

# Arts

IDEAS

## BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITIES

**We make three critical choices in our modern, globalized lives. One's job: What to do? One's partner: Who to do it with? One's home: Where to live?**

JOE BERRIDGE

March 15, 2008

WHO'S YOUR CITY?

How the Creative Economy is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life

By Richard Florida

Random House Canada,

**Print Edition - Section Front**



Richard Florida is a phenomenon. An intellectual entrepreneur, a travelling road show with a fully outfitted website, there is no academic quite like him in Canada. Which is where the author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* chose to move last year, to the

University of Toronto, his arrival fêted by everyone from Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty on down. He is a major catch.

Florida thinks about cities, about why they are important and what makes them successful. His first book crystallized a simple idea and introduced it, to general acceptance. The successful city is not the one that has the lowest taxes, cheapest labour or most functional efficiency, but rather the place that can best offer the wealth-creators of the modern economy, those key knowledge workers, a sympathetic place to live.

That creative class wants tolerance, nightlife, parks, culture high and low, great places to eat and talented people to meet. It's been a powerful idea. Florida's influence on Toronto was felt long before he moved here, fuelling the collective will to fix the waterfront, build the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Opera House, and to undertake all the other cultural initiatives that are making the city more attractive to people who can choose to live anywhere.

*Who's Your City?* carries on from that conclusion. We make three critical choices in our modern, globalized lives. One's job: What to do? One's partner: Who to do it with? And the third, no less important, as it vitally affects the first two, which city: Where to live?

The first part of the book is an intriguing exploration of the global geography of the new urban world. Florida takes issue with the premise of Thomas Friedman's bestseller on globalization, *The World is Flat*, although he shares that breezy, generous, anecdotal delivery, a style guaranteed to give conventional academics heartburn.

The world is not flat; it is spiky. Florida has the maps to prove it, plotting the highly localized distribution of GDP, patent applications and top-ranked scientists by city rather than by country. Greater Tokyo is the equivalent of the third-biggest economy in the world. Seoul, New York, San Francisco, Boston and Tokyo dominate the world's production of innovation. Top scientific brains live in the Boston-Washington corridor, San Francisco, London, Amsterdam, Paris and Tokyo again. (Toronto and Vancouver make the middle/top ranks on his charts, performing distinctly above average.) It is not the choice of country that is important for individual economic, cultural or even marital success, but the city.

Not that the term "city" is an adequate description any longer; mega-regions, agglomerations of large urban areas, are emerging as the production units of the ideas economy, places far more significant than the countries that contain them. Florida has some truly ugly names for them: Bos-Wash, Lon-Leed-chester, Barce-Lyon and our very own Tor-Buff-chester.

What that regional city status masks, Florida acknowledges, is the extreme differences in culture, income and social prospects increasingly occurring within cities, rather than between countries. The residents of New York's Upper West Side, London's Islington and Toronto's Cabbagetown may share an effortless, distanceless commonality, but so too do

their South Bronx, Peckham and Malvern neighbourhoods. It may indeed be less globalization than the imperatives of the knowledge economy that exacerbate inequality.

Florida maps the uneven distribution of education in the United States. Cities with high percentages of university graduates are prosperous cities, since without postsecondary education, it is increasingly impossible to earn a living wage. Well-educated people marry well-educated people, doubling both their good fortune and that of their chosen city.

The policy implications of Florida's work have not been lost on cities, even if they are on our federal government. Cities are in competition for brains and must do what it takes to get them.

The second part of *Who's Your City?* is less compelling, particularly for Canadians; it's a guide on how to choose which city is for you, using largely examples from the United States. Like all self-help books, it suffers from the assertive blandness of soft psychologizing. In judging a city's educational offerings, Florida notes, "Studies have shown time and again that expanding one's mind can add years to your life." Maybe he should stick just a bit closer to academe.

Florida has clearly made an informed personal choice about where to live. And one thing else is clear. He is in love, passionately, intelligently, endearingly, with Toronto. And he counts the ways, not only in this informative, insightful, imaginative book, but in his frequent columns for this newspaper. For that he is to be welcomed, and thanked for putting a spring back in the step of our city, the over-abused husband of the Canadian family. It's nice to hear those words again.

*Joe Berridge is a partner at Urban Strategies Inc., and working on projects in Toronto, London and Ireland.*

**An excerpt from *Who's Your City* appears in today's Focus section.**