

### **The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity**

Richard Florida

*Reviewed by Kyle Vangel*

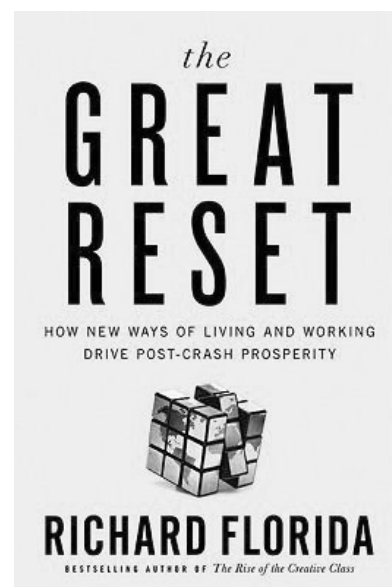
Richard Florida's *The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity* is a sweeping yet brisk work that attempts to make sense of how America will remake itself in the wake of the Great Recession. Florida draws heavily on the experience of the Long Depression of the 1870s and the Great Depression to make a convincing case that recovery from a severe economic downturn involves fundamental societal, economic, and geographic transformation. He contends that we are now at the outset of a "Great Reset" that will produce new social and economic forms. A key component of this process is a new "spatial fix" whereby the built environment is reconstituted to better match nascent modes of living and working. In the late nineteenth century, the rise of factories and the industrial city represented this nexus, while in the mid-twentieth century it was embodied by the marriage of mass production and auto-dependent suburbs. In the coming decades, Florida perceives that the emergence of the creative economy will be facilitated by fostering better

linkages between, and densifying, the cities that comprise megaregions.

Florida also endeavors to predict the fates of specific cities and regions, but none of these vignettes quite match the narrative and conceptual power of his case studies of Pittsburgh and Austin in his most famous prior effort, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Moreover, those familiar with his emphasis on "technology, talent, and tolerance" could probably surmise his prognostications for skilled cities like Washington, D.C. and Toronto on the one hand – and Las Vegas and Detroit on the other – without reading this book. Nonetheless, Florida is adept at tying these individual examples to the meta-narrative, particularly in the chapter "Sun sets on the Sunbelt," where he relates how that region's overbuilding manifests the overconsumption that characterized the U.S. economy prior to the Great Recession. Indeed, the "latter-day Gatsbyism" leading up to the crash is a favorite target of Florida throughout the book.

To conclude, Florida synthesizes how our economy and lifestyles are changing as well as the resulting implications for our future geography. This wide-ranging discussion covers topics such as shrinking the financial sector in favor of the "real economy" and upgrading job quality in the service sector. Undaunted by contentious issues, Florida is willing to take hard-line positions, for instance calling on government to focus less on propping up the industries of the past, which "might be better left to go the way of all things," and more on supporting the idea-driven industries of the future. In spatial terms, Florida envisions the rising prominence of transit-oriented development. Rebuffing the chorus of voices that anticipate the wholesale demise of suburbia, Florida instead believes suburbs will be retrofitted to offer a greater variety of housing and transportation options.

Florida musters a great deal of passion throughout the book, but arguments opposed to his vision are sometimes



too easily dismissed. He vehemently defends high-speed rail as “the one technology on the horizon that fits the geographic scale of megaregions,” but fails to adequately discuss alternatives and paints cost-conscious critics as myopic. Florida also leaves himself open to continued criticism that his perspective is elitist, with, for instance, his emphasis on the locational choices of “global talent” and his use of a survey of graduating Harvard students as a key piece of evidence for shifting employment preferences.

As in his previous efforts, Florida is at his best when distilling broad social, cultural, economic, and geographic trends in a manner that makes them easily accessible to a popular audience. While planners may be familiar with many of the examples he cites – the plight of Detroit, the revival of walkable neighborhoods – it is Florida’s exceptional capacity for synthesis that renders this book an insightful read for professionals seeking a better grasp on the societal context in which they operate. Few writers capture the contemporary zeitgeist like Richard Florida.

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