Market Recap

Valuation: More Art than Science



adjusted price-to-earnings ratio 1/(CAPE) – 10-year real rate. CAPE is calculated by dividing the inflation-adjusted price of the S&P 500 Index by the median of the last 10 years' inflation-adjusted earnings. This is a variant of Shiller's P/E ratio. The real rate is the 10-year TIPS yield since 1998 and nominal rates less 36-month trailing inflation before 1998.

Source: PIMCO

Volatility Down in the Face of Higher Returns



Source: Haver Analytics

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In the world of finance, market valuation levels are never static, but ultimately tend to reflect what investors are willing to pay for a company's future profits. Given that these valuation levels represent investors' confidence in the future of a particular company or stock, they naturally tend to fluctuate throughout the business cycle as economic prospects shift. In the context of today's exceptionally low interest rate environment, the real equity risk premium is a useful lens through which to gauge expectations for longer-term stock returns, as this measure adjusts for changing interest rate environments. Following several years of outsized performance, today the real equity risk premium suggests that the stock market is becoming slightly more expensive relative to long-term averages. While valuation alone is not a catalyst for a pullback in the market, investors' increasing enthusiasm for stocks puts greater onus on improving corporate profits to propel the market going forward.

Equity markets hit a near-term bottom in February 2016 as fears of a slowdown in China and plunging oil prices came to a head. Since then, global assets have posted strong returns while experiencing extremely low levels of volatility. Price fluctuations of riskier assets have been relatively subdued compared to their historical averages, even in the face of those higher returns. The Efficient Frontier is a concept representing a set of optimal portfolios that offer the highest expected return for any given level of risk. One key assumption used in the application of this theory is that a higher degree of risk correlates positively with a higher expected return. While nearly every asset class, save for Investment-Grade Bonds, has departed from this expectation in the past 20 months, history would suggest that this deviation will resolve itself over time with either volatility increasing or returns coming down.

10/27/2017

Market Recap

The Rising Costs of Education



Source: BlackRock, College Board

What is Driving the E-Sports Trend?



Source: Sports Redef

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College education costs continue to climb rapidly, with tuition at private, four-year colleges and universities outpacing inflation by an average annual rate of 2.3% (2.8% for public, four-year institutions) over the past 10 years. More importantly, these costs are also rising faster than the average American's income levels, making higher education feel increasingly out of reach for many working families. The reality of these escalating expenses underscores the importance of beginning the college savings process as early as possible, in order to reap the benefits of compound interest. Though saving for college is a costly endeavor, the investment can pay massive dividends long-term. Research from the College Board suggests that the typical bachelor's degree recipient earns approximately 66% more over the course of a 40-year working career than the average high school graduate earns over the same timeframe.

While televised online gaming, or E-Sports, has faced skepticism around its validity as a 'true' sports media product, this debate may miss the broader point. The media business is about viewership volume, and audiences are clearly responding to the online gaming product. Newzoo estimates that 22% of millennial American males watch E-Sports, on par with baseball and hockey in terms of viewership within that demographic. Its growth metrics are impressive, as well, with industry revenue estimated to grow from \$325 million in 2015 to over \$1 billion by 2019 - a trend unlikely to stall anytime soon. Globally, a clear, positive correlation emerges between internet penetration in a region and gaming revenue - greater connectivity organically increases the size of the addressable market. As the world becomes increasingly connected, trends suggest that the market for E-Sports will continue to grow.

10/27/2017

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10/27/2017