

Book Review: “The Great Reset” by Richard Florida

Posted July 7, 2010 by poprice in Book Review, Pamela Price. [Leave a Comment](#)

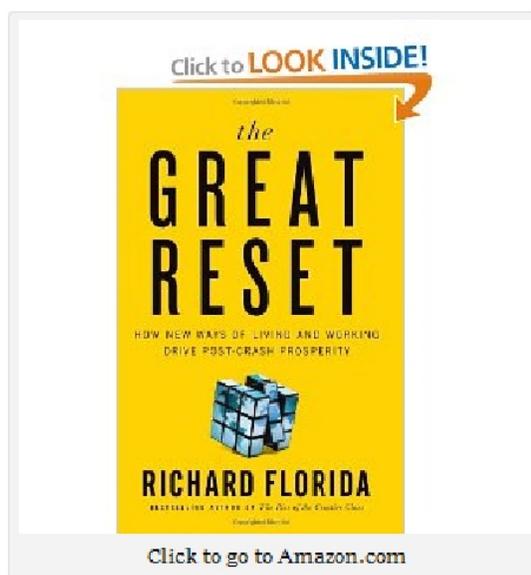
The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity by Richard Florida. Harper: 2010. 225 pages, with index. \$26.99

Where sections of Florida's acclaimed *The Rise of the Creative Class* were weighed down by academic charts and figures, *The Great Reset* hums. That's not to suggest that Florida's research has turned shoddy; the book has ample footnotes. Yet here the author's voice has grown wiser, more introspective. In short, I like it *even better* than his previous books.

History is essential to Florida's understanding of the current recession and its aftermath, and his text includes several personal anecdotes. Florida's parents were born in the '20s and were therefore part of that famous “Greatest Generation.” While much has been made of that generation's commitment to shoulder the burden of WWII with dignity—both on the frontlines and the home front, they also demonstrated a collective resilience in the face of economic disaster (ex. The Great Depression, recessions) and significant social upheavals (ex. the civil rights and women's rights movements).

Florida, a late Boomer, describes the “economic peaks and valleys” twentieth-century Americans experienced as “part of the life cycle of any society. They can be difficult, sometimes horribly painful, but just as trees shed their leaves in the fall to make room for the new growth of spring, economies *reset* themselves.” This perspective enables Florida to look at the current recession as more opportunity than obstacle.

Florida sees five phases to his “Great Resets.” The first is the phase in which institutions break and consumers dial their spending back. In the second phase, after everyone experiences the discomfort that attends liminal moments, new ideas and innovations come forth. In the third phase, entrepreneurs channel those innovations into “bigger and better technological systems.” Fourth comes public and private investments in the big three cornerstones needed for a vital economy: energy, transportation and communication infrastructure. Last comes the fifth stage, in which a “new spatial fix emerges, creating a new economic landscape that is more closely in sync with the... underlying economy.”



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For Florida, modern suburbs are important to our future “spatial fix.” Unlike urban theorists who seem only willing to *complain* about suburbs, Florida accepts the 'burbs as a reality and sees *potential* in them—provided suburbanites have the capacity to make significant lifestyle changes. (Think of the dense, mixed-use communities espoused by New Urbanists together with light rail and bikes.) Florida sketches an appealing vision in which suburbanites and urbanites coexist in a mutually beneficial environment supported by “a wide range of transportation options,” all designed to transform cities into thriving micro-economies (“megaregions”) in which goods, people and ideas move about with ease. Arguably it may be as utopian a vision as New Urbanism, but it's more inclusive and constructive.

Cooperation at every level of society is key for the fulfillment of Florida's vision, as is the universal acceptance that we wean ourselves from oil and big, energy-sucking purchases like large SUVs and huge houses. We'll do this, he says, as much to save the environment as to recapture leisure time. As the saying goes, “time is money,” and we may be on the verge of redefining “prosperity.” In fact, Florida makes a splendid case that the shift away from McMansions—and home ownership in general—has begun. (He's been using his Twitter account ([@richard_florida](#)) to support this and other assertions in the book, by the way.) One wonders, however, if every city has the kind of talent in place to pull off the coordination required to shore up things like local transportation infrastructure sufficiently. If they don't, what can be done to remedy the situation? Are some cities just *doomed*?

Moreover, as someone who has spent two years examining resurgent interest in old-fashioned “victory gardening,” I wish that Florida would have discussed homesteading, urban farming, cohousing, coworking, and the “slow” lifestyle trends like voluntary simplicity—all being nurtured by young (and young-at-heart) knowledge workers famously dubbed by Florida as the “creative class.” These movements may represent, after all, the *roots* of the reset, where life's intangibles *already* matter more than dollar signs for many Americans.

Not surprisingly several of the existing and emerging megaregions that Florida sees as “really power[ing] the global economy” are comprised of the same thriving communities (Austin, Seattle, Boulder) lauded in his earlier books for their ability to attract and retain the creative class. Florida is banking on those talent pools to power both their respective regions and the broader U.S. economy in the future, saying that “megaregions are to our time what suburbanization was to the postwar era. They provide the seeds of a new spatial fix.”

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Years ago I heard Florida and other panelists discuss “time, talent, technology, and trees” as powerful magnets for the “creative class.” In *The Great Reset*, Florida appears to regard those four elements as being vital for our collective future economy, too. He may be right. We’ll see.

In the meantime, read the book.