

RICHARD FLORIDA: It's Up To The Cities To Bring America Back

[Richard Florida](#)

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This editorial is part of our GREAT DEBATE feature ['What Resource Do We Most Need For Our Future?'](#)

Some will make the case for renewable energy, or science and technology, or even fresh water, but I take a longer view.

Our most important resource is us – or to be more precise, the creative potential that is in every human being.

What brought us down from the trees and out of the caves eons ago is our capacity to innovate and invent—the ability, latent in all of us, that allows us to devise new tools and to organize and develop our thoughts. It will secure our future as well—provided that we don't outsmart ourselves.

Everyone is creative to one degree or another, and everyone has the need and the right to express their creativity. Creativity is not only infinitely renewable, it is a great leveler. It both subverts and sustains civilization, annihilating the categories of race, gender, ethnicity and class that we have imposed on ourselves. It can't be handed down; nor can it be owned in the traditional sense. We have no way of knowing who the next creative geniuses will be or where they will come from.



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Yet to reward the creativity of only the artistic, scientific and entrepreneurial elite, as our society has done until now, is to squander the vast reservoirs of creativity that lie untapped in everyone. The Creative Class, people engaged in high skill, high pay occupations ranging from professional, management and knowledge work to science and technology, arts, culture, design and entertainment, accounts for about a third of our workforce and receive some 50 percent of our wages.

But more than 60 million Americans toil in low-wage, low-skill service jobs in everything from food prep and retail sales to personal care. We can transform them into good, family sustaining jobs, the same way we made manufacturing jobs good jobs decades ago, by *creativifying* them—tapping the knowledge and creativity of workers as a source of productivity, which in turn will generate higher wages.

Our school system was designed in the Nineteenth century to socialize immigrants and provide them with the skills they needed to work on production lines. It is badly broken – a giant creativity-squelching machine—and must be retooled from the bottom up, no more tinkering at the margins. Our schools should stoke their students’ passions, unleash their talents, and nurture their creative and entrepreneurial potential.

And yes, we need to address the financialization of our economy and remake the corporation, shifting it from its focus on share value and transforming it into an organizational vehicle for harnessing and leveraging human potential.

But the real key to unleashing our creativity lies in humanity’s greatest invention – the city. Cities are veritable magnetrons for creativity. Great thinkers, artists, and entrepreneurs—the Creative Class writ large – have always clustered and concentrated in cities. Deeper in our past the concentration of people in cities not only powered advances in agriculture, but led to the basic innovations in tool-making and the rudimentary arts that came to define civilization.

The past century or so was a giant step backward on this score. [Once-great cities](#) became veritable hostages of the old industrial order, which put housing and cars before people, spurred suburban sprawl, emptying many cities in the process, and then promoted faux urban renewal around white elephant sports stadiums, convention centers, Disneyfied malls, and now even casinos.

[But cities are coming back](#), fueled by the mass migration of talent and creative people. The nerdistan model of high-tech suburbia (Silicon Valley, the Route 128 beltway) is shifting towards urban tech as young engineers, innovators, and venture capital have started flowing to places like downtown [San Francisco and New York](#), inner city Boston, and London and Berlin. The reason is simple: real cities have real neighborhoods. They are filled with the flexible old buildings that are ideal for incubating new ideas. They are made up of mixed use, pedestrian scale neighborhoods that literally push people out into the street, cafes and other third places, encouraging the serendipitous interactions, the constant combinations and recombinations that result in new ideas, new businesses and new industries.

Some may call this a pipe dream of an out-of-this-world urban creative utopia. I assure you it is not. It is already emerging in the here and now, powered by the very logic of our rapidly evolving knowledge economy. For perhaps the first time in human history, the further progress of our economy is inextricably tied up with the further development of our essential humanity. While it may take some time to get there –to build the institutions required to take advantage of this underlying potential – sooner or later we *will* get there.

Read more: <http://www.businessinsider.com/richard-florida-its-up-to-the-cities-to-bring-america-back-2012-2#ixzz119eUU01X>