

THE MAN BEHIND THE RISE OF THE CREATIVE CLASS

BY JESSICA DAVIS

Richard Florida, author of the global best sellers *The Rise of the Creative Class* and *Who's Your City*, is scheduled to release a new book in the coming months entitled *The Rise of the Creative Class Revisited* in which he takes a deeper look at the forces that are shaping our economy and the way we live today.

Florida is well known for his research and theories of the creative class and how today's creativity is revolutionizing the global economy. His ideas have been used to help in campaigns for companies such as Apple Inc., BMW, IBM and many others as well as numerous cities worldwide in order to help transform their economic prosperity.

Currently director of the Martin Prosperity Institute, Professor of Business and Creativity with the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto and with Professorships stints at great Universities such as Harvard, MIT, Carnegie Mellon, and George Mason, we can see how this modern genius can be in high demand. With those seeking well-researched advice, concepts and inspiration, from problem solving to strategy development, Richard Florida has much to offer leading organizations and thus serves as one of the most sought after speakers.



RAINE Magazine recently caught up with Mr. Florida to gain insight on what is coming up in the new book and why his research and analysis of the creative class is so innovative.

RAINE: How would you describe your younger self?

Richard Florida: Curious, inquisitive, interested – not much different than I am now.

RAINE: What did you plan to be as an adult when you were a kid?

Richard Florida: Jimi Hendrix was my boyhood idol, as both a guitar-player and an all around musician. I am still more at home in a guitar store than a bookstore.

RAINE: Have you ever had a life changing experience? What was it? What happened?

Richard Florida: Going to college. It took me out of a working-class environment where boys fought almost everyday and where I had to hide the fact that I was smart. For the first time, I felt like I could be myself. I was free to pursue my interests, and I was surrounded by really interesting people.

RAINE: What was your college experience like?

Richard Florida: Fantastic! Rutgers College was a terrific experience. I took classes in political science, economics, and urban planning. I played in a band with my brother and some of our friends. I saw great live music, from Bruce Springsteen and the E-Street Band to the Gang of Four and Dexter Gordon (Rutgers has a terrific jazz program). I hung out in great bars at night, discussing everything from music and cities to food with

my buddies—one of whom was Mario Batali.

RAINE: How did you come up with the name/category “Creative Class”?

Richard Florida: I had a great editor for the book, Bill Frucht. When I sold the book, it was called *Work, Life, Time, Place*. But my research team kept finding statistics that this group of people who works with their minds and their creativity — what we came to call the Creative Class — was quite large and growing larger all the time. Bill said, if it looks like a class and acts like a class, well, it is a class. By then we were calling the book *The Big Morph: The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. After the 9/11 attacks I decided to kill *The Big Morph*, literally at the last minute (though one of the book's chapters was entitled “*The Big Morph: A Rant*”). Instead, we called the book *The Rise of the Creative Class*.

RAINE: What led you to your research and analysis of the Creative Class and its potential effects?

Richard Florida: I tell the story in the preface to the original edition. For years I had been studying the nature of economic development under capitalism, trying to

understand what people were calling “post-industrial” society. Most of my work had been focused on companies, high-tech companies or even Japanese companies. I had written two books about this kind of thing with a brilliant sociologist, Martin Kenney. I was living in Pittsburgh, teaching at this phenomenal university, Carnegie Mellon.

All around me people were inventing computer technology and Internet search tools and developing cutting edge software, but Pittsburgh, at least at the time, was not becoming anything like Silicon Valley. I guess I started wondering why that was. And then all of a sudden Lycos, one of the early important Internet companies and certainly the best high-tech startup by far that had come out of Carnegie Mellon, moved from Pittsburgh to Boston. Why had that happened?

The answer I kept coming back to was people and places—the kinds of places that people, especially, creative people, want to live and work in. Most people in my field were studying the ways that companies power the economy. I said, its time to start looking at people, at creative people and their role in economic development.

RAINE: In what ways can/will the Creative Class transform the global economy?

Richard Florida: Creativity is already transforming virtually every facet of the global economy. The Creative Class has taken hold in countries across the world. While about a third of Americans are fortunate to do Creative Class work, in Singapore the figure is almost half of the work force. The Creative Class numbers 46 percent of the workforce in the Netherlands, and 45 percent in Switzerland. In Australia, it's 44.5 percent.

RAINE: What do you believe have been some of the effects of the declining economy on the creative class?

Richard Florida: I don't believe the economy is declining. We are undergoing an epochal economic transformation, perhaps the biggest and most fundamental in world history. For most of human history, economies created wealth by harnessing natural resources. During the Industrial Revolution, we added machines and technology. Economists used to say that land, labor and capital were the three factors of production. But now creativity itself has become the most important factor of all. The crisis and economic transformation is more than a financial crisis and more than an economic crisis—it reflects the rise of this new creativity-powered economy, which is supplanting the old industrial order. We are in that strange interregnum when the old order is collapsing and the new order is not yet fully born. A new global economic order is taking shape, but it is still confined within the brittle carapace of the old.

RAINE: What are some of the different roles that creativity can play in a person's life as well as a company's life?

Richard Florida: The cornerstone of my message is that every human being is creative. Creativity – using our creativity – is what gives our lives purpose and meaning. If it showed us anything, the economic crisis showed us the limits of a hyper-consumerist, hyper-branded society. We can't get true meaning and purpose from buying this product or that one off a department store shelf. Consumption leaves us empty. True purpose and meaning, true happiness comes from doing creative work.

RAINE: What are some of the first steps smaller companies can take in creative innovation and setting themselves apart from their competitors?

Richard Florida: The best companies – in any and every line of work, from grocery stores to design to manufacturing and high-tech – all do the same things. They harness the collective creativity of their entire workforce, of every single person, from the factory floor to the R&D lab, from the artistic studio to the executive suite.

RAINE: Can you give us a quick explanation of “The Geography of Inequality”?

Richard Florida: Unfortunately, as with all economic transformations, this one is generating increased inequality. Inequality is the single biggest social challenge we face. And it's not just class inequality. The inequality between the classes is reflected and reinforced in our geography, in where we live. The classes used to live together. No longer. The different classes live in different places and they live entirely different lives. It's this class divide that lies behind virtually all of the other divides we see in America and across the world, from the red and blue divides of politics to our differing prospects for health and happiness.

RAINE: What can we look forward to in your new book?

Richard Florida: Over the past decade creativity has increasingly come to be seen as the motor force in our work, lives, society, and economy. Great talking with you!

RAINE: My Pleasure!