

## Our economic future is not what it used to be

BY RICHARD PACHTER

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*The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity.* Richard Florida. HarperCollins. 225 pages.

It's not just a matter of bank failures, spiraling foreclosures, high unemployment and the rest of this mess. Many of us sense that we're on the cusp of a fundamental shift in our economy and culture. Though most may be in denial, the evidence strongly suggests that the American economy has been propelled and sustained by criminally inflated credit and rampant speculation, and we are on the precipice of a change that will result in a dramatically altered American landscape.

Richard Florida, an American who lives in Toronto, made his name with *The Rise of The Creative Class*, the book that predicted the primacy of metropolitan areas with diverse populations. Not surprisingly, this new one makes the same case, placing it within the context of our ongoing economic tumult and turmoil.

As an academic, Florida starts, somewhat predictably, with a large dose of history, focusing on previous eras and shifts in the country's socioeconomic fabric. He invokes tons of stats and quotes, another academic habit, which can be a bit off-putting at times though it's more of a mild distraction than an annoyance. But if you're patient, this flood of data forms a nice mosaic of snapshots as he explains how the Industrial Revolution and the Great Depression morphed the largely rural, agrarian economy and population of the United States into an urban manufacturing powerhouse.

As in his earlier book, Florida argues effectively (with stats, naturally) that the country's diversity has been its most powerful, important and, ironically, subtlest strength, despite teabaggers' and nativists' assertions to the contrary. Areas with diverse populations -- ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations and other factors -- are invariably economically stronger, not to mention more interesting places to live. Further, he asserts that cities, with their dense clusters of apartment houses, clogged roads and massed populations, are actually more environmentally friendly and better at "metabolizing" their wealth.

Also among Florida's findings is that the U.S. infrastructure is approaching third-world status so if we truly want to be competitive, if not viable, we need to get with it! We're way behind China, Spain and most of what Rummy used to call "Old Europe."

We must also upgrade our transportation system. Forget about building more inefficient, energy-depleting highways, light rail and high-speed rail is where it's at. In fact, high-speed rail would bring scattered areas together into more powerful clusters and also be useful if, indeed the predictions of \$20-a-gallon gas comes true, or the rest of the prognostications of the "peak oil" crowd comes to pass.

Not all of Florida's recommendations are easily implemented. Though Starbucks, Trader Joe's and Costco have already done so, Florida's advocacy of the elevation of service workers' pay may unfortunately be a bit Utopian.

Overall, *The Great Reset* is an interesting, provocative and intelligent book. Florida is a witty and entertaining writer, despite his academic tics and tropes. It's well worth reading as a starting point for the future that's coming our way whether we're ready or not.

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