

Home Front: Book argues for less homeownership, more mobility

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Urban theorist [Richard Florida](#) says so many people are trapped in homeownership today that it's harming our economy.

"They're underwater. They can't sell the house. They can't rent it. They can't get money to move," he said.

In high-[unemployment](#) metro areas such as [Sacramento](#), more people should be moving elsewhere to find work, [Florida](#) said. But many can't. They're held back because they own a house.

[Florida](#) gained prominence with his theory of a "creative class" of artists, musicians, lesbians, gays and high-tech workers who breathe economic vitality into cities. He's written a new book, "The Great Reset," arguing that we need less homeownership and more mobility to rev up the nation's economy.

"This system makes perfect sense for my father," he said in a phone interview this week. "My father had one job his whole life. But this is an economy where we are shifting jobs more and more. In many cases we have to move."

[Florida](#) said: "The system depends on economic flexibility and ability of people to move to opportunity. If they're trapped how can they do it? The house has become an anchor."

Thousands of [Sacramento](#)-area households know this well. A new CoreLogic report says 45 percent of mortgaged houses in [El Dorado](#), Placer, [Sacramento](#) and Yolo are worth less than the amount owed on them.

[Home Front](#) gets phone calls from people stuck professionally and personally because they're in this condition. A young working couple want to return to [India](#) for a year or more to care for elderly parents. Will they have to "walk away" from the mortgage and their sizable down payment?

A laid-off engineering professional in a region where no one builds eyes available jobs in other states. But neighborhood foreclosures have driven the family's home values \$100,000 or more below the 2003 purchase price.

A 50-something construction industry worker wonders if it's time to leave town. But how to sell a house in Natomas when the neighborhood listings are all bank-owned?

More happily, area renter [Leslie Madsen-Brooks](#), 34, says: "My lack of a mortgage has allowed me to take a job in [Boise](#)." She's leaving Davis – quite easily – in July to teach history at [Boise State](#).

"Renters can more easily downshift or move or trade down," said [Florida](#). "They have more ability to adjust to economic shock."

[Florida](#) owns a house in [Toronto](#). But he previously rented in [Pittsburgh](#), where the economy is less dynamic. He said he wouldn't buy in [Miami](#) or [Las Vegas](#).

"When I look at housing I'm always looking at ability to exit the housing," he said.

[Florida](#) was polite enough not to mention [Sacramento](#) in that regard. But we fit his contention: Cities with high rates of homeownership lean toward less dynamic economies and higher unemployment than those where flexible renters come and go.

[Census](#) statistics say 60.4 percent of dwellings in Sacramento County are owner-occupied. San Francisco: 39 percent.

We do love our single-family homes and quality of life here. But there's no question today which city has a better economy.

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