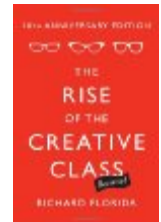




FINANCIAL
TIMES

Richard Florida is an urban studies expert who runs a think-tank in Toronto: his *Rise of the Creative Class* was first published in 2001, and he has revised “virtually every word” for this new edition, reflecting contentedly that what had seemed contentious a decade ago is now widely accepted. More usefully, he includes a new section on what the new class’s responsibilities are to the society that they now dominate. This creative class is composed of the obviously creative – architects, artists, writers – as well as those in management, engineering, law, education, whose “creativity is a key factor in [their] work”. They are one-third of the US workforce, still growing strongly while the working class loses hundreds of thousands of jobs every year.



The creatives’ relative success contributes to growing inequality in the advanced economies. Its virtues can be seen as skin-deep or hypocritical by those who can’t make a good living by tapping away at an Apple keyboard in an organic café, and this must account for some of the increased conservatism of the working classes in the US, who see what had been a relatively good life of well-paid and secure skilled labour disappear, only to be replaced by low-paid service jobs. The creative class, Florida insists, is not born: it’s made, by application to learning, adapting and learning again, life as a constant series of intellectual challenges – just what Sergeant’s characters can’t, and won’t, do.

Florida believes the London riots were really about the growing social divide; the rioters’ “inchoate rage”, he says, is that of a marginalised group who see vast wealth and luxurious consumption all about them. The riots “should serve as a wake-up call ... it’s little wonder we find ourselves in an increasingly fractured society, in which growing numbers are ready to vote – or tear – down what they perceive to be the economic elite of our cities and the world”.

In his concluding chapter on the responsibilities of the creatives, he is vaguer. What’s needed is the “creatification” of everyone; creativity lurks inside us all, waiting to be drawn out. That is right; a movement to give workers more autonomy and creativity in their work should be at the centre of government concern, and could re-animate union movements still being drained of members.

But it's the "how" we need to know about. Sergeant saw creativity in Tuggy Tug, who is revealed in her book and in a video she made with him as a man with charm and mental agility. But he's also a ruthless thug who, despite getting more help (from her) than any of his peers to escape a future that will bring a lot of time in prison and a probable early death, still turned back to the life that gave him quick money and the fear that he and his peers call "respect".

Reform, as Florida observes, is usually better than revolution. London, along with all our other cities, needs another deep draught of it, at least comparable to that which the English social reformer Charles Booth, and his fellow late Victorians saw as their duty to administer to those people Booth described as living "the life of savages". These three books, in differing ways, clear some of the ground for modern reform: creative architects are now required.

John Lloyd is an FT contributing editor