

You Are Where You Live

Success and contentment may depend as much on choice of location as on choice of spouse or job

Richard Florida is the anti-Thomas Friedman. Florida takes issue with the *New York Times* columnist's popular notion that "the world is flat" — that under globalization, a great leveling has erased the economic advantages of any place in particular. Florida says this is an oversimplification. While some out-of-the-way areas may be finally experiencing economic development, he says, globalization has also meant a tendency for "higher-level economic activities such as innovation, design, finance, and media" to cluster in an ever smaller number of locations. We need to understand "that the world is flat and spiky at the same time," he insists.

In a new book, *Who's Your City? How the Creative Economy Is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life*, Florida makes the case for why place matters and explains how to determine which cities will "encourage people to do more than they otherwise would, such as engage in more creative activities, invent new things, or start new companies."

Such thinking will be familiar to readers of Florida's pieces in *The Atlantic* or his earlier books, including

The Rise of the Creative Class. But while his previous works were traditional urban-studies texts, the new book is a useful guide for those contemplating a change of venue. Only occasionally does it falter, as when the author dwells too much on others' research rather than his own.

More people are on the move than ever: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, over 40 million Americans relocate every year, and the average citizen moves once every seven years. The well-being of such people, says Florida, is as dependent on a choice of destination as it is on a choice of a spouse or profession. It's true, he concedes, that new technologies allow more people to work remotely. But folks still congregate in certain areas "because of the powerful productivity advantages, economies of scale, and knowledge spillovers such density brings," he says. In this "spiky" world, the tallest points are innovation hubs. These include the areas around Seoul and San Francisco, which generate the most patents; "mega-regions" such as the "Bos-Wash" corridor, including Boston, New York, and Washington, which generates \$2.2 trillion in output; and the region from Osaka to Nagasaki, which generates \$1.4 trillion.

Some of the most interesting material in *Who's Your City?* describes fresh psychological research. A "Place and Happiness Survey" of over 27,000

people that Florida conducted with the Gallup Organization found that location is almost as important to people as job satisfaction. And working with various psychologists who surveyed more than 600,000 people across the U.S., Florida determined that those with such basic personality types as agreeableness or "neuroticism" tend to group together. For instance, while most regions contain people with a variety of personality types, the most

"conscientious" and "agreeable" people are in the Sunbelt. A fascinating array of maps and charts illuminates these studies and others.

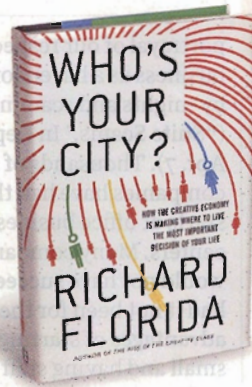
Some of Florida's assertions are a matter of common observation, but many readers will still find them useful. If you're single, it matters that New York has 211,000 more women

than men. Best places for families with children? Try Washington, D.C., which has a favorable student-to-teacher ratio.

The volume's lighthearted tone — illustrated

Who's Your City?: How the Creative Economy Is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life by Richard Florida; Basic Books; 374pp; \$26.95

by the title's play on the expression "who's your daddy?" — doesn't always work. Pop music references along with a plethora of coinages such as "strollerville" (for an area with a large number of young families) will amuse some readers and annoy others. Ultimately, reading *Who's Your City?* feels like a cross between relationship counseling and a personality exam meant to determine the best career path: It asks as many questions as it answers. **BW**



LINKS

Creative Bloc

News coverage of the Presidential race has emphasized Barack Obama's appeal to African American and youth voters. But on Apr. 6, blogging for *The Globe & Mail*, Richard Florida offered a different view: Obama's campaign has "caught fire" with "a new creative class of...professionals in idea-driven industries." Supporting his analysis, says Florida, is a Zogby poll that shows 64% of this group favoring Obama over either Hillary Clinton or John McCain. Go to: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/blogs/creativeclass>

