



From: [TPMCafe Book Club](#)

The Ticking Clock



By [Richard Florida](#) - July 24, 2008, 5:34PM

TPMCafe Book Club

I have been following along with great interest. I think [The Big Sort](#) is one of the most important books to come along in a while, not just because of its analysis of American politics but for its implications for American society and the US economy.

My main worry is that the big sort poses huge implications for US economic competitiveness and a wide range of domestic economic and social issues.

Most commentators see the big sort as a lens into American politics - a window into an increasingly polarized America - red vs. blue, Republican vs. Democrat, McCain vs. Obama, Al Franken vs. Rush Limbaugh.

That's real and important. But it seems to me this split Bill Bishop so correctly identifies has made it nearly impossible to build broad political consensus required for the kind of policy shift needed to ensure the US stays a competitive, innovative economy and can begin to develop a shared economic framework that can build economic strength and provide a reality of more broad based and inclusive economic participation by a wide cross section of American workers.

This is particularly important in an era of broad based creative destruction where the ability to set in place a new set of economic policies and broad economic infrastructure will be important to sustained economic growth for decades to come.

The US economy faces huge issues from its financial sector to its real economy to real estate globalization, never mind rising inequality and sinking living standards which are not being addressed or even talked about. It is in effect running down its long run prosperity. It is incredibly difficult to make the investments required for the future in an era of political polarization.

The really important thing about the big sort is not who wins or loses the election or the partisan composition of the Congress, it is what this is doing to make it difficult or impossible for the country to address real economic and social issues in a broad, pragmatic and timely way.

In the end, the clock of history is always ticking. Sooner or later some other place will come along, just like America did a century or so ago, and put together the framework required to marshal its assets broadly to succeed in the new global economic framework. The big sort makes it more and more likely that the United States with its long track of responding nimbly and remaking itself to meet the needs of technological and economic challenges will for the first time in quite awhile be less and less able to respond.