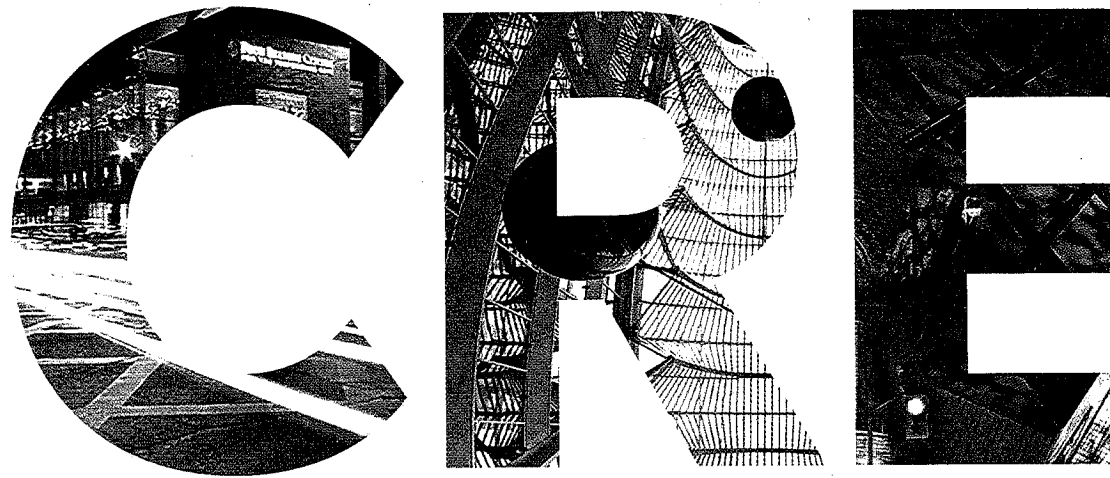


*the*  
CREATIVE  
CITY



The role of talent and creativity in economic development has been a subject of growing interest to social scientists. Future economic growth lies not only in attracting creative thinking to Toronto, but also in translating this advantage into new ideas, high-tech business and regional growth. As award-winning author Richard Florida writes, Toronto is one of only a handful of cities in the world that sit on the front burner of this rise of the creative class.



**I'M A HUGE FAN OF TORONTO. TO ME IT IS THE**

**QUINTESSENTIAL CITY.** It's not as big as New York or London, but it has as much or more diversity as either of them. And to its credit, it has not become completely gentrified and yuppified. Instead, it is one of very few great world cities that really do still have neighbourhoods, where people of different classes and ethnicities can mix and mingle and where neighbourhood shopping districts are not overwhelmed by chains.

Like many cities at the cutting edge of this global economy, Toronto is going through some massive, far-reaching changes. Today, economic value is driven by our knowledge, synthesis and creativity rather than manufacturing — our cities reflect this as they stumble, adjust and take advantage of the shift from an industrial to a creative economy. What's more, this change is essentially urban in nature. But what makes Toronto so transformative and exciting is that it is uniquely situated — geographically and socially — to take advantage of the global transformation to a creative economy.

There are only a handful of city-regions in the world that sit on the front burner of what I've called the rise of the creative class. Toronto is one of them. Whether it acknowledges this extremely advantageous position and works toward fulfilling this potential, or whether it clings to outdated notions of itself is the question of the moment. And it's a big question — perhaps the biggest Toronto has ever faced. This is a pivotal moment in Toronto's history: Does it move forward or stand still?

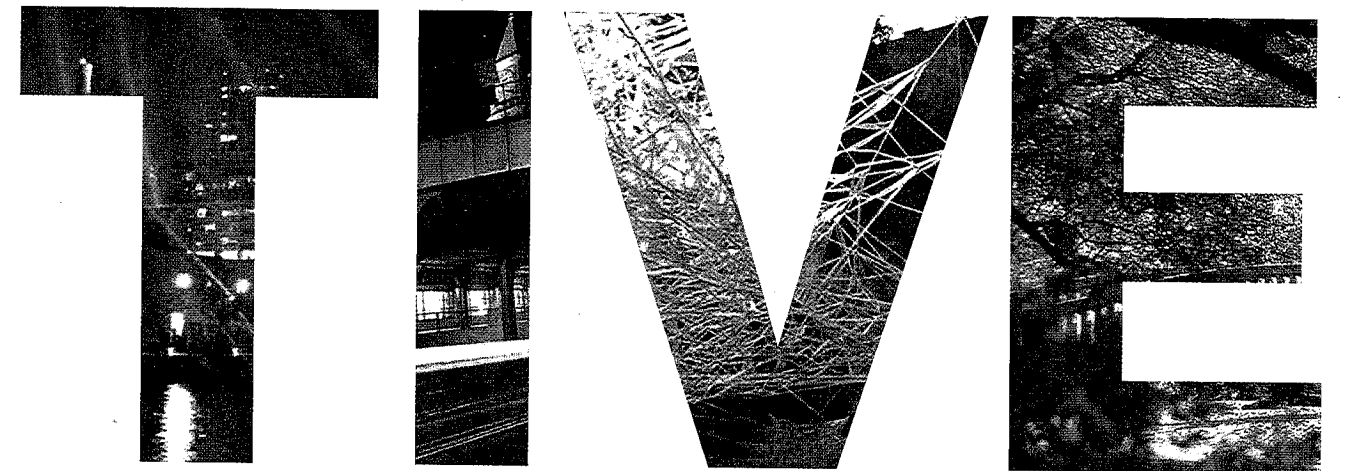
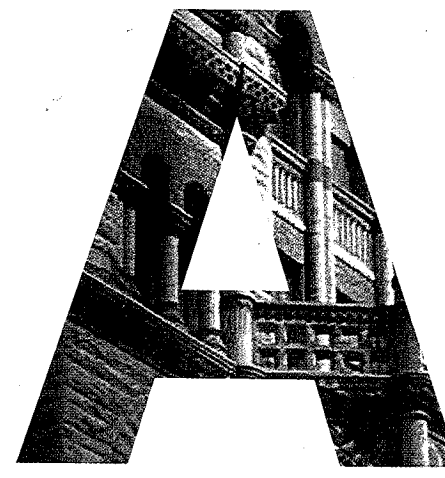
The creative class makes up 36 per cent of its workforce. Of North America's 10 most populous cities, only Boston, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., do better. Toronto ranks second in the world, behind only New York City, on Lisa Benton-Short's Mosaic Index — a measure of a region's foreign-born population, not just the raw numbers but how diverse that population is, how many different parts

of the world are represented in its mosaic. It also happens to be a crucial indicator of a region's openness to new ideas, to new people and, therefore, to economic growth.

Toronto is the centre of one of North America's mega-regions — again, not quite as big as the one that stretches from Boston to Washington, or that which connects Chicago and Pittsburgh, or Greater London or Tokyo, but it is among the world's 10 largest. Toronto's mega-region has a gravitational pull that reaches from Ottawa to Buffalo. It has an incredibly skilled workforce and immediate access to a market that is enormous. It's close to the United States, and this combination of proximity and distance is one of its greatest advantages.

Many Torontonians don't think of their city's relationship with its region this way. Historically, Torontonians have demonstrated a kind of civic modesty that, while not entirely unattractive, sometimes works against them. I expect that many Torontonians will be surprised to hear that, in my view, they sit at the heart of one of the most promising mega-regions in the world. Torontonians may also be just as surprised by what seems to an insider a truly remarkable strength: the city's deeply ingrained sense of economic and social fairness.

The world desperately needs a social and economic model that can harness the power of the creative economy and do so in a way that harnesses the creative energy of every single human being. That is the great challenge of our time — to build a truly inclusive agenda for the creative age, to understand and act on the fact that creativity refuses to accept and be limited by the social categories of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and age that we have imposed on ourselves. This model must start from the first principle that further economic development requires further human development across the board. Toronto is one of only a very few places in the world that have



the economic capability and the social infrastructure to complete that model.

It's the city's sense of fairness that mitigates the underlying tensions of the high-powered creative economy engine and ensures that it won't exacerbate division further. For example, Torontonians gradually came to realize that the way gays were being treated wasn't fair, that demonizing a segment of the population runs counter to Toronto's notion of what it is. This has led to the city's embrace of its gay community — a change of both official attitude and the attitude of citizens that has benefited the city in countless ways.

The same sense of fairness is the reason that neighbourhoods — both well-to-do and working-class — are so cherished in the city. The notion of a gated community is almost antithetical to Toronto's municipal self-image, in part because the gated community is seen as being unfair. It's seen, in Toronto terms, that everyone should have a neighbourhood that is safe and where everyone is welcome.

What this amounts to, in economic terms, is a surprising sense of purpose. There are two things that are certain about the changes that lie ahead: they are going to be profound and there is no going back. Toronto's innate sense of what is fair is what holds the city together in the face of confusion and uncertainty and challenge. And it is fairness that makes it more

likely that the city will address these changes, so that all its citizens can actualize the potential they present. To put it simply, Toronto is not set in its ways enough to imagine that there is any good reason to struggle against what is the prevailing current. This is only an attitude, I realize, but it is an attitude that represents a very clear competitive edge. Whether Toronto has the wisdom to capitalize on these advantages is what those of us who watch it with interest from within are very eager to find out.

It's difficult to overstate how profound the economic, social and technological changes are that we are living through. Those regions that successfully manage the dislocations caused by and, hopefully, solved by the emergence of the global creative economy will thrive. It's as simple as that. Toronto is set to become a model of sustainable creativity that the world will one day emulate. Thanks to its unique geographic location, incredibly skilled and diverse workforce, its love of neighbourhoods and true quality-of-place, its abiding sense of fairness and its globally-minded outlook, the further development of the economy turns on the development of the creative abilities, self-expression and talent of each and every single person. ●

*Richard Florida is the director of the Martin Prosperity Institute, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, and author of Rise of the Creative Class.*