

## Urban guru Richard Florida: Harrisburg not a war zone

By [Roger DuPuis](#), October 12, 2016 at 2:17 PM

Far from being a war zone as Donald Trump recently described it, Harrisburg has a substantial creative class and the resources to overcome years of deindustrialization, nationally renowned urban studies expert Richard Florida said.

The New Jersey native, who previously taught at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, now is based primarily in Toronto and New York. And he has a very clear opinion about what a Trump presidency would mean for the nation's urban areas.



"It would be an abject disaster," Florida said. "This is a man who, by all accounts, is not fit to be president."

Florida, whose works include 2002's "The Rise of the Creative Class" and numerous papers and articles on cities and their economies, spoke to CPBJ prior to a Wednesday afternoon speech at Penn State Harrisburg. There, he is scheduled to give the inaugural PNC Thought Leaders Lecture Series. It starts at 4:30 p.m.

Florida believes that Trump's view about the state of American urban life — "crime-ridden, poverty-stricken, with parts in absolute decay" — is more fit for what the country looked like in late 1960s than the realities of the 2010s.

Which isn't to say that Florida doesn't acknowledge serious challenges in America's cities, but he also is "guardedly optimistic" about the path forward.

He also believes that voters in those same densely populated urban areas are likely to ensure "Trump isn't elected."

Those areas tend to attract what Florida calls the creative class, a socioeconomic group that includes knowledge-based workers ranging from scientists, engineers and educators to artists and professionals working in business, health care and other fields.

## **Background**

Florida is director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, Global Research professor at New York University, and the founder of the Creative Class Group, which works closely with governments and companies worldwide.

He is "as close to a household name as it is possible for an urban theorist to be in America," according to The Economist, while Fast Company dubbed him an "intellectual rock star."

In addition to "The Rise of the Creative Class," Florida is a senior editor for The Atlantic, where he co-founded and serves as editor-at-large for Atlantic Cities, a media site devoted to cities and urban affairs. He appears regularly on CNN and other news programs and is a regular contributor to the op-ed pages of major newspapers and magazines. Time magazine recognized his Twitter feed as one of the 140 most influential in the world.

Jim Hoehn, regional president for PNC Bank, said PNC and Penn State wanted a speaker who would "make a splash" for the series' inaugural lecture.

"The speaker series will cultivate a culture of innovative thinking where we can challenge and inspire residents, students, business owners and government officials," Hoehn said.

"We hope the experience will spark our regional economy, help create jobs and improve financial security,"

Penn State Harrisburg Chancellor Mukund Kulkarni said the goal in choosing Florida was to find a speaker who could emphasize the region's potential for growth, and whose message would mesh well with the school's course offerings, which attract the sort of creative individuals whom Florida said are key to building thriving urban areas.

"Higher education institutions obviously are a place where such people gather," Kulkarni said.

And, he added, the lecture — which is open to the public — is designed to bring together members of the community for a discussion on the region's "intellectual capital."

## **A government town**

Florida explained that capital cities, from Washington, D.C. to state capitals — especially those which also have major universities — tend to attract large creative-class populations. Austin, Texas and Boulder, Colorado are key examples, he said.

Trump, after flying out of Harrisburg following an August campaign stop in Cumberland County, said that from the window of his plane, Harrisburg [looked like a warzone](#).

Florida dismissed such a judgment as contrary to his research on the area's economic and socioeconomic condition.

Acknowledging that the Harrisburg region, like many Pennsylvania cities, has suffered from a loss of industrial jobs, Florida said state government is one of the factors that contributes to a workforce with a 30 percent rate of creative-class employees.

"For all the challenges the area has faced, it's relatively well positioned because of the state capital," Florida said.

## **The patchwork metropolis**

In a wide-ranging interview, Florida also touched on many of the other issues facing U.S. cities, including the trend toward gentrification, in which educated creative-class workers are returning to inner-city areas, reversing the postwar "white flight" to the suburbs.

While such people bring vitality to those neighborhoods, the economic problems developed over years of urban-suburban dichotomy still persist — and that's the topic of a book Florida has coming out next spring, "The New Urban Crisis."

Instead of a large geographic gulf between economic classes, Florida sees pockets of newcomers living close to longtime urban residents who stuck it out during the difficult years, but who still struggle with poverty and job loss.

"I don't see it as a great inversion," he said. "I call it a patchwork metropolis."

Florida believes that the current crop of mayors, especially in many of the nation's top metro areas, is aware of these issues and have a strong incentive to find solutions, but he acknowledges the challenge is great.

With wealthy and poor living side by side, city leaders — unlike in some suburbs — "can't just ignore this problem because everyone is rich," he said.

"I have guarded optimism," Florida said of the eventual outcome, but reiterated that the issues "are very real."