

Toronto's mosaic an example for American cities

RICHARD FLORIDA

From Saturday's Globe and Mail

May 2, 2009 at 3:23 AM EDT

En route to obtaining his back-dated, life-long Canadian citizenship, Will Wilkinson, a research fellow at Washington's Cato Institute, and one of the sharpest young policy minds around, dropped by to visit at the Prosperity Institute.

Back home stateside, he wrote this terrific essay on why Toronto's largely successful experiment in immigration – its global-straddling ethnic mosaic – is a big smack upside the head for notions that immigration is eating away at core “Anglo-Protestant” values and institutions, à la the late Samuel Huntington.

WILKINSON ON TORONTO

From Will Wilkinson's column in the online forum, The Street, April 27, 2009:

“Here is what Toronto is not: Toronto is not dirty, dangerous, or poor. Toronto is not a hell of lost liberties or a babble of cultural incoherence or a ruin of failed institutions. Yet a popular argument against high levels of immigration suggests it should be.

“In his 2004 book, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity*, the late Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington warned that “the United States of America will suffer the fate of Sparta and Rome,” should its founding Anglo-Protestant culture continue to wane ... [so] we must keep outsiders out.

“Successful societies (so this argument goes) owe their liberty and prosperity to distinct institutions which, in turn, depend on the persistence and dominance of the culture that established and nurtured them. Should that culture fade – or become too diluted by the customs, religions, and tongues of outsiders – the foundation of all that is best and most attractive about that society cannot long last.

“But somebody forgot to tell Toronto! “Nearly half the denizens of Canada's most populous metropolis were born outside the nation's borders – 47 per cent, according to the 2006 census, and the number is rising.

“This makes Toronto the fifth-biggest city in North America, also the most diverse city in North America. Neither Miami, nor Los Angeles, nor New York City can compete with Toronto's cosmopolitan credentials.

“Here is what Toronto is: the fifth-most-livable city in the world. So said the Economist Intelligence Unit in a report last year drawing on indicators of stability, health care, culture, environment, education, and infrastructure. ... “The United States, [a] fabled land of immigrants, has fallen dismally far behind countries like Australia and Canada in openness to immigration ... That cultural-fragility argument is false, and it deserves to die.

“Toronto, which has an Anglo-Protestant heritage as strong as any, has proved it dead wrong. In fact, Toronto shows that a community and its core institutions can not only survive a massive and growing immigrant population but thrive with one. ... “Maybe some day an American city will place in the top 10 on the list of the world's most livable places. Maybe – if it becomes more like Toronto. ...”

To read the whole text, please go to www.theweek.com.

FLORIDA ON WILKINSON

I could not agree more. Mr. Wilkinson hits several nails directly on the head here. In my book, *Flight of the Creative Class*, I similarly argued against Mr. Huntington. And I offered that Canada's – and Toronto's – mosaic principle may well prove to be one of the core enduring principles of our economy and society.

Or, as Mr. Wilkinson concludes: “Maybe some day an American city will place in the top 10 on the list of the world's most livable places. Maybe – if it becomes more like Toronto. ...”

Richard Florida is director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management