

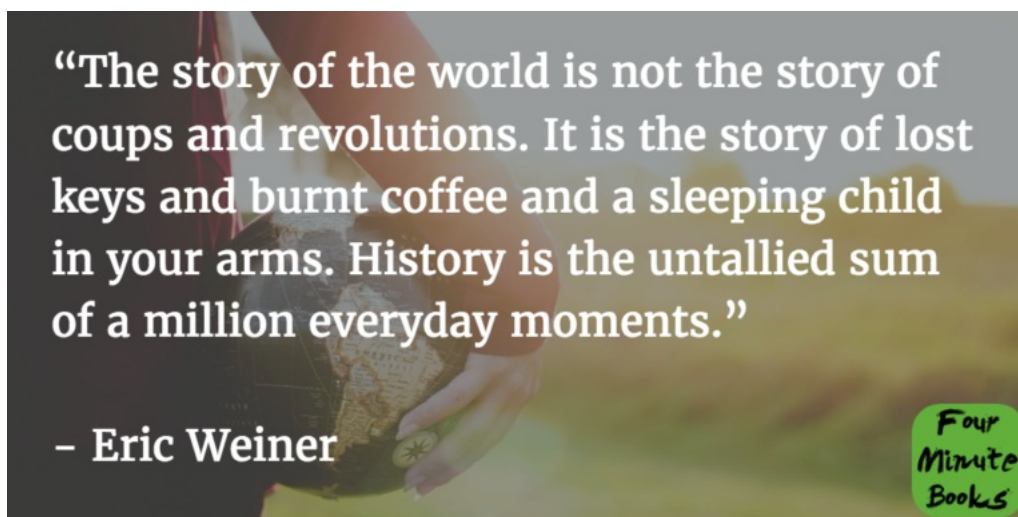
The Geography Of Genius Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Geography Of Genius explains how genius is not an inherited trait bound to individual, but rather happens at the intersection of time and place, by talking you on a tour through some of the historically most creative cities in the world.*

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Who's the first person that comes to your mind when I say the word "genius?" For me, it'll always be Albert Einstein. However, I could've just as well asked you "what comes to mind...?" instead of *who*. We usually tie the concept of genius to individuals, using it as a term to describe someone who's especially bright, has tons of good ideas and always says the right thing at the right time.

But there's plenty of genius going on in the world that doesn't have a single first and last name, like the way bees structure their hives, anonymous street art or the San Francisco cable car system built as early as 1873.

Speaking of the latter, it's also one of the city's Eric Weiner describes as hubs of genius in *The Geography Of Genius*. He says genius is more a result of time and place, rather than some inherent greatness or genetic makeup of an individual.

Here are my 3 favorite places he explores and why they bred so much genius:

1. Athens is the original grandmother of genius.
2. Thanks to a smart church "invention," Florence was home to much genius in the Renaissance.
3. Weak ties and successful failures are what makes modern day San Francisco so creative.

Would you like to take a stroll through history, following the footsteps of genius? Lead the way, Mr. Weiner!

Lesson 1: Ancient Athens is the grandmother of genius.

It's always sad to see when what was once of true greatness has fallen and is nothing but a mere remnant of its glorious past. Athens sure is one of those places. Greece has been in horrendous debt for years now, unemployment is sky high and they just can't get a foot in the door anywhere.

2,000 years ago, Athens was the frontier of human progress. Statesmen, playwrights, philosophers like Socrates, some of the greatest minds of all time were Athenians.

There are a couple reasons for this:

1. **Athenians were proud citizens.** Because they loved Athens so much, they would always compete to see who could contribute to their local society the most.
2. **Rich locals invested into arts and entertainment,** making sure culture would advance, giving creativity a huge backdrop.
3. **They weren't afraid to adopt foreign ideas,** like Egyptian architecture, the Phoenician alphabet or Babylonian number system.
4. **People walked everywhere.** 10,000 steps a day isn't just good for your health, it also boosts your cognitive ability and creativity.

Not solely, but largely responsible for creation and innovation, these four things made Athens the true grandmother of genius. Let's hope it'll get back up soon! As it turns out, these traits are commonalities among other creative hubs too.

Lesson 2: Because the church "invented" purgatory, it could finance a lot of innovation in Renaissance Florence.

For example, hardly any city produced more iconic art than Florence during the Renaissance. Michelangelo, Donatello, Da Vinci, these grandmasters of innovation and art all called it their home. **Patronage played a big role here,** with rich entrepreneur families, like the Medici, financing and commissioning lots of paintings, sculptures and architectural ventures.

However, even they pale in comparison with the powerful patronage of the Catholic church – which had more money than ever before, thanks to a clever "invention" of their own: purgatory.

The church told everyone they'd spend a certain time after death in a place of excruciating pain and suffering, depending on how much they sinned in life. Conveniently, by buying expensive indulgences from the church (think of it as a letter of apology in advance – a line of credit for

sinning, if you will), you could reduce that time. Suddenly, the church's treasure chambers were flooded with gold, a lot of which went right back into building monuments for the church, such as the Duomo.

Competition and collaboration were also prevalent among Florentine inventors and artists. Also, just like Athens, they adopted many foreign ideas, most of which entered the city through commerce, such as the Arabic numeral system, brought to Florence by Leonardo Fibonacci, which later spread through the entire Western world.

Lesson 3: Two things that make San Francisco a modern hub of innovation are weak ties and successful failures.

When did Silicon Valley even become the symbol of innovation and technological advance it is today? It all started in the 1930s. Fred Terman, the dean of Stanford's Engineering School at the time, decided to boldly invest into a company two of his former students formed: Hewlett-Packard.

Thinking this whole technology thing was worth a shot, Terman went all in and built something called Stanford Industrial Park, a technology center, which, had it failed, he would've turned into a school.

This attitude resembles one of the two main drivers of SF's innovative spirit: **successful failure**. As long as you set up your ventures in a way that they can at least fail in a smart way or be leveraged into something else, there's not much to fear, is there?

The second part of SF's innovation equation is what Eric Weiner calls **weak ties**. These are the connections with have with other people through friends of friends (of friends) and so on. Having many of these loose relationships has two advantages:

1. You know, interact and exchange with many people of different disciplines, industries and backgrounds.
2. You're not as invested in those relationships, which allows you to challenge bad ideas and crank up the speed of execution.

So where will the next big center of genius be? I have no idea. But it'll probably be a place with lots of competition, culture and a big influx of foreign ideas – Israel maybe?

The Geography Of Genius Review

I really enjoyed these blinks. I never thought of connecting a topic like innovation to geography, so this got all kinds of gears going in my brain. Plus, it gave me lots of ideas for my "places to visit" list. Definitely recommend *The Geography Of Genius*

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- Where past researchers of genius went off track
- Some more foreign ideas Athenians adopted
- How Hangzhou in China was able to live through a 300-year Golden Age
- Why being practical was at the root of Edinburgh's flourishing creativity
- What made Calcutta a great place to be in the early 20th century
- A benefit of the occasional glass of wine

Who would I recommend The Geography Of Genius summary to?

The 21 year old Athenian, who loves her city but is sad about the current state of it, the 32 year old Italian, who can't help but shake his head at the actual political situation in his country, and anyone who wants to move to Silicon Valley.