

## [Finding Hope in Creativity: 5 Questions for Trend-Watcher Richard Florida](#)

[Gregory McNamee](#) - August 29, 2012

Ten years ago, writing in his book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida, a professor in the [management](#) school at the University of Toronto and now a senior editor at *The Atlantic*, set a [meme](#) in motion: the idea that artists, writers, designers, and other creative workers helped improve the quality of a place, collectively serving to promote innovative businesses, tourism, a thriving housing market, ethnic and cultural diversity, mobility, and other aspects of a desirable economy. He set off a touch of controversy as well with some of his correlations, which now seem commonsensical but were then so new as to be heretical. All are part of the conversation now surrounding other memes, among them the idea of the “good city,” the creation of arts districts in distressed downtown areas, and the use of civic and cultural tourism as a means of bringing people—and dollars—into communities.

Britannica contributing editor Gregory McNamee caught up with Florida to ask a few questions about the new version of his book, *The Rise of the Creative Class Revisited*, in which, having crunched the numbers on 300-plus U.S. metropolitan areas, he observes, “Human capital may reflect richer places, but it seems that the creative class makes a place more productive.”

**Britannica:** What are some of the major differences in your findings about the creative class and its influence between 2002 and this tenth-anniversary edition?

**Richard Florida:** One thing I’ve explored more in this revision is how deeply divided our society is by [class](#). Two chapters in the new book delve into our class divide. Class, more than

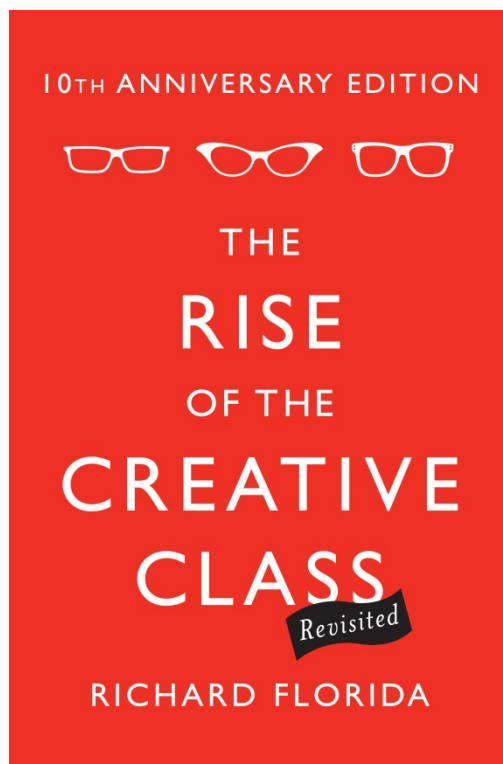


Richard Florida. Credit: courtesy Of ©  
Creative Class Group

before, shapes everything from the political division between red and blue states and income inequality to obesity, smoking, fitness, and even gun violence. The last decade has also illustrated that [creativity](#) is even more powerful than we assumed it was a decade ago. The creative class has come through the last ten years and the recent economic downturn even stronger than before, with higher wages than workers in the service and working sectors.

**Britannica:** Given the importance that you place on innovation, education, and research, do you find it surprising that none of these social goods seems to be a priority, at least in the United States?

**Florida:** It's not completely surprising, given our continued obsession with housing and the structural forces of the industrial economy. That said, with the shift to a creative economy, it's clear to me that we need a "creative compact." As I explain in the book, that term describes the commitment necessary for advancing the creative economy and maximizing the creative potential of all workers, not just the creative class. A few of the key principles include the following: First, we must find a way to upgrade our service and working sectors. Approximately 60 million Americans work in low-paid service sector jobs. Second, we should promote density and cluster development in our cities and regions. Third, we must ensure our educational system is fostering creativity and not suppressing it. And finally, as a society and broader community we must measure and support what really matters—true prosperity. Let's focus on supporting the growth that fully utilizes human capabilities, that makes us happier, that provides more meaningful and enjoyable experiences.



**Britannica:** The first edition of *The Rise of the Creative Class* excited controversy in some circles—for instance, in your observation that a visible gay community correlates with strong housing values and a high-tech economy. Do you expect any such controversies to arise with this version of the book?

**Florida:** I do not expect any additional controversies with this revision. We've spent a full decade debating and engaging in a dialogue about the creative class and the impact on economic development. When [LinkedIn](#) asked its members what word they would use to describe themselves, the word that came back was "creative." During the recent economic downturn, when the national rate of unemployment surged past 10 percent, the rate of [unemployment](#) for the creative class never topped 5 percent. Moreover, creative class regions have been far more resilient over the course of the economic crisis. There's no getting around it now: creativity is the main economic driver of our time.

Credit: courtesy of Richard Florida

**Britannica:** If you were advising a young reader, say one heading into middle school, about what kind of work he or she might want to prepare to do ten years hence, perhaps in time for a third edition of your book, what might you say?

**Florida:** Focus on maximizing your personal creativity. Creativity will be the key competitive advantage in a future driven by knowledge and innovation. Tap into your inner entrepreneur; focus on interests that spur your creative abilities and do not squelch them.

**Britannica:** In the same vein, looking at current trends, where might you advise that a young person live ten years hence in order to become a card-carrying member of that creative class?

**Florida:** Rather than suggest a specific place to live, I encourage them to make a deliberate decision about place. Often our location decisions take a back seat to professional or personal choices, when choosing a place to live is really the single most important decision we make. It affects our economic prospects, professional networks, friends and social outlets, and ultimately our happiness. Understanding your needs and values and pragmatically examining potential places to live will ensure greater long-term happiness and personal prosperity.