



Scholar: It's Time For The Post Automotive Era



Michigan, the national leader in recession, depends on an auto industry that will never be as big as it was. So how does the Detroit area diversify? Who's hiring, or investing in something new? *Morning Edition* reports on Detroit's desperate race to replace the jobs that the automakers eliminate.

[Morning Edition](#), April 22, 2009

There is an elevated train that rings downtown Detroit. It's called the People Mover. And it gives passengers a spectacular view of the early century skyscrapers that make up much of Detroit's skyline. Many of those buildings are empty now, signs that this is a deeply troubled city.

Michigan has the country's highest jobless rate, 12.6 percent. Detroit's unemployment rate is even higher than that. But all may not be lost for the city that gave birth to the Model-T and Motown. If, says Dr. Richard Florida, the city and the region can move past the auto industry.

Florida is Professor of Business and Creativity at the University of Toronto and author of *"Who's Your City"* and other books. He's a leading expert in how regions grow and attract people. Right now, according to Florida, people are simply focusing on the wrong thing.

"I know in this time of economic crisis people are saying where are the jobs going to come from. And clearly there has to be a focus on providing good work. But at the same time," he cautions, "it's not just about attracting companies and firms and jobs, it has to be about retaining and attracting and motivating people."

So how does a city like Detroit, or even a state like Michigan do this? Richard Florida offers what he admits may seem like a strange idea in the middle of these troubled times. "Instead of bailing out the auto firms, and giving industrial incentives to companies that are going to try and come and create low skill dead end jobs, why not use that same money to enable business start ups? And encourage people to take real risks. To come to

Detroit and create their own businesses. And I think that the region really has to realize is that the future after auto can be better."

Florida stresses this idea has worked in the past. Think Silicon Valley forty or fifty years ago and more recently Pittsburg as it moved into the post steel era. The population of the city shrank but Pittsburg, says Florida became "more innovative and entrepreneurial and actually the quality of life in Pittsburg improved a lot."

And he thinks the same thing could happen in Detroit.

"I think the great tragedy of Detroit has been this tragedy of separated, segregated city and region. A largely African-American core surrounded by a largely white and to some degree immigrant suburban periphery. And when I look at Detroit, I see a tremendous legacy and reservoir of urban energy." And Florida believes this can overcome the crime, troubled schools and, most importantly, help bring jobs. Especially if the region as a whole comes together. "There are these fabulous university towns like Ann Arbor and Lansing, if that region can work together it would be a whole lot more than the sum of its parts."

If Richard Florida sounds overly optimistic to some, he's not. He too shares this common fear; "There is a very great danger that it could be too late for a place like Detroit. It can only remake itself in a new way with a new kind of innovative and entrepreneurial and creative energy, that's its only hope. That's its only hope for the future."