



Ottawa: This ain't Flint and we ain't bad



[Urban Compass by Steve Collins](#)

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Let's ignore for a day the criminal trial of our mayor and the mutating menace of H1N1/swine flu/Mexican Chupacabra Cough, and bask in the splendour that is Ottawa.

The "This Ain't Flint" ad campaign went, I thought, unnecessarily negative in this regard, touting Ottawa's beauty and prosperity only at the expense, and much to the annoyance of, Flint, Michigan.

The ads compare Ottawa to the recession-wracked Flint of 20 years ago, as portrayed in Michael Moore's film *Roger and Me*, so even Flint ain't Flint.

The point, however, is solid: Ottawa, heavy on government, light on manufacturing, has so far proved resistant to the current economic malaise.

In other regions, they might argue that the capital's inability to feel the rest of the country's pain is precisely the problem, but we'll leave that for a crankier day.

Ottawa takes a lot of crap, often from Ottawans. Local writer Andrew Cohen devoted an entire chapter of his 2007 book *The Unfinished Canadian* to the shortcomings of the nation's capital. He slams Ottawa as "a city that has given up. It bumps along, living off its past, avoiding its future. They say New York City is a place in a hurry, a town without foreplay. Ottawa is in no hurry at all. It is a town without climax."

Cohen devotes much of the chapter to complain about the architecture, how *This Ain't Paris*, and sure, we boast plenty of hideous office towers and suburban box stores, but he mostly ignores the people who live here and how they live.

Not-so-urban theorist Richard Florida, to whom Ottawa is a forward-looking mecca for what he calls the "Creative Class" the highly skilled, highly mobile knowledge workers he sees as key to economic productivity now and in the future.

In the Canadian edition of *Who's Your City?*, Florida puts diverse, tolerant Ottawa well ahead in the global competition for such brainpower, noting that in some neighbourhoods, nine out of 10 residents have degrees. He also points out that 30 per cent of the nation's economists live here, but no place is perfect.

Florida rubbishes the creaky clichés about Ottawa the Dull, ranking it number 1 among Canadian cities as a place to live for families, retirees and those in mid-career, and second overall for empty-nesters.

Not that we need to refer to Florida's data here at the beginning of festival season, when we finally seem to re-enter orbit with the sun, ditch our toques and head for a pint on the city's acres of beckoning patio. This ain't bad.