Our project compares two graphical interpretations of the 2008 recession produced by the New York Times. Both show how the recession impacted industry and trade, but using different methodologies. At their core, the first and most obvious differentiating factor is the use of two vs. three dimensional displays. As we delve in further, the differences go beyond just an extra dimension on the displays, to the data which was chosen and the structure of the storytelling through different lenses. While the two dimensional representation breaks down impacts and recovery into specific categories (services, media, insurance, housing, etc.) with an American centric focus, the three dimensional representation takes a macro approach by summarizing economic impacts with one statistic, Federal government’s interest rates. Neither way is inherently better or worse. Rather the method of the stories, one told by a macro comparison of international governments and the other a micro breakdown of American industries create different narratives surrounding the same event.

The narrative told by the 255 charts can be summarized as a divided America. When viewing all of the charts, either together or separated, it becomes apparent that almost all sectors of employment and industry took a hit during 2008 and subsequently many have recovered. The visualization tells a story of different sectors in America which have declined and continue to do so in contrast to ones which are thriving. Business, health care, clean energy, and professional services are on the rise while manufacturing, construction, and coal production have been in a continual downwards spiral since 2008. The divide is not necessarily new information, but the visualization shows the extremes and adds quantitative information to the discussion. It tells a story which continues to be at the center of American politics, employment sector division and the deindustrialization of the United States.

Line graphs and area charts are used in this project to display the data. All of the data used for the visualizations was obtained from the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ (BLS) Current Employment Statistics program. The BLS is a government agency which does a sampling of employment around the United States and publishes this report on a monthly basis.

At the top of the page, line charts are utilized with wages on the x-axis and number of jobs on the y-axis. As each line graph moves from left to right it indicates an increase in average salary and as the slope goes upward or downward it shows an increase or decrease in employment. Additionally, a color scale is used to indicate the rate of recovery. The darker the shades of green and red, the more extreme recovery or decline associated with the industry. As a user scrolls down the page, the sectors become separated and specific industries highlighted from within the amalgamation of the 255 lines. Initially, they are separated into anecdotes of employment sectors with titles such as “A Long Housing Bust” and “Black Gold Rush” to emphasize strengths and weaknesses pre and post-recession. At the bottom of the page, each specification within different industries is given a color coded employment area graph. In the separation of job sectors, the user can see a more granular display of exactly which jobs have flourished or diminished. All of the information is displayed on one page and as the user scrolls down it becomes more separated and distinct as compared to an overview of employment in the United States which is provided at the top.