



THE CREATIVITY & CIVICS MANIFESTO

I believe that creativity is an essential and irreplaceable element of the American character and mind. Our ability to invent new ideas, things, and ways of relating to one-another has been the engine that created our country and that drives our economic and spiritual well-being.

The establishment of America was a creative act. The Declaration of Independence was a profoundly innovative document that helped spark the public's imagination and gave life to a revolutionary idea.

The public readings of the Declaration across the face of the 13 colonies in 1776 were civic performances that helped turn those colonies into the United States of America in the minds of the listeners.

I believe that creativity and the passion to pursue the dreams released by one's creativity lie at the heart of America's success as a nation and as a people. When we stay true to the spirit and meaning of creative expression, we are at our best.

Collectively, our creative efforts have generated the driving force in today's global economy - our creative industries are leading the world in new products, entertainment and scientific advancement. America's creative class - artists, cultural workers, writers, software developers, inventors, change agents, community organizers and others who live to create new visions, products and solutions add immeasurable value to the American fabric of life as well as to its economy.

Taken together, our creativity-based industries have been called the Creative Economy.

Included in this set of industries are what have been labeled the "copyright industries." In 2007 the total value added to the economy by all the copyright industries was \$152 trillion or 11.05% of our Gross Domestic Product.¹

Over 38 million Americans work in the industries that comprise the Creative Economy.²

The Creative Economy is where the action is for post-Industrial, post-Service and post-Modern societies. This is where the most value will be created and the highest-paying jobs will be. It's also where the fun is.

And it's projected to grow by a 4.6 percent compound annual growth rate through 2015.³

In a sense, creativity is an energy source, a source that lies inside every individual and that is renewable and endless - like sunlight. In fact, creativity is the one energy source that is non-polluting, available everywhere and exists in inexhaustible abundance.

I believe that by unleashing American ingenuity and the drive to create, we will find the path to continued prosperity and economic security. We will also engender new ways of solving

problems, of making life more just, humane and fulfilling for more and more people here – and abroad.

Creativity is not just about inventing new products. It's also about asking the most basic questions about injustice and imagining a world where basic needs are not just manipulated but ennobled and met. Creative people who ask fundamental questions and act on those questions can change society in fundamental ways.

We don't know where the next Steve Jobs, Jimi Hendrix, Jonas Salk, Jane Addams or Cesar Chavez will come from. Who will be the next pioneers and innovators whose work will immeasurably enrich the national life? If we want to increase the likelihood that they will be American-born or American-based, we need to think creatively about how to nourish, maximize, and accelerate creativity here.

I believe that every person has something precious and important to offer our community and our economy. Great ideas don't respect skin color, religious preference, sexual orientation or economic circumstance. If we, as a nation, restrict opportunity and access to resources to certain people because of some pre-conceived prejudice, then we risk losing the ideas and creations those people might generate.

If we demand that everyone look, act and think like us, then we foreclose on the possibility that some new and unanticipated insight will blossom into the "killer app" that technology writers talk about. Most great innovations happen when people question the usual and the standard ways of thinking.

The way I see the American creed goes something like this; "We don't care where you came from, who your parents were, who you sleep with, what color you are or what you had for breakfast - we just want to know what's in your head and what's in your heart. If we like it, we try it - we buy into it - we take it and run with it."

That's what is so unique about America.

That is what makes us great - what is at our core and what we offer to the rest of the world. That's why 35 million people born in other countries are here right now.⁴ Freedom to be and freedom to create.

I call this aspect of America the Creativity Imperative. It's Job #1 for America – for her schools, civic organizations, for her arts organizations and for her science and business sectors.

I commit myself and my work to helping America live up to her creative heritage. I commit myself to helping units of government, businesses and nonprofit enterprises realize The Creativity Imperative. I look forward to working with like-minded souls who are committed to creating new jobs, new services, and new solutions by tapping a very old and precious American resource - our fabulous pool of American creativity and the American passion to leave things better than we found them.

References / related links:

1. The International Intellectual Property Alliance, Fact Sheet issued July 20, 2009 – <http://www.iipa.com>.
2. "[The Rise of the Creative Class](#)," Richard Florida, Basic Books, 2002, p. 68 & 328.
3. "[Study Finds Rebound in Entertainment and Media Spending](#)," New York Times online, June 14, 2011.

4. [United Nations Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, International Migration Profiles](#)

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Tom Tresser is a consultant, producer, educator and trainer works with individuals, companies and communities to leverage and amplify their creative assets in order to solve problems, create economic value and trigger civic engagement. In 2007 he designed and produced training programs for the provincial government of Saskatchewan on how to use the arts and creativity for local economic development. He was director of cultural development at Peoples Housing, in north Rogers Park, Chicago, where he created a community arts program that blended the arts, education and micro-enterprise. Tom has acted in some 40 shows and produced over 100 plays, special events, festivals and community programs. He was an arts activist, having organized support for pro-arts candidates and developed a cultural policy think tank at Roosevelt University in the early 1990's, where he taught "Arts & Public Policy." In 2003 he was appointed Visiting Fellow in Arts and Culture at the DePaul University College of Commerce's Ryan Center for Creativity and Innovation. Tom was elected to the Abraham Lincoln Elementary School's Local School Council and served from 2004 to 2006. He was a co-founder of Protect Our Parks, a neighborhood effort to stop the privatization of public space in Chicago. He was a lead organizer for [No Games Chicago](#), an all-volunteer grassroots effort that opposed Chicago's 2016 Olympic bid. He has taught workshops on "The Politics of Creativity – A Call To Service" for arts service organizations in six states. He has taught a number of classes on art, creativity and civic engagement for Loyola University, School of the Art Institute, the Illinois Institute of Technology, and DePaul University. Tom also consults with arts organizations on strategic planning and program development. Tom has published a web-based project, "[America Needs You!](#)" – about the need for artists to get involved in politics. Tom was the [Green Party](#) candidate for the position of President of the Board of Commissioners of Cook County in November 2010 election. Tom recently taught "[Got Creativity? Strategies & Tools for the Next Economy](#)" (IIT Stuart School of Business), "[Introduction to the Creative Economy](#)" (online for [Project Polymath](#)), and "[Acting Up – Using Theater & Technology for Social Change](#)" (online for DePaul University's School for New Learning) and "Nonprofit Management" (online for Loyola University's School of Social Work). Tom is currently working on establishing a new civic project, [Protect Our Public Assets](#), to fight privatization and to defend the commons.

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