

# TIME

## **BOOKS**

# Richard Florida on How to Keep America's Artists From Starving

*As his 'The Rise of the Creative Class' reaches its tenth anniversary, the controversial urban theorist has a plan to keep the artists from starving. It involves a lot more than art*

By **LILY ROTHMAN** | June 26, 2012

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AP

*Richard Florida author of "Who's Your City?"*

The urban theorist Richard Florida often illustrates his data with anecdotes, and he has one about an art collector. In it, he asks the art dealer, someone “very well known,” how to tell which artists’ work will be worth something in the future. To what degree is it a factor of non-artistic skills, Florida asks the dealer. “That’s the one that’s going to make it,” the dealer says of the hypothetical artist who could draw attention to himself. “That’s the one who’s going somewhere.”

As we hit the tenth anniversary of his polarizing 2002 book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, that anecdote is only one of the many that Florida has to add to his oeuvre. An anniversary edition of the book, which will be released on June 26, includes several new chapters, with revised data (and anecdotes) throughout. Most of that information is about the topic for which Florida is best known—whether cities can be revitalized if their leaders work to attract creative types, which has gotten him his current gig at the helm of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto—and he takes the opportunity to rebut some of the many criticisms he’s faced over the last decade. (The criticism is still coming: the new book *The New Geography of Jobs* by economist Enrico Moretti contains a substantial list of cities that are counterexamples to Florida’s theories.) But the revised edition of the book also includes his prophecy about the future of the entertainment industry—and, between the lines, his prescription to keep artists from starving. That’s where the collector comes in: more than ever, entertainment-industry workers have to be creative; at the same time, art isn’t enough.

Florida describes how creatives—anyone who uses his or her brain at work, even a doctor, but not excluding those starving artists—have fared relatively well in the economic downturn of the time between editions of the book. Unemployment among members of Florida’s Creative Class has not topped five percent. Florida, who spoke to TIME days before the book’s release, says a big factor in that success is the freelance lifestyle that is increasingly common in the entertainment industry and elsewhere. “What I would call the super-creative core, they’re very adept at mixing income,” Florida says. “It doesn’t mean they don’t struggle, of course they do, but compared to trauma of a blue-collar worker in Detroit or a construction worker in Phoenix, they’ve been able to mix and match income and to somehow survive.”

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But part of that mixing and matching may mean an aspiring musician signing on for a service-class job as a barista, leaving the Creative Class. Florida acknowledges that being a member of the Creative Class hasn’t turned out the way it was cracked up to be, mostly because the economy is not yet equipped to handle all the freelancers. “As optimistic as I am, I’m also fearful,” he says. “This is bigger than the shift from the agricultural age to the industrial age. This is probably the biggest shift in modern history in the nature of economies.” While he says it’s not a completely new lifestyle, its pitfalls are bigger than ever. “Looking back, I was perhaps too optimistic about the potential for worker mobility, flexibility, and freedom,” he writes of the first edition of the book.

Sara Horowitz, who founded the Freelancers Union, the 2003-founded collective of freelancers that is cited by Florida as an example of where the economy needs to go, agrees. “I think that book was

genius and right and all these trends are continuing,” she says, adding that the government doesn’t accurately count the freelance workforce and national unemployment numbers may thus be exaggerated. “In the entertainment industry, so many jobs are going to be freelance, project -and gig-based. What I think is so significant is that it’s almost hitting a tipping point where that’s how the work is, versus the old 9-to-5, 40-hour work week job. And I think you see that the most in entertainment.”

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In Florida’s ideal vision of the future, the big *voilà* from the new book, the Creative Class expands to include, well, everyone. “Every job can and must be *creatified*,” he writes in the new last chapter. This means that, in order to elevate working- and service-class jobs and the way they contribute to the larger economy, businesses must find ways to engage those workers’ minds. But, for the entertainment industry, the important part is the unsaid vice versa: while we’re creatifying the jobs, we also have to jobify the creation.

“When we look at the most successful bands, almost always they have a family member or a friend or a quote-unquote fifth member. U2 has a guy who’s been with them since the inception but he doesn’t look like a rocker, he looks like a businessman, and he takes care of the management. That’s what we’re advocating,” Florida says. “We could get over this schism between creativity and management and kind of build a bridge, and that would help more people be successful.”

But Florida sees hope in the youngest generation of artists: “there’s at least a subgroup of young people in these fields who are inclined to do that,” he says. “They’re not so anti-management-skills. They see it as their life’s work and they have to manage it. I don’t want to be seen as crassly capitalist but I think that’s the skill set that creative people are going to have to learn.”

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