500

MORGAN STANLEY CUTS
~3% of workforce. The largest single cut of 2026 so far.

JANUARY JOB MARKET

JOBS ADDED	126K
UNEXPECTED LOSS	92K
UNEMPLOYMENT	4.4%

MS FINANCIALS

2025 REVENUE	$70.6B
2024 REVENUE	$61.8B
YOY GROWTH	+14%

OTHER MAJOR CUTS

CITI	~20K
BLOCK	~40%
CRYPTO	12%

MS EMPLOYEE HISTORY

2019	60,000
2025 PEAK	83,000
AFTER CUTS	~80,500
NET ADD	+20,500

CROSS-INDUSTRY 2026 WORKFORCE REDUCTIONS *GLOBAL TREND*

2.5K	**20K**	**40%**	**12%**
MORGAN STANLEY	CITI	BLOCK	CRYPTO
~3% workforce	planned reduction	intelligence tools	AI integration

A POST-PANDEMIC RECKONING

"126,000 jobs added in January.
92,000 unexpectedly lost in February.
The market does not care about the average."

ENERGY AND GEOPOLITICS

The Economics of the War with Iran

• SIMON KLETTER '27 • REGIS HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

Since the start of the military campaign against Iran, natural gas and oil prices have soared, and reports say consumer goods may be next. While the short-term impacts of the war are clear, the question remains: will the burden on the American people increase as the war drags on?

// THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ

Twenty percent of the world's oil and natural gas pass through this Strait. In stopping passage, Iran is acting strategically, though they have shown they are not afraid to set a tanker ablaze. These ships filled with oil can each cost upwards of two hundred million dollars. Therefore, though President Trump has claimed the Strait is currently "safe" and protected, shipping companies do not want to risk a massive loss.

Consumers worldwide feel this pressure. Gas prices in America are up nearly a dollar, and Brent Crude Oil currently sits near 110 dollars per barrel. Fertilizer is up over 30 percent, the long-term effects of which on the global food supply are soon to materialize. The Strait is also a passage for food supporting over 100 million people, with Qatar in the Gulf importing up to 98 percent of food supply through it.

A REGION IN CONFLICT · TEHRAN, ISRAEL, AND THE WEST

// THE COST OF WAR

The war with Iran is already predicted to become the most expensive US war since Afghanistan. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth recently requested 200 billion more dollars from Congress. This follows reports showing nearly 23 billion dollars were spent in the first two weeks alone, with 1 to 2 billion projected per day going forward.

The first long-lasting impact is wartime inflation. Each rising cost in oil, fertilizer, and food fuels broader inflation. As of January 2026, inflation was at 2.4 percent, above the Fed's 2.0 percent target. With Treasury Secretary Bessent promising to not raise taxes, the US returns to borrowing, raising the national debt now over 39 trillion dollars. President Trump, prior to the war, has shown a willingness to cut spending on social welfare programs, so welfare, infrastructure, education, and environmental investments could suffer.

// THE LONG SHADOW

Each impact, whether global or domestic, is not contained however long the war continues. Middle Eastern conflicts in 1973, 1979, and 1990 provide precedent that prices could remain elevated for months to over a year. Repairs to Iran's energy facilities could take 3 to 5 years. The food security crisis will continue for the Gulf, where over 90 percent of food comes through the Strait. Regionally, rebuilding may take decades.

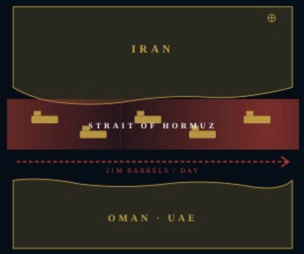
$110
BRENT CRUDE / BBL
Up sharply since campaign start.

20%
OF WORLD OIL VIA HORMUZ
A single strait, a global lifeline.

$200B
HEGSETH'S NEW REQUEST
For continued operations.

$1.5B
SPENT PER DAY OF WAR
Per ongoing DOD projections.

HORMUZ · CHOKE POINT



A 21-mile narrowest point. One in five barrels of global oil.

WAR SPENDING TRAJECTORY

$23B in two weeks. $1 to 2B per day.

A WARTIME LEDGER

"$1 to 2 billion per day, paid for through borrowing on a $39 trillion debt. The most expensive American war since Afghanistan."

BEHAVIORAL FINANCE AND MEDIA

The Good, The Bad, and the Doubtful: Financial Advice on Social Media

• **DANNY BARRIO '27** • REGIS HIGH SCHOOL • ISSUE I, 2026

In 2026, in the age of smartphones and short-form media, "financial advice" is no longer limited to professionals. Anyone with a camera and a confident tone can reach millions through TikTok and Instagram, telling viewers how to invest, which stocks to buy, or how to "get rich quick."

// THE SCALE

The troubling reality is that people act on the advice. According to Vericast, 66 percent of Gen Z investors get their information from TikTok or YouTube, while only 34 percent speak with a financial advisor. The Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia reports videos under "FinTok" have reached 1.4 billion views.

// WHY THEY LISTEN

Psychologists call it social proof: the tendency to look to others' behavior in uncertain situations. Almost half of Gen Z report feeling negatively about their finances after seeing posts from peers, and 46 percent admit posting videos that make their lives look more successful than they really are.

This manufactured success has emotional pull. Lavish lifestyles and oversized returns create a fear of missing out that turns viewers into customers.

THE PERFORMANCE ECONOMY · CURATED LIVES, CURATED ADVICE

// THE MISINFORMATION ENGINE

The problem deepens when content is not just oversimplified but misleading. TikTok runs on virality, not reliability. Complex financial strategies are reduced to 15-second hacks, great for engagement and dangerous for portfolios.

Many creators have no formal qualifications. Most learned a few things on Reddit, then present themselves as experts who prioritize followers over their viewers' interests. Licensed advisors must follow strict guidelines on what they share publicly, which keeps real professionals quiet. Unqualified voices fill the silence.

// THE PATH FORWARD

As financial psychologist Brad Klontz has warned, "young people are listening to financial advice that may be totally inappropriate." Good financial advice is never universal. It must account for income, goals, and debts. The solution is not to avoid social media entirely, but to approach financial advice with deliberate skepticism. Verify the poster, consult official sources, and remember that important decisions should not be based on a 30-second reel.

66%
GEN Z USE TIKTOK / YT
For investment information.

34%
SPEAK WITH AN ADVISOR
Half the rate of social-media use.

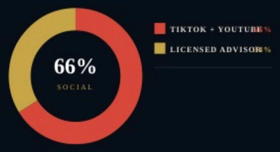
1.4B
"FINTOK" VIEWS
Per the Philadelphia Fed.

46%
POST A FALSE SELF
Gen Z admit faking success online.

TRUST · REACH VS CREDIBILITY

The voices reaching millions are the ones least qualified to speak.

GEN Z · WHERE THEY GET ADVICE



SOURCE · VERICAST · PHILADELPHIA FED

A REEL DECISION

"Two-thirds of Gen Z investors take financial advice from a 30-second reel. The decisions are real. The credentials are not."

A CLOSING WORD

Editor's Note

ISSUE I, 2026

In this edition, we were looking to emphasize how business and wider economic decisions can directly and indirectly shape real world events, often in ways that people overlook.

From private prisons profiting off of incarceration, to AI restructuring jobs, to NAFTA influencing manufacturing communities across the Americas, we highlight how underlying financial incentives and systems drive social, financial, and global consequences.

// WITH GRATITUDE

Thank you to Mr. Cappabianca for helping us with every step of the publication process, from planning to printing. Thank you to Mr. Mariano for helping us with the planning process and allowing us to print at Regis.

This first edition took a tremendous amount of effort, especially in the editing and design layout processes. We are immensely appreciative of the work our writers put into this edition. This publication would not have been possible without you all.

// TO OUR WRITERS

To our dedicated writers, we sincerely apologize to those of you whose work was not published in this issue. This decision was solely due to space and cost limitations, not the quality of submissions. We remain committed to showcasing your work and will continue striving to publish all submissions in future issues.

// ORIGINAL LEADERSHIP

Thank you to Finbar Doyle, Tim O'Sullivan, and the rest of the original Meridian (formerly the 85th St. Journal) leadership team. Your work has constantly inspired us to improve on our own original pieces, and we hope to make your vision of true financial literacy at Regis a reality for both this generation and future generations of Regians.

Sincerely,

Alex Golden · *Caroline Woram* · *Benjamin Louis*

EDITORS

ISSUE I · BY THE NUMBERS

18	4	22	*I*
ARTICLES IN ISSUE	SCHOOLS REPRESENTED	PAGES OF COVERAGE	FIRST OF MANY

NOW RECRUITING WRITERS

If you are interested in writing for the Meridian Financial Review, please email any of the following:

→ agolden27@regis.org → jlouis27@regis.org → carolineworam17@gmail.com

OECONOMICA RATIONE PONIMUS

CONTINUE READING ONLINE

Read our complete archive of articles, weekly market analysis,
and exclusive insights from our full team of writers.

themeridianfinancialreview.org

WEALTH · MARKETS · BUSINESS · CULTURE · EDITORIAL

The Meridian · New York · MMXXVI

"The investor's chief problem, and even his worst enemy, is likely to be himself."

BENJAMIN GRAHAM · THE INTELLIGENT INVESTOR