

COB review by George Mechling

Title: "Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution--and How It Can Renew America"

Author: Thomas Friedman

Publisher: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2008

Length: 421 pages

Reading time: 8 hours

Reading rating: 7 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 3 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

"Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution--and How It Can Renew America" (2008) by Thomas L. Friedman is a book first and foremost written to and for Americans. It is a systemic look at current issues confronting the United States and the globe organized around three presumptively interrelated dynamics cited in the book's title. Accelerating population growth (*crowded*) along with a rising middle class in the developing world (e.g., China and India) that technological leveling of the global economic playing field has made possible (*flat*), add to increasing demands on the planet's natural resources they (e.g., oil) cannot indefinitely sustain even as our global climate is increasingly impacted adversely (*hot*). Friedman uses catchy little phrases throughout the book as code for various ideas with which he works, such as; "dumb as we wanna be" that describes our insular attitude toward effectively addressing the increasingly perilous consequences of the globe becoming *hot, flat, and crowded*. Chapter Four, *Fill'er Up with Dictators*, for example, describes in detail one such consequence in which our unwillingness to emancipate ourselves from dependence on foreign oil has fostered and often incited developments and reactions throughout the globe antagonistic to our interests--rogue states, terrorism, and undermined democracies.

Friedman's book, however, is not "gloom and doom" stuff. It is in fact, quite upbeat and optimistic about America. When he talks about a "green revolution" as a way to effectively address our growing energy demands, Friedman is pitching his message at those who are positioned to make far-ranging long-term decisions of economic significance because he thinks that such a revolution makes sound business and economic sense. He furthermore believes and I believe rightly so, that those who possess the means to make such a "green revolution" economically viable will in fact have positioned themselves for future economic leadership in the global community. This was true for those in the past who then initially held the new energy keys whether it was maritime Holland with wind and water whom Great Britain with coal replaced and whom in turn the United States with oil then replaced.

Friedman is, however, optimistic that economic decline for the United States relative to some ascending replacement need not be imminent even though it would appear that the production of accessible oil has peaked. His optimism is grounded in his belief that the United States has the technology relative to other nations to achieve such a revolution and given the right circumstances, it can have the political will also. The United States has often promoted markets vital to its interests. It did so with the oil and railroad industries. It can do so again with the geo-thermal, wind, solar, nuclear, and hydro-electric energy industries if it chooses. Investing in such ventures in Friedman's thinking will pay dividends in terms of domestic GDP as well as create opportunities

to market such know-how and skills that will eventually be desperately needed elsewhere in the not too distant future.

Friedman acknowledges that the challenges of a *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* world are monumental and daunting but he hastens to emphasize that the opportunities accompanying these challenges which we have the capacity to exploit can be monumentally rewarding also. Friedman devotes Parts Three, Four, and Five of his book enthusiastically outlining how this can be and is, in part, being done.

“Hot, Flat, and Crowded” is a relatively easy read despite some strained metaphors and imagery. Friedman is a skilled writer. Unfortunately, he does little to acknowledge the *green revolution* going on in the European community that admittedly is well ahead of us. The reader can probably overlook this deficiency, however, because Friedman's concern and care for the moment is with and for America and getting to it a message he thinks it needs to hear.

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