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# Home Is Where the Paycheck Is

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By Marc Fisher  
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Richard Florida -- the social demographics guru who taught us that, even in this age of globalization and virtual geography, you are where you live -- moved out of the District last year, settling in [Toronto](#).

The man who brought us the book "The Rise of the Creative Class" and other best-selling ruminations on the meaning of our location choices is back with a book called "Who's Your City?" In it, he says that selecting a city or region inevitably involves deciding who you are and what kind of folks you want around you.

So why did Florida move from his lovely house in Northwest Washington clear across the U.S. border to [Canada](#)'s most eclectic city? Simply put, he got a better offer, shifting his base from [George Mason University](#) to the [University of Toronto](#).

But he also got to move away from a place where his life was divided among three realities: the bustle of [Dupont Circle](#), U Street and other engaging D.C. neighborhoods he cherished; the quiet of his leafy residential section of Northwest Washington (he lived in [Forest Hills](#), just off Tilden Street); and the relative isolation of Mason's location in [Fairfax County](#), where Florida worked but swore he would never live.

Now, he says, he can have it all -- living, working and playing in an urban setting that has the smart people and ethnic mix he cherished in the District, without the high crime rate, but with the sense of community he found lacking in Washington.

Florida moves around a lot, perhaps for largely professional reasons, but also because he's a searcher by nature, someone who believes in place as a key to getting the most out of the human experience. For years, he has preached that it makes sense for young people to go where other smart young people are, and the District comes out on top of any list of magnets for that crowd (18 percent of D.C. residents are college graduates, the highest figure of any city in the country, followed closely by [San Francisco](#), Florida says in his book.)

Florida looks at a social map of the United States and sees us clustering ourselves according to our passions and pursuits. Washington, he writes, is home to 78 percent of the nation's political scientists, "as well as a huge share of economists, mathematicians and astronomers." [New York](#) is where more than half of all fashion designers work, and [Houston](#) is home to more than a third of petroleum engineers.

Although Washington still tops Florida's list of cities for young singles and is one of the top five for gays, he is down on the District as a place for families with children, preferring [Kansas City](#), Mo., [Minneapolis](#) and [San Jose](#). Nonetheless, he still ranks the Washington area -- meaning the suburbs -- as the nation's best for families with kids.

For Florida, the great revelation came during his first Halloween in Toronto. In Washington, "not a single kid came to our door in three years" on the night of the great candy hunt, he writes. In Toronto, "our house was mobbed by children of a mosaic of races."

This is where Florida loses me. We lived less than 20 blocks apart when he was in Washington, but our experiences were as different as could be on what he calls the "trick or treater index."

Our block, like many in Northwest, has always been busy on Halloween. Florida's surely was not. For reasons that always baffled me, this great bard of urban vibrancy, a latter-day Jane Jacobs (the spiritual grandmother of the smart-growth movement), chose to live in about as anti-urban a city setting as could be had: far from a Metro station, way up on a hill, in a beautiful spot right near [Rock Creek Park](#), well away from any of the amenities he preaches about in his books.

Of course he didn't see kids on Halloween. What halfway intelligent kid would waste his time wandering around in a dark neighborhood of widely separated houses way off the main drag? Especially when, just a few blocks away, kids could find block after block teeming with trick or treaters each year.

Florida is surely right about some of the other reasons that families with children tend to move out of the District -- the lousy schools, crime, weak services. But I'm puzzled by the Place Man's decisions about where to live. Yes, Toronto is a terrific city, in many ways an urban model.

In the end, however, it seems [Richard Florida](#) chooses where to live more the way many of us do rather than the way he advises in his books: He doesn't necessarily go where the most creative and exciting people are; rather, he goes where he gets the best job. There's not the least bit of shame in that, but Florida's answer to "Who's Your City?" may well be "whoever's making it worth my while."

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