



# STIFEL *Bits*

May 21, 2025

## The Appetizer

***“Villanova does not have a real NBA prospect on this squad.”***

– Stephen A. Smith talking about the Villanova basketball team in 2016. Knicks players Jalen Brunson, Mikal Bridges and Josh Hart were all on this team ... and now they are in the Eastern Conference Finals.

***Now, on to the numbers. Drum roll, please ...***

- 1.8%: The probability that the Dallas Mavericks would win the **No. 1 draft pick** this June, which they did. The Mavs are expected to draft Duke’s Cooper Flagg.
- 2.3%: The April consumer price index (CPI) **annual inflation rate**, the lowest since 2021.
- 40%: The percentage of Gen Z and millennials that would take a pay cut in exchange for **hybrid or remote work**, according to a LinkedIn survey.
- 1,161: The number of points (roughly 2.8%) the Dow Jones Industrial Average **rose on May 12** after news of the temporary tariff agreement between China and the U.S.
- 4.5: The number of sheep for each **New Zealander**. That’s un-baa-lievable!
- 31.8%: How much of the Japanese stock market that is owned by foreign investors, up from ~5% in the 1970, according to the Tokyo Stock Exchange.

## Dig In

### The Worker Shortage

Have you noticed the Newark Airport delays making headlines? Spoiler: It’s not due to the weather – it’s a **people** problem. Or rather, the lack of them. And it’s not just airports; the U.S. is running low on workers across the board.

We’re talking air traffic controllers, doctors, electricians, teachers, pilots, you name it. Meanwhile, American businesses are cranking out hundreds of thousands of new jobs every month, and the unemployment rate is low at 4.2%, so what’s the problem?

For starters, there’s a skills gap. Companies are struggling to find workers with the right expertise. But the bigger issue? There just aren’t enough people in the labor force. Since the pandemic, labor force participation hasn’t fully bounced back. In other words, we are **missing 1.7 million Americans** from the workforce compared to February 2020.

What’s keeping folks out? A mix of early retirements, an aging population, and yes, even “influencers” contributed some. The pandemic nudged more than **3 million** adults into early retirement. Meanwhile, the share of older Americans **continues to rise**, and in 2020 alone, **two million individuals** made six figures or more on social media. Pff. I wouldn’t be sprinting back to a 9-to-5 either.

While these trends explain part of the labor shortage, there’s more to the story. This is why **Shifting Demographics** is one of our five long-term investment themes.

# Weekly Specials

The **Knicks finally made the Eastern Conference Finals!** It only took 25 years, where we had seven presidential elections, three popes, and the rise and fall of One Direction. Miracles really do happen!

My sister-in-law is Olivia. My cousin? Liam. Same for half the country it seems. These two **names topped baby name charts again in 2024.** Some people try to be unique, naming their kids names like Apple or Stormi, but deep down, we all just want something that sounds like a friendly barista.

A Soviet spacecraft was launched in 1972 to land on Venus. It missed. Badly. It orbited Earth for 50 years, then finally **crash-landed in the Indian Ocean on May 10.**

Most Americans would probably cheer for fewer ultra-processed foods – because who doesn’t want to live longer and pronounce all the ingredients on their snack label? But Health Secretary Robert Kennedy, Jr.’s push for cleaner eats comes with a side of **sticker shock:** In 2024, organic foods were 41% pricier than the regular stuff. As long as they don’t mess with the Oreos recipe, I can live with this.

## Corporate Lunch

**Walgreens** puts **robots** on pill duty as it scripts a comeback.

**AMC** wants to be your hump day hero – 50% off tickets on Wednesdays for **budget-friendly** blockbuster dates.

**Live Nation** drops the beat (and billions) to help **Atlanta’s downtown** make a comeback tour.

**Apple** taps into mind control – literally – with **brainwave tech** that lets you scroll without lifting a finger.

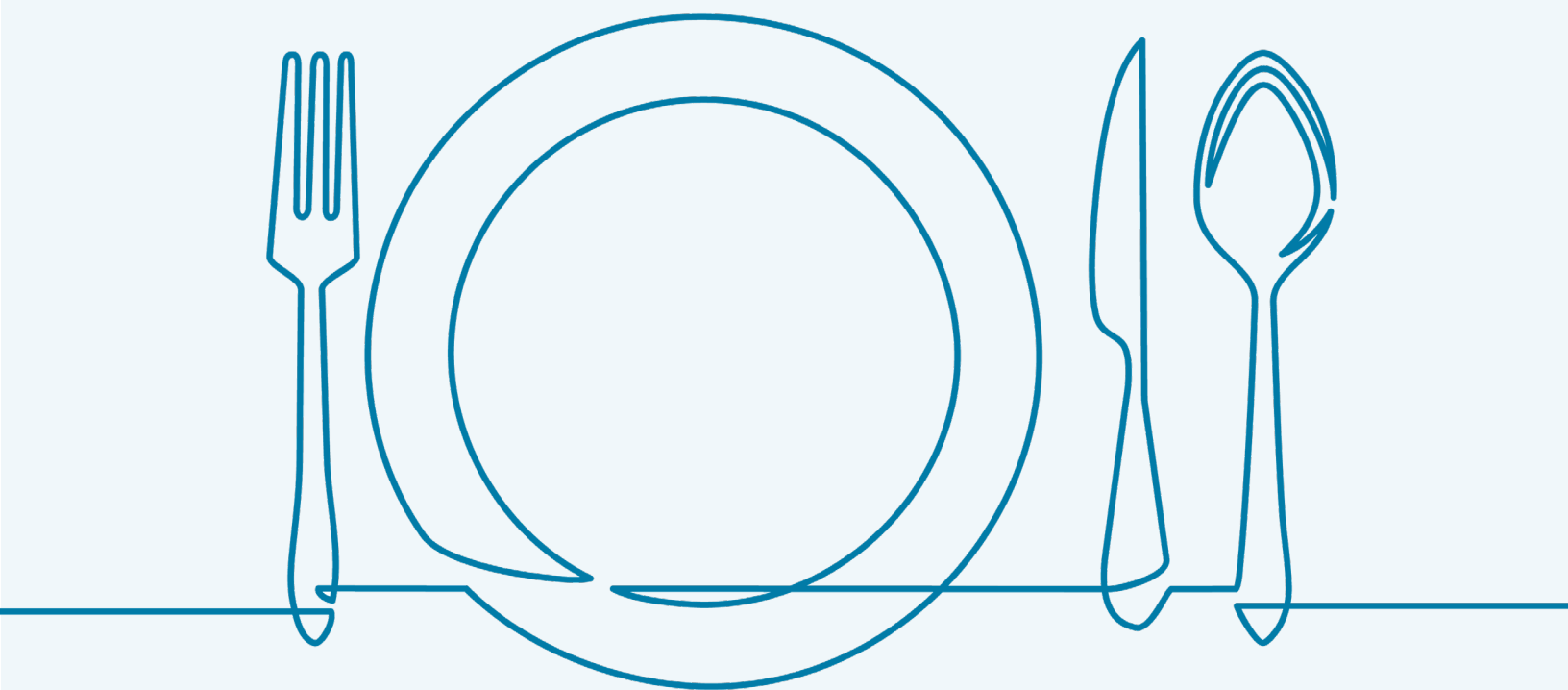
**Dick’s Sporting Goods** laces up to run **Foot Locker** – the sporting goods giant has now stepped into the **sneaker game.**

Michael Jordan is coming out of retirement (for the third time) – but this time with a mic, not a ball, as **NBC Sports’** new **NBA insider.**

Found your **dream trip** on Instagram? **Expedia’s** new AI tool can turn that reel into real plans – hotels and all.

**Airbnb** started with spare rooms – now it’s aiming to help you book your **whole life,** from massages to Michelin-level meals.

A new reason to love Fridays – **TGI Fridays** overhauled its menu and blessed us with an expanded **mozzarella stick** sauce selection and the new all-purpose “TGI Sauce.”



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