



## *Fighting for Financial Independence*

In America, the idea of “independence” is almost sacred. Every July 4<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate the start of the United States’ long road towards independence and control of its own interests.

When people make plans for the future, many put “financial independence” as their ultimate goal. But much like national independence, financial independence—living without the need to work for someone else—takes years of struggle against huge challenges.

Here are some of the essential concepts to help you win your war for financial independence. Each one battle-tested and proven effective by that other great struggle for independence: the American Revolution.

**Coordinate your attack** – Winning a war takes success on all fronts. If you neglect a certain area of your finances, all your progress could be completely undermined. For instance, going to great lengths to secure higher income for yourself becomes pointless if it forces your expenses to grow even faster. Even though you are worth more, your net worth will decrease and it will take more time to reach your goal. Every part of your financial plan needs to work together to secure victory in the shortest amount of time. **(Siege of Yorktown, 1781)**

**Seize opportunities to advance** – Sometimes a great financial opportunity appears, but we are too nervous to take advantage of the situation. Although caution is useful, having the courage to commit to a solid investment can pay huge dividends in the future. Watch for financial opportunities, judge them rationally and make a bold move if everything looks good. **(Battle of Saratoga, 1777)**

**You can lose a battle and still win the war** – Both financial plans and military strategies must survive setbacks and short-term problems on their way to a long-term goal. If generals completely changed their campaigns

# JULY

every time something went wrong, no army would ever accomplish its objectives. Don’t let temporary market downturns or sudden expenses cause you to panic or abandon your goals. Expect difficulties and learn to push through, even when things are disrupted. **(Battle of Bunker Hill, 1775)**

**Keep your morale up** – Staying disciplined with saving, planning and investing is difficult in even the best of times. But if your attitude turns negative, you’ll never be able to reach the level of independence you desire. When things get tough, try to focus on the future and how great things will be when you reach your goals. Don’t forget to regularly reward your efforts; it’s better to occasionally deviate from your plans than to get worn out and give up entirely. **(Winter at Valley Forge, 1777-8)**

**Drill your actions** – As with all things, practice makes permanent. Habits take time to develop, so keep trying to put your financial plans into practice. If you continually allow or encourage yourself to break your rules, you’ll be creating bad habits that could end up being costly. Training is about getting so comfortable with an action that you can perform it in the middle of chaos. **(Baron von Steuben, 1730-1794)**

**Get creative** – The most impressive victories are the ones that an enemy never saw coming. Traditional tactics can work well in most situations, but taking time to find an original approach to your goals can get you to financial independence faster and more efficiently than anyone expected. **(Battle of Cowpens, 1781)**

The fight for financial freedom takes hard work, discipline and sacrifice. It’s a war unlike anything else, but its values are nothing new. By understanding the challenge and adapting the lessons of the past, we can learn how to keep winning independence for the future.

# the market at a glance

## JUNE

**U.S. Large Cap**  
(Dow Jones Industrial Average)

**17,619.51** (-2.17%) ▼

**U.S. Mid/Small**  
(Russell 2000)

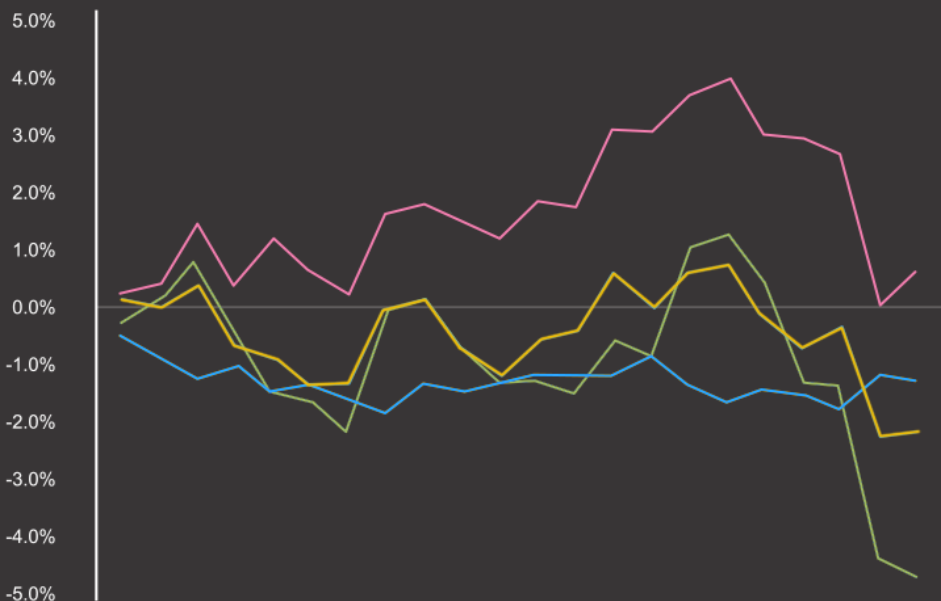
**1,253.95** (0.60%) ▲

**Foreign Large**  
(MSCI EAFE Index Fund)

**63.49** (-4.73%) ▼

**Bond Market**  
(Barclays Aggregate Bond Fund)

**108.78** (-1.26%) ▼



*Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Indices are unmanaged and cannot be invested into directly.*

## the market in action

- Bailout talks between Greece and other Eurozone countries break down in the last days of the month, just before Greece is scheduled to default on its debt. Global market volatility jumps as investors see the conflict as a potential threat to the stability of the entire Eurozone.
- Intel, the world's largest manufacturer of microchips, agrees to buy rival chipmaker Altera Corp. for \$16.7B. The move comes shortly after the merger of tech giants Avago Technologies and Broadcom Corporation.
- Reports show that U.S. auto sales climbed to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 17.79M in May, the highest rate since 2005.
- The Federal Trade Commission reaches a settlement in its first case involving a "crowdfunding" project. The suit was levied against a board game creator who used money raised on crowdfunding-site Kickstarter for personal expenses and never delivered a finished product. Kickstarter, which merely acts as facilitator for crowdfunding projects, was not targeted by the suit.
- Prince al-Waleed bin Talal of Saudi Arabia pledges to donate his \$32B fortune to charity. One of the richest men in the world, the prince says his charitable efforts will focus on gender equality, world health and disaster relief.
- General Electric moves to sell its private-equity business to the Canadian Pension Plan Investment Board in a \$12B deal. General Electric says the sale will allow the company to refocus on its core businesses.
- In an effort to combat a sudden market downturn and slowing growth, China lowers its bank borrowing rates for the fourth time in the past seven months.



## China: More Money, More Problems

When it comes to economic growth, no country can compare to China. The country's expansion over the past quarter-century has been staggering, posting annual GDP growth rates between 7.4 and 14.3 percent. What makes the growth rate even more impressive is the scale on which it's happening: China is the world's most populous country, home to approximately 1.3 billion people.

Although it is mostly communist, China has tried to introduce more free-market principles into its economy. It has encouraged—and limited—its citizens to make domestic investments. The government knows that if it can attract foreign investment while keeping Chinese capital within the country, it could perpetuate economic growth. The only question is how difficult it will be for citizens to integrate financial markets into their lives.

### The Sharp Climb

So far, China's market behavior has been extremely volatile. The county experienced a massive stock bubble in 2006-07 that sent the Shanghai Index up more than 400 percent in just 21 months. When the government suspected moved to temper the growth rate, the market panicked and the index dropped 70 percent from its peak in less than a year; its performance remained stagnant for years after.

But as one bubble deflated, another began to ramp up. Real estate—already widely promoted and used as an investment—became the only sensible investment a person could make. Purchasing apartments became (and continues to be) frenzied. Developers built dozens of still-uninhabited “ghost cities,” solely to meet the demand for real estate property.

Then, in late 2014, stocks found renewed popularity when the Chinese government opened Shanghai's stock market to foreign investors. Although the government limited the amount of foreign capital that could be spent on the market each day, stock prices began to rise quickly. This caught the attention of Chinese citizens, who began pouring money into the market. The Shanghai Index took off like a rocket, more than doubling in the seven months from mid-November 2014 to mid-June 2015.

### Partying Like It's 1999

So what's the problem? Isn't the Chinese economy expected to continue growing? While many economists believe China has a bright long-term future, there are serious concerns about the “irrational exuberance” of the Chinese investor. By April 2015, the Shanghai Index looked like the dot-com Nasdaq of the late 1990s: stock prices were extremely high and a huge number of ordinary Chinese citizens had begun to use margin accounts so they could borrow money to invest.

Starting in mid-June, the Chinese market began to take major steps back. Within two weeks, the Shanghai index dropped nearly 20 percent from its high. Where the market will move in the coming months and years is anyone's guess. Despite the government's direct involvement in the economy, China's markets seem to be impossible to control.

### The Learning Curve

From an American perspective, China's volatility and repeated involvement with bubbles may seem foolish. But before we judge China too harshly, we should think about some of the underlying factors that lead to this “wild” financial behavior.

China has a staggering amount of money to invest and citizens that are unsure how to invest it. The average Chinese person saves almost 10 times as much of their income as the average American but has no experience with things like “trading,” “margin accounts” or “investment risk.” Since investment options are limited, those encouraged/allowed by the government are going to experience a lot of buying pressure.

Ultimately, China is a unique country going through difficult economic transitions. Despite wielding the second largest GDP in the world, China is still trying to understand the basics of investing. Its markets are unlike anything the world has seen before, and trying to define or predict its “bubbles” may be pointless. All of its dramatic movements are the result of 1.3 billion people trying to make the best choices available to them.



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