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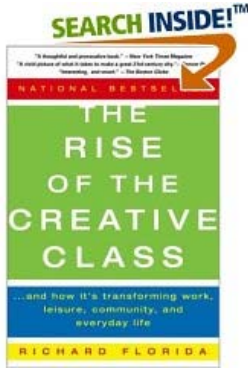
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by [Richard Florida](#) (Author) "Here's a thought experiment..." ([more](#))  
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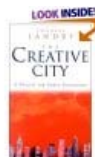
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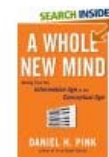
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Florida, an academic whose field is regional economic development, explains the rise of a new social class that he labels the creative class. Members include scientists, engineers, architects, educators, writers, artists, and entertainers. He defines this class as those whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology, and new creative content. In general this group shares common characteristics, such as creativity, individuality, diversity, and merit. The author estimates that this group has 38 million members, constitutes more than 30 percent of the U.S. workforce, and profoundly influences work and lifestyle issues. The purpose of this book is to examine how and why we value creativity more highly than ever and cultivate it more intensely. He concludes that it is time for the creative class to grow up--boomers and Xers, liberals and conservatives, urbanites and suburbanites--and evolve from an amorphous group of self-directed while high-achieving individuals into a responsible, more cohesive group interested in the common good. *Mary Whaley*  
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**This review is from: [The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life \(Hardcover\)](#)**

Richard Florida's study began with a rather straightforward premise: what characterizes the cities and regions that are economically successful today? His conclusions are rather controversial, but, based on the statistical evidence he presents (as well as my own experience), I found them highly convincing.

The liveliest economies, he finds, are in regions characterized by the 3 T's -- talent, technology, and tolerance. The implications are profound, to wit:

1. Conventional wisdom holds that, to boost an area's economy, it's necessary to attract large companies and thus create jobs. In fact, companies locate where the talent is; all the tax breaks in the world won't bring a large company to your area if they can't find the quality of employees they want there. Often, too, the talent itself will generate new companies and create jobs that way.

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2. Urban planners assume that, to attract talent/jobs, what's important is to provide infrastructure: sports stadiums, freeways, shopping centers, etc. In fact, creative people prefer authenticity -- so making your city just like everywhere else is a sure way to kill its attractiveness.

3. The often-misunderstood "gay index" doesn't mean that gay people are more creative, or that attracting gays to a community will ipso facto boost its economy. Creative people tend to prefer gay-friendly communities because they're perceived as tolerant of anyone who isn't "mainstream"; a city that's run by a conservative good-ole-boys network isn't a good place to try to start a business unless you're one of the good ole boys.

The book is primarily descriptive and analytical, rather than prescriptive. But I feel it's immensely valuable for pointing out that much of the conventional wisdom about economic development and community planning is just plain wrong, and suggesting alternative approaches that have a greater chance of succeeding. And I'm amused (and bemused) by the reviewers who sneered that this book propounds an elitist, liberal, contempt-for-the-working-masses view of American society. To me, the book is almost TOO descriptive: didn't these reviewers read the many statistical tables and the lengthy analyses that the author provides? Fact: The most economically successful cities and regions have these characteristics. That isn't propaganda; it's the way things work.

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This review is from: [The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life \(Hardcover\)](#)

Possibly anyone who wrote a book on the → Creative Class→ just before 2003 should be exempt from critical review → just like anyone who wrote an investment guide in 1928, or a colonial government primer in 1775. But → The Rise of the Creative Class→ has recently been reissued in paperback, is frequently quoted by ambitious politicians, and is still being touted by its author. Therefore, it matters that we re-examine its contents carefully.

Richard Florida→ s thesis is that there is a niche group of society, which over the past century has grown to become a separately identifiable class in its own right, distinguishable from the Working Class or the Service Sector Class or the almost-disappeared class of agricultural workers. This is different from saying that today→ s better-educated workers need less direct supervision, or that many jobs vary more in content from day to day than used to be the case.

The author struggles mightily to define the nearly one-third of the population that he calls → creative→ as a valid class. He proposes definitions, backs up a couple of pages later, corrects his proposal, and starts off down another path. The result is more of an out loud conversation with himself than a clearly delineated model. There are no neat conclusions here.

The book uses both published sources and the author→ s own research to identify the characteristics of his new class: who they are and what motivates them. Sometimes the sources are of doubtful value.

One has to wonder why he would turn to his public policy students at prestigious Carnegie Mellon University to find out why highly-paid manufacturing jobs are no longer attractive to young blue-collar

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workers. A stroll through any of Pittsburgh's poorer neighborhoods would surely have elicited a more sensible and substantive response than that such jobs were → insufficiently creative→ .

Similarly, the book quotes an Information Week magazine survey of high-tech workers on what mattered to them. Florida reads the low rating of stock options as a motivator to mean that respondents valued → creative work→ more than money. As one of those respondents, I can tell you that we were simply saying that the declining stock market had rendered all our options worthless. We were tired of being paid in funny money.

A core point in the book's thesis is that → creative workers→ deliberately move to → diverse, open, tolerant→ regions and that → creative companies→ follow them there → a reverse of the earlier pattern of workers going to where the jobs were. This is one of the many patterns Florida tries to pin down, but which squirm under his microscope. San Francisco follows the pattern, but pleasantly homogenous, middle-class Austin, TX is a high-tech Mecca, while funky, artistic, open, tolerant, diverse New Orleans lags.


Tolerant of whom, by whom? Florida points out that there is a negative correlation between → non-whites→ and → creative class→ companies. The best leading indicator is the presence of a gay community. But is it surprising or meaningful, that the most affluent areas of the country are frequently home to double-male-income, no-kids households? Surely, this datum isn't enough to define a new class?

Dr Florida assumes → as did most of us → that 2002 represented the nadir of the US economy and that we were rapidly returning to a more → normal→ job situation. In retrospect, we were all wrong, but what can one say about the → Creative Class→ thesis with the benefit of hindsight? Let's quote, as the book does, Hewlett-Packard CEO, Carly Fiorina, the quintessential → creative class→ leader of the time:

→ Keep your tax incentives and highway interchanges; we will go where the highly skilled people are.→

Most recently, this same CEO has angrily declared her → right→ to move those same jobs to a tax-shelter in funky, artistic → . Bangalore. If a million jobs can be re-categorized overnight from → Creative Class→ to commodity → Service Sector→ , were they ever really part of a → Creative Class→ at all?

\*\* Dr Florida has created a web site that can legitimately be regarded as an informal addendum to the book: <http://www.creativeclass.org> .

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This review is from: [The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life \(Hardcover\)](#)

Much of this book is spent on demonstrating how Mr. Florida's "creative economy" is reshaping society, not as is commonly believed the other way around. It's a bit of a kick-in-the-pants for the holier-than-thou family values crusaders who chastise gays and others who don't fit into their perfect world. It goes on to provide a strong argument that diversity is the breeding ground of creativity and therefore the bedrock of our economy.

Mr. Florida presents plenty of research, antidotes, personal experiences and astute observations throughout the book, and he oftentimes had me looking up, gazing at nothing in particular while pondering how the new information I was taking had indeed already taken root in my own life. It was almost an interactive experience. This book won't change your life but it will help you understand why



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