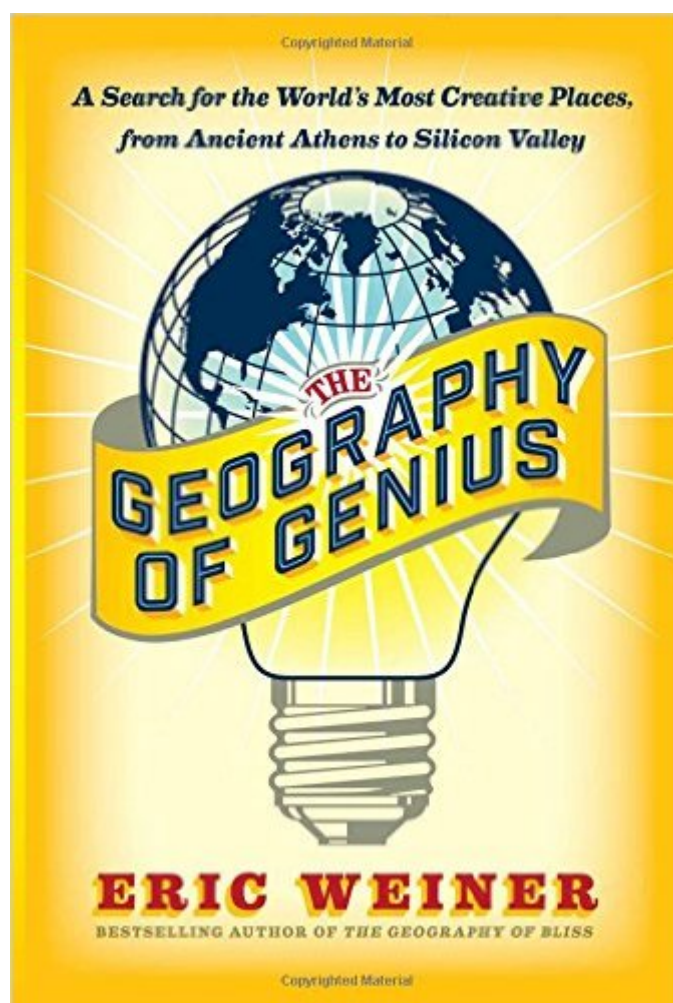


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The Geography Of Genius: A Search For The World's Most Creative Places From Ancient Athens To Silicon Valley



Synopsis

“An intellectual odyssey, a traveler’s diary, and a comic novel all rolled into one. Smart, original, and utterly delightful.” —Daniel Gilbert, Harvard professor and bestselling author of *Stumbling on Happiness* “A charming mix of history and wisdom cloaked as a rollicking travelogue.” —Walter Isaacson, bestselling author of *Steve Jobs* Travel the world with Eric Weiner, the New York Times bestselling author of *The Geography of Bliss*, as he journeys from Athens to Silicon Valley—and throughout history, too—to show how creative genius flourishes in specific places at specific times. In *The Geography of Genius*, acclaimed travel writer Weiner sets out to examine the connection between our surroundings and our most innovative ideas. He explores the history of places, like Vienna of 1900, Renaissance Florence, ancient Athens, Song Dynasty Hangzhou, and Silicon Valley, to show how certain urban settings are conducive to ingenuity. And, with his trademark insightful humor, he walks the same paths as the geniuses who flourished in these settings to see if the spirit of what inspired figures like Socrates, Michelangelo, and Leonardo remains. In these places, Weiner asks, “What was in the air, and can we bottle it?” This link can be traced back through history: Darwin’s theory of evolution gelled while he was riding in a carriage. Freud did his best thinking at this favorite coffee house. Beethoven, like many geniuses, preferred long walks in the woods. Sharp and provocative, *The Geography of Genius* redefines the argument about how genius came to be. His reevaluation of the importance of culture in nurturing creativity is an informed romp through history that will surely jumpstart a national conversation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There's a school of thought that runs something like this: the average US citizen isn't very bright, has a limited attention span, and has an appetite only for the superficial. So if you want to write a book about something you feel to be important, you have to sugar the pill - with lots and lots of sugar and make sure it's a very small pill indeed. Hence the style "American-Folksy." In this genre the author leads the reader gently along by means of first-person narrative, tons of anecdote, and just the gentlest hint of new information here and there. The lexicon is undemanding and the pace is calculated to be just brisk enough to prevent the onset of catatonia while being leisurely enough not to require any strenuous intellectual activity on the part of the reader. It's basically DisneyWords. This is a well-tried genre used across a wide variety of subjects. In *Search of Excellence* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* both use the same style despite their contexts being very different. And Weiner uses *American-Folksy* here for precisely the same reasons and to precisely the same effect. The purpose of *American-Folksy* is to take something that could have made a somewhat interesting 6-page monograph and stretch it out into a book-length peregrination. The problem with *American-Folksy*, however is that it's not just a question of stretching things out and diluting ideas into easy-to-digest micro-fragments. The core problem is that when you meander around a topic rather than condense it down to its essentials you can very easily overlook the logical flaws inherent in your treatment and the gaps in your arguments. And that's precisely the problem with this book.

Author Eric Weiner examines creativity as a function of the locations that were historically the best milieu for producing creative genius of all kinds. Weiner's thesis is that the spirit of certain places like Vienna in the 18th and early 20th centuries, ancient Athens, Florence Italy at the beginning of the Renaissance, Edinburgh in the 18th century and Silicon Valley in our own day, seemed to foster creativity at the highest levels. It's an interesting thesis and certain places do appear to influence creativity. However, any major city is likely to have more talented individuals than elsewhere and places like Silicon Valley actively solicit and attract talent as a function of what they intrinsically are, so Weiner's thesis is difficult to prove. His writing style is light-hearted and non-threatening, making it an entertaining look at creative genius with few intellectually challenging moments. Weiner makes some serious factual errors even as he professes ignorance in the subjects he writes about. For example, in the chapter in which he discusses Mozart and 18th century Vienna, Weiner asserts that

the composer wrote six string quartets when he actually composed twenty-seven, beginning with K.80 written in 1770 when Mozart was 14 years old. He later writes that Mozart's first five piano concertos were composed by others (the first four were so-called pastiche concertos in which individual sonata movements by others were assembled and orchestrated by Mozart and the fifth concerto was entirely original). When the author discovers that his Viennese hotel is actually named after an important musical term (the Adagio), he is stunned. I wonder if this level of ignorance is really a positive in a book about knowledge and genius.

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