

The Boulevardier

A QUARTERLY INVESTORS REPORT FROM THE VECTOR GROUP AT MORGAN STANLEY

MAY 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First Quarter 2022

- **Equity Markets**¹: U.S. equities were volatile through the 1st quarter as the S&P 500 drew down over -10.00% before finishing the quarter -4.60%. International equities fared worse as the MSCI EAFE fell -6.61% in the first quarter, while Emerging Markets fell by -7.32%.
- **Bond Markets**²: High Yield outperformed other areas of credit through the first quarter of 2022 as Sub-Investment Grade bonds returned -4.80%, spreads rose by 43 bps to 3.25% over treasuries. Investment Grade spreads rose more modestly by 24 bps to 1.16% over Treasuries but returned -7.70% due to higher rate sensitivity. The US 10-year bond saw yields increase substantially in Q1, rising by 83 basis points to 2.34%. The yield curve, measured by 30 and 2-year rates, flattened with the spread decreasing by 106 bps throughout the quarter as the 2-year rate rose by 160 bps and the 30-year rate rose by a more modest 54 bps. The Fed moved off the 0.00 lower bound by 25 bps in March to 0.25 – 0.50.
- **Economics**³: The first quarter saw inflation in the spotlight with year over year readings coming in at 7.50%, 7.90%, and 8.50% in January, February, and March respectively. Despite high inflation, aggregate economic expectations were handily surpassed when measured by the Citi Economic Surprise Index, with the benchmark closing the quarter well into positive territory. Housing remained robust, job growth accelerated, Unemployment fell, and Industrial Production was strong. Both Manufacturing and Services moderated in aggregate but remained well in growth territory. Retail Sales performed well in the quarter after an acceleration in January coming off Covid related headwinds in December.
- **Oil**⁴ ended the quarter at \$100.28/barrel WTI, a +33.33% increase from last quarter's close.
- **Gold**⁵ futures closed at \$1954.00/oz., a +6.86% increase for the quarter.

Outlook 2022

- Equity volatility returns after a reprieve in 2021.
- Inflation levels and Federal Reserve policy remain in center stage.
- Recession fears return.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

Paradigm Shift – 1970s Redux?



“Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet.”












– Aristotle

THE VECTOR GROUP *at* MORGAN STANLEY

1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10104 • 212 893-7516 • <https://advisor.morganstanley.com/the-vector-group>

Tactical Ideas for Consideration

for the Appropriate Investor

ASSET CLASS CHOICE	SUB CLASS	IDEAS	CONVICTION ¹
US Equity/Debt/ Cash	Equity	Attractive	
US Equity Size	Larger	Attractive	
Equity Investment	Sectors: Info Tech, Industrials, Financials	Attractive	
Developed Int'l Equity	EuroZone	Neutral	
Emerging Markets	China	Unattractive	
US Gov Bond Market	Long Term	Unattractive	
Municipal Bonds	Medium Duration	Attractive	
High Yield Debt	Various	Unattractive	
Preferred Stocks	QDI Financials	Unattractive	
Mortgage Bonds	Agency	Attractive	
Precious Metals	Gold	Attractive	

NOTE: We have discontinued ranking currencies and alternative investments as a group.

NOTES:

¹  Lowest,  Highest [Increasing number of top hats indicates increasing conviction to the idea]

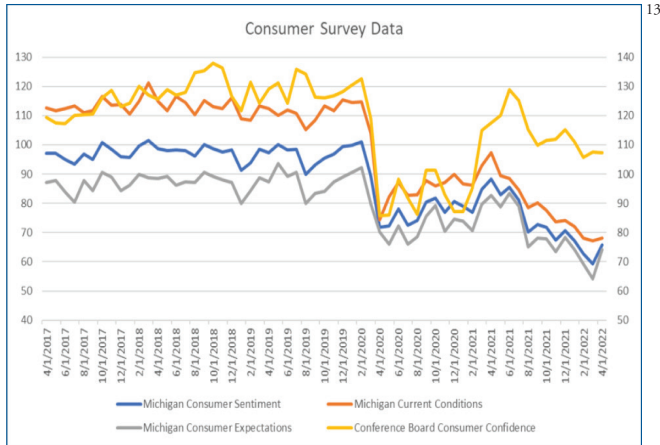
If you are interested in exploring any of the ideas mentioned above, please call. We will discuss if it is appropriate for your specific situation as well as the different investment choices available to gain exposure.

QII 2022 Outlook

After a yearlong hiatus, risk has become the driving theme for the first half of 2022. Inflation, Federal Reserve Policy, war, and recession concern are all driving volatility not seen since the beginning phase of the pandemic.

Inflation & The Consumer

It's no secret that elevated inflation is a major concern. Consumer Confidence, and to an even greater extent Consumer Sentiment, have fallen meaningfully to begin the year, due in large part to current inflation readings. Both subindices of Consumer Sentiment, Current Conditions and Expectations have fallen to record lows³. This paints a dour picture for consumer behavior should inflation continue at its torrid pace.



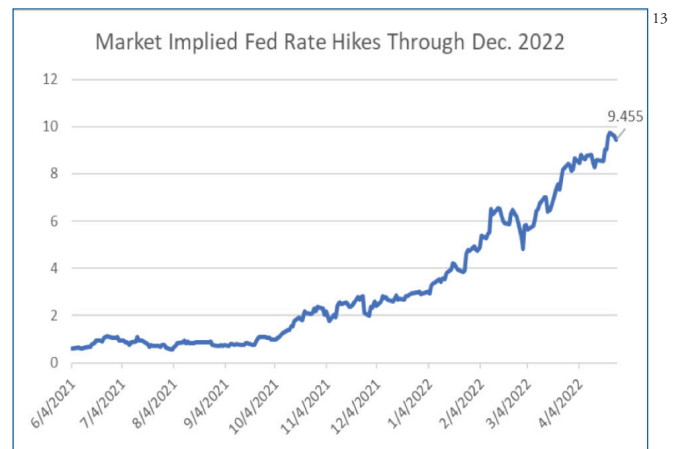
The good news is that we should not be left in limbo too long figuring out inflation's forward trend. The May 2021 reading of CPI was the first to hit

	CPI Y/Y
1/31/2021	1.40
2/28/2021	1.70
3/31/2021	2.60
4/30/2021	4.20
5/31/2021	5.00
6/30/2021	5.40
7/31/2021	5.40
8/31/2021	5.30
9/30/2021	5.40
10/31/2021	6.20
11/30/2021	6.80
12/31/2021	7.00
1/31/2022	7.50
2/28/2022	7.90
3/31/2022	8.50

5.00% on a year over year basis³. This is where one would expect readings to begin receding from peak levels. If this were to materialize, it would be a welcome site to consumers. Should it not, the implications will be far reaching.

The Federal Reserve & Interest Rates

The primary implication of continued elevated inflation will be felt by the Federal Reserve. Prior to the November 2021 committee meeting, inflation was viewed by the organization to be "transitory." This led to modest expectations in the eventual tightening cycle they would pursue. This messaging was drastically altered in November with the removal of the term transitory. To combat inflation, market expectations for rate hikes were aggressively moved forward and as elevated CPI readings continued to come in through the beginning months of 2022, talks of 50 and even 75 bp hikes have become commonplace. As it sits now, the market is expecting between 9 & 10 25 basis point rate hikes through Dec. 2022¹³. If inflation were to continue at current levels, the pace of tightening would be forced to move at an increasingly aggressive pace. Should CPI come down as base effects take hold, market expectations for Fed tightening would likely become too aggressive.

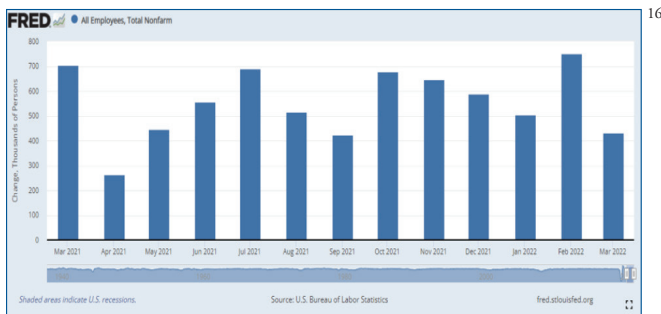
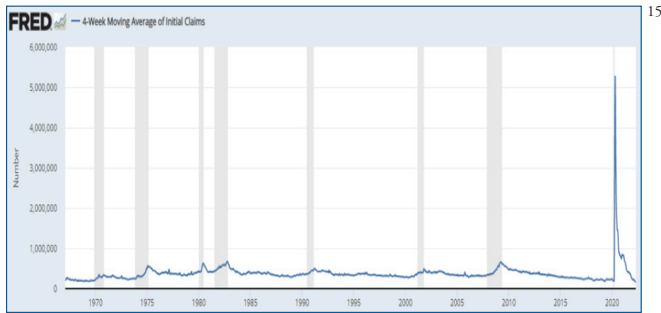


Recession Fears

Elevated inflation, poor consumer sentiment, and aggressive Fed tightening policy has rightfully stoked recession fears. As the S&P 500 finds itself down -10.43% through April 25th from closing highs set January 3rd 2022¹⁴, the aggregate economy becomes increasingly important in dictating the eventual direction of risk assets.

A core tenant of our economic view is employment. It would be an historic outlier for the U.S. to enter a recession with improving employment. Non-Farm payrolls grew by 431m jobs in March, while the February reading was revised up to 750m adds¹⁵. The February number was good for the highest reading since the immediate aftermath of the Covid-19 related shutdowns¹⁵. In

addition, Unemployment Claims have held consistent at 50-year lows¹⁶ while Job Openings sit at historically elevated levels¹⁷. In aggregate, this suggests companies are hiring at a rapid pace, while employees are retaining jobs. Concurrently, job openings suggest there is substantially more hiring possible. This paints an extremely positive view of employment as it currently stands and moving forward.



Additional data points that suggest strength in the aggregate U.S. economy include Industrial Production, Housing Starts, Truck Tonnage, and the Leading Economic indicator. In March, Industrial Production hit new highs growing by 5.50% Year over Year³. New housing starts grew by 1.793mm reaching a new post-global financial crisis high³. Truck Tonnage, which represents approximately 70% of all U.S. freight, grew by 2.40% in March, reaching levels not seen since prior to the

pandemic³. The Conference Board Leading Economic Index, which aggregates 10 forward looking data releases seeking to be predictive of turning points in the business cycle, also hit new highs in March³. Despite a pessimistic consumer, elevated inflation and a Federal Reserve aggressively removing accommodative policy, there are several significant aspects of the U.S. economy suggesting a recession is unlikely in the immediate future.

Implication

Whether the U.S. moves into a recession or not is crucial for risk assets as we move forward. Historical standards suggest that this will ultimately decide the direction of equity markets. From 1950 through 2021, drawdowns of -10% in the S&P 500, where the economy was not in a recession, have tended to produce greater than average forward returns over the following 12 months¹³. During the same time frame, the opposite is true with -10% drawdowns that were met with a recession¹³. A caveat, however, is that since the S&P 500's inception, about half of -10% drawdowns turn into -15% drawdowns, whether there is a recession or not¹³. In other words, volatility is not always absolved by strength in the economy. It has, however, tended to resolve it to the upside.

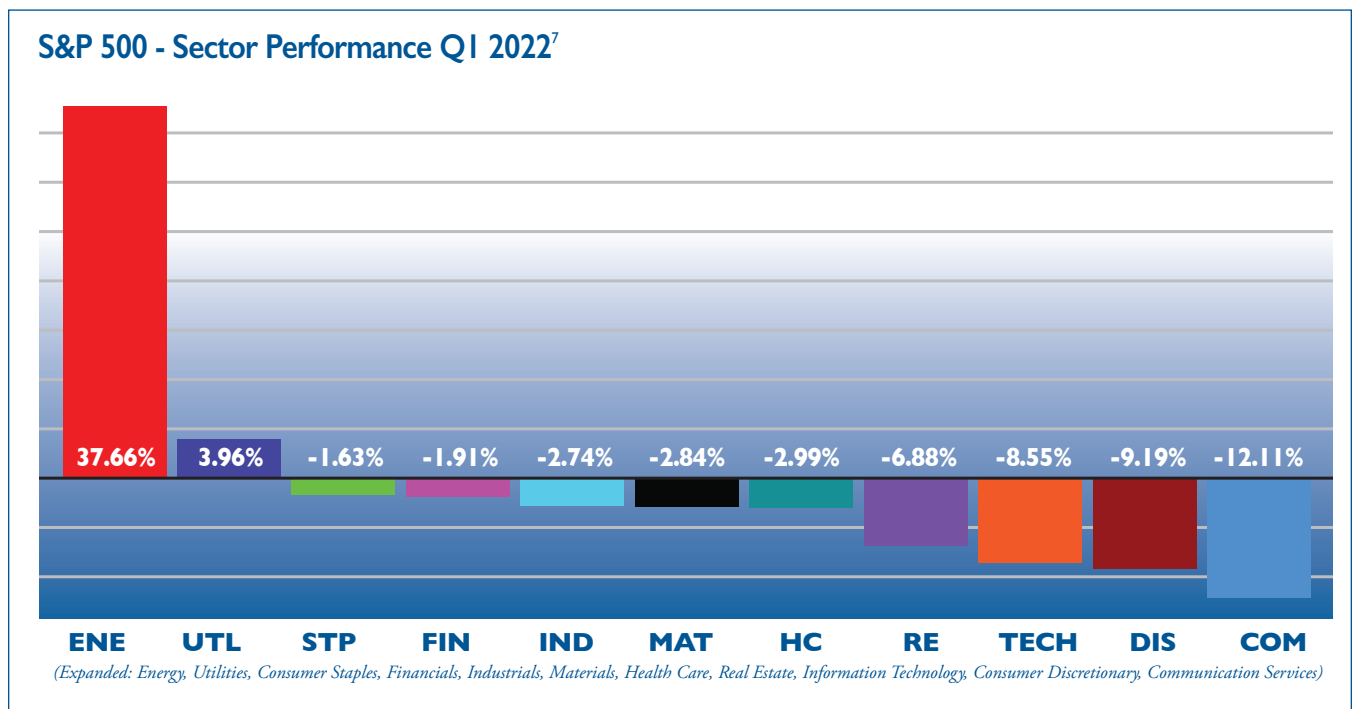
In summary, the path forward looks to hinge on inflation readings and the effect this has on the consumer as well as the Federal Reserve's policy stance. Coupled with the underlying strength in employment and other areas of the economy, positive resolution would provide support moving forward.

MARKET ACTION

US Equity Markets

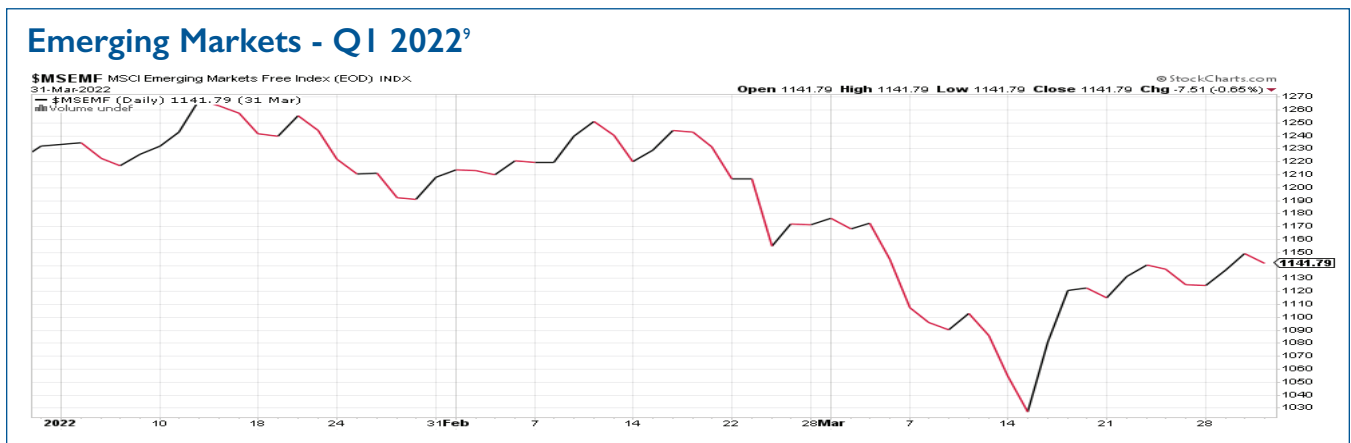


The S&P 500 fell -4.60% in the first quarter of 2022¹. Outperforming sectors include Energy and Utilities, while Information Technology, Consumer Discretionary, and Communication Services underperformed.



Other Equity Markets

MSCI EAFE underperformed the US by 201 basis points in the fourth quarter, falling -6.61%¹.



Emerging Markets underperformed the US by 272 basis points while also underperforming Developed International Markets by 71 basis points in the first quarter, falling -7.32% by the MSCI EM Index¹.



Energy Markets

WTI Crude Price/Barrel & Gasoline Price/Gallon Q1 2022⁴



Energy prices were volatile in the first quarter as WTI rose +33.33% while Gasoline futures rose +41.57%⁴.

Precious Metals

Gold ended the quarter gaining +6.86% while Silver ended with a gain of +7.62%⁵.

Gold & Silver - Q1 2022⁵



Bond Markets

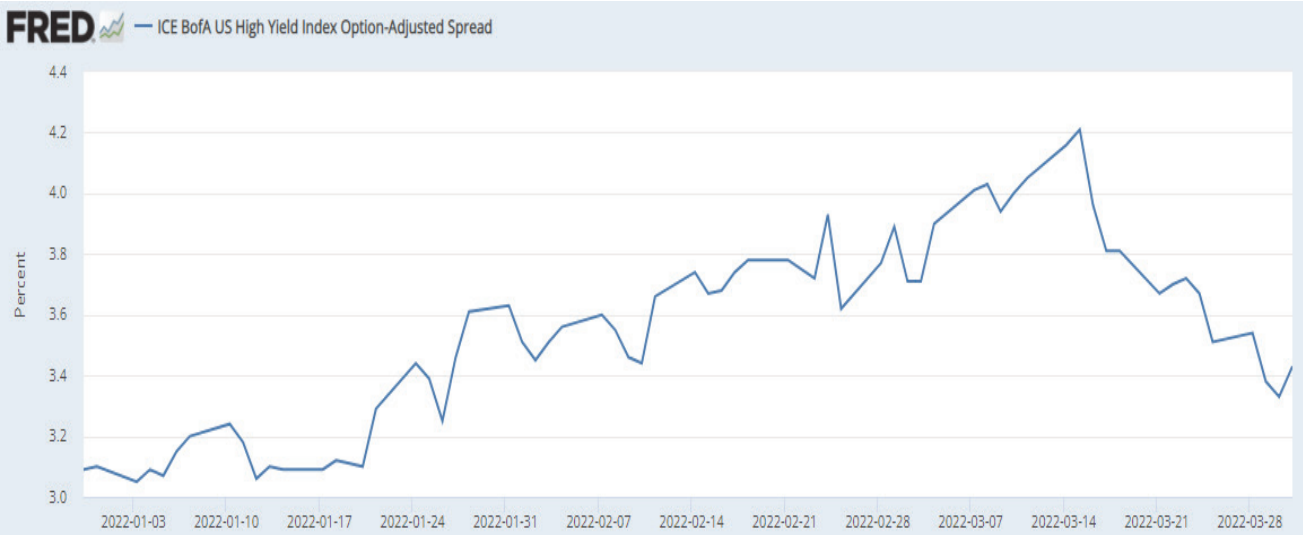
Ten-Year Treasury Yields rose by 83 bps throughout the quarter to 2.34% while the Two-Year Rate rose sharply by 160 bps to 2.33%².

Ten Year & 2 Year Treasury Yield - Q1 2022¹¹



High Yield spreads rose by 42 bps³.

High Yield Corporate Debt Option-Adjusted Spread - Q1 2021¹²



Paradigm Shift - 1970s Redux?

The phrase “paradigm shift” is one of the scariest to humans. It is a rethinking of whatever assumptions we’ve made in life about whatever it is we do – social norms, environmental issues and of course, investing. If tomorrow’s investment process is different from today’s, we may be in danger of choosing the wrong assets from which to gain, grow or receive income. As investors, we all fear missing any important shifts in thinking of how to select securities in which we can invest (or which we want to divest).

At the moment, the paradigm under question is the low-inflation/high growth environment in which we have been. We have enjoyed a long period of growth in part fueled by low interest rates and business investment that yields high growth returns. The greatest current concern is how inflation and interest rate actions affect asset valuation – the higher the interest rate, the lower the present value of the asset so the thinking goes.

To help navigate these times, as always, we try to find periods in history with similar characteristics to help find clues to the outcomes of the current environment. Since recent history has little or no occurrences of high inflation, one must travel back a number of years to find real sustained inflationary pressure in the US economy. Although we had moderate inflation in the mid-2000s, inflation for the last 30+ years has been quite tame. Sustained, persistent inflation hasn’t been seen since the early 1980s. If we look at the 1970s as a guide (lord help us), we could be in for an ugly ride. But I don’t think this is the case.

1970s

Inflation in the 1970s was caused by a confluence of factors. Among them were: 1) recovery from a high-spending period including funding the “Great Society” and the war in Vietnam; 2) wage-price controls initiated in 1971; 3) major oil price spikes; 4) the end of the Bretton Woods System (ratified in 1976) and release from the gold standard 1971-3; and probably most importantly 5) poor monetary policy and reaction to economic shocks. This was a decade of economic stagnation and price inflation which produced one of the toughest economic environments since the great depression of the 1930s.

The current environment has some similarities to that of the 1970s: oil price shocks (although not nearly as severe) and a previous period of high government spending (the end of QE and covid-induced assistance).

But one key thing these periods do not have in common is that current inflationary pressures have come about through exogenous forces that will likely abate (supply chain issues, production ramp

up and access to natural resources). While it is all too possible that current efforts to reign this in result in an economic downturn (in fact this is the goal of the Federal Reserve’s action), I believe a recession or pullback will be somewhat shallow and short-lived. I base this on the underlying structure of the US and global economy, which I’ll devote more time to in later newsletters.

One other important thing we have today which we did not have in the previous era is a playbook drawn specifically from the 1970s era for monetary policy. As Milton Friedman points out, Monetary Policy alone counted for most of the missteps of this period and the current focus is how to avoid these issues. This doesn’t mean we will see perfect execution here, but I suspect the longer-term structure of inflation (I’ve mentioned my thesis on long term inflation in the modern era in these pages) seems likely to return to lower levels in the not-too-distant future (2-3+% annually). This can of course mean elevated volatility in the stock and bond markets for over a number of quarters before we find a meaningful bottom.

A word about the “Nifty Fifty” comparison

During the 1960s and 1970s there were a group of roughly 50 large cap US stocks that were deemed stable “blue chip” companies that one could buy and hold with some assurances that they would always return favorable results. These names commanded often 40 – 60 x price earnings multiples given their exalted status. It is important to note that these were not considered just growth names, with higher multiples in earlier stages of market maturity – they were across many industries some in various stages of maturation already. Ultimately, as a group, they performed poorly in the market downturns of the 1970s.

When I think about the comparison of the current FMAAMMNGG (or whatever) to the “Nifty Fifty” of the 1960s-1970s I am reminded of much higher valuations of the latter that resulted in poor performance for a number of years. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of those 50 or so companies exist today and still play a significant role in our economy.

My best guess on the US stock market is while prices may decline a bit further, they currently represent good value in many areas in the long run. As always, there are stocks that may be overvalued (while a few remain in super high growth areas, others may be in energy and materials, given recent runups) but there again individual company selection now means more than ever. These are times when I believe active management can help make or save investors a lot of money.

—MDS

NOTES:

- 1 Morgan Stanley Investment Resources. Month-End Asset Return Analysis published 1 April 2022. Sources: Morgan Stanley & Co. Research, Bloomberg, and FactSet. Index returns reflect total return as of 3/31/2022.
- 2 Morgan Stanley Research. US Corporate Credit Strategy Chartbook published 1 April 2022. Sources: Morgan Stanley & Co. Research, Bloomberg, Citigroup Index LLC, and iBoxx. Index returns reflect total return as of 3/31/2021.
- 3 Factset Research Systems. Economics: United States. Data as of 3/31/2022.
- 4 StockCharts.com, Inc., Market data provided by Interactive Data Corporation, StockCharts.com, SharpChart of (SWTIC) Light Crude Oil – Continuous Contract (EOD) and (\$GASO) Gasoline Unleaded – Continuous Contract (EOD), data as of 3/31/2022.
- 5 StockCharts.com, Inc., Market data provided by Interactive Data Corporation, StockCharts.com, SharpChart of Gold (\$GOLD) Gold – Continuous Contract (EOD) and (\$SILVER) Silver - Continuous Contract (EOD), data as of 3/31/2022.
- 6 StockCharts.com, Inc., Market data provided by Interactive Data Corporation, SharpChart of S&P 500 (\$SPX), data as of 3/31/2022.
- 7 StockCharts.com, Inc. Market data provided by Interactive Data Corporation, StockCharts.com, PerfChart of S&P 500 Information Technology Sector Index (\$SPT), S&P 500 Consumer Discretionary Sector Index (\$SPCC), S&P 500 Health Care Sector Index (\$SPHC), S&P 500 Information Utilities Sector Index (\$SPU), S&P 500 Consumer Staples Sector Index (\$SPST), S&P 500 Materials Sector Index (\$SPM), S&P 500 Industrials Sector Index (\$SPI), S&P 500 Financial Index (\$SPF), S&P 500 Communication Services Sector Index (\$SPTS), S&P 500 Energy Sector Index (\$SPEN), and S&P 500 Real Estate Sector Index (\$SPRE), data from 12/31/2021 through 3/31/2022.
- 8 StockCharts.com, Inc. Market data provided by Interactive Data Corporation, iShares MSCI EAFE Index (\$MSEAFE), StockCharts.com, data as of 3/31/2022.
- 9 StockCharts.com, Inc., Market data provided by Interactive Data Corporation, SharpChart of MSCI Emerging Markets Free Index (\$MSEMF), data as of 3/31/2022.
- 10 PerfCharts of Shanghai Composite Index (\$SSEC), Brazil Bovespa Index (\$BVSP), Nifty 50 Index (\$NIFTY), and Russia TS Index (\$RTSI), data from 12/31/2021 through 3/31/2022.
- 11 StockCharts.com, Inc., Market data provided by Interactive Data Corporation, StockCharts.com, SharpChart of CBOE 10-Year US Treasury Yield Index (\$TNX) & (\$UST2Y) 2-Year US Treasury Yield (EOD), data as of 3/31/2022.
- 12 FRED. ICE BofA US High Yield Index Option-Adjusted Spread. Data as of 3/31/2022.
- 13 Bloomberg. Data as of 3/31/2022.
- 14 FactSet Research Systems. Data as of 3/31/2022.
- 15 FRED. All Employees, Total Nonfarm Monthly Change. Data as of 3/31/2022.
- 16 FRED. 4-Week Moving Average of Initial Claims. Data as of 4/16/2022.
- 17 FRED. Job Openings: Total Nonfarm. Data as of 2/28/2022.

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THE VECTOR GROUP
at MORGAN STANLEY

M. David Sherrill, CFA®, CMT®

*Managing Director
Senior Portfolio Management Director
International Client Advisor (ICA)
Private Wealth Advisor
212 893-7515
M.David.Sherrill@morganstanley.com*

Daniel Sheldon, CFA®

*First Vice President
Financial Advisor
212 492-6934
Daniel.Sheldon@morganstanley.com*

Greg Waldman

*Senior Vice President
Financial Advisor
212 705-4561
greg.waldman@morganstanley.com*

Lindsey Paesano

*Financial Advisor
212 705 4572
lindsey.paesano@morganstanleypwm.com*

1290 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10104 • 212 893-7516

<https://advisor.morganstanley.com/the-vector-group>