

Creativity Will Drive the U.S. Economy

Creativity can be found in all industries, and we need it to boost the economy

By [SHANNON MCGOVERN](#)

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Ten years ago, **Richard Florida** published his first book about how creativity was emerging as a common element shaping America's economy, geography, communities, and jobs. Now, in *The Rise of the Creative Class: Revisited*, Florida reveals updated statistics and discusses how the United States has reached a Creative Age that will be the driving force behind its economic recovery. Florida, director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management and founder of the Creative Class Group, recently spoke with *U.S. News* about how creativity has pervaded every aspect of Americans' lives, but has also caused a new kind of class divide. Excerpts:

Why is creativity a valuable resource?

When I began to look at this in some detail a little more than a decade ago, I became convinced that it is the key to economic growth. And over the past decade, what has really surprised me is how creativity has started to infuse everything. I noticed all these younger researchers looking at not only arts and culture, and science and engineering, and the traditional knowledge-based jobs, but they're looking at the transformation of, like, barbershops or butcher shops or distilleries or microbreweries in places all across the country.

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Who is the creative class?

Now we have 10 years of research to document it, but what I looked at were occupations, jobs, and the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. So I began to choose jobs based on which of those jobs use a lot of creativity in work. And it's interesting, now we've had new data which actually enables us to look at the underlying skills in the past 10 years, and the researchers who have looked at that say that there are two key skills that underlay creative work. The first are cognitive or analytical skills—our brain power, our ability to process information to acquire knowledge. But the other one is social skills, and not just the ability to be popular, be a nice person, but the ability to manage teams or manage other people or form a business or manage an entrepreneurial enterprise. And those two skill sets, the cognitive and social skills, are really the ones that distinguish the creative class. About 40 million Americans are members of the creative class.

How has the meaning of the word "creative" expanded or shifted over time?

It was really funny, actually I say this in the preface, when I looked at the term that professionals on LinkedIn most use to define themselves in the past couple years, it was "creative." I think they would have thought of "creative" in the past as an arts person or maybe a marketing person or a musician or maybe a designer, but you find increasingly people are defining themselves as creative in their work. They also did a survey of CEOs and they said, what is the skill you most value in your people, and they said their creativity, their ability to solve problems, come up with new solutions, use their brainpower to figure things out.

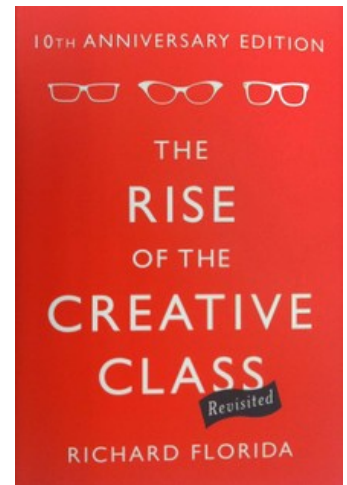
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What is the Creative Age?

We had three great ages in recent history. The first was the modern Agricultural Age, and we made progress in agriculture. Then we shifted from the Agricultural Age to the Industrial Age, and that created the great economic revolution and propelled the United States to dominance. But now over the past three or four decades, we have shifted to the Creative Age. We saw that beginning to happen in 1980. In about 1980 you could see more than 20 million new members of our workforce joined the creative class.

Is American society closer to a full Creative Age than it was when you wrote the first book?

Yes, but it's more divided. The United States has built a stronger creative economy, more of our people work in the creative economy. Unfortunately, our working class has shrunk as manufacturing jobs were eliminated in the crisis. That's really the challenge of our future: How do we now expand the creative class, which has, say, 35 percent of our workforce and in some cities and metros nearly half, how do we expand that class to include more people and get past this divide? There are the creative class areas and the places that are falling further behind. Even though they offer lower housing prices and many times attractive living, it seems as though the economic benefits—the concentration of these creative class jobs, the ability to pursue it in your career, all the other things that people want—those are in certain



areas more than others, so we have this society that's dividing by class and by community. That's really what worries me. I talk in the last chapter of the book about the need to build a new creative compact, a social compact of our time that can extend the Creative Age and creative economy to more Americans, can upgrade those service jobs, can make manufacturing stronger, make sure people have opportunity, make sure that cities are strengthened, but that's hard.

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