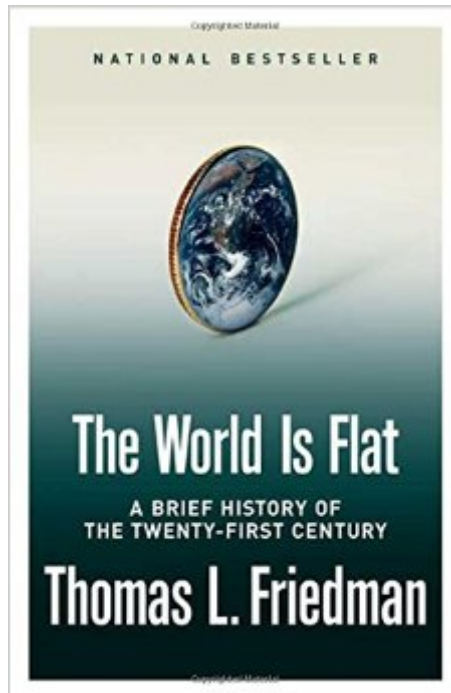


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The World Is Flat: A Brief History Of The Twenty-first Century



Synopsis

When scholars write the history of the world twenty years from now, and they come to the chapter "Y2K to March 2004," what will they say was the most crucial development? The attacks on the World Trade Center on 9/11 and the Iraq war? Or the convergence of technology and events that allowed India, China, and so many other countries to become part of the global supply chain for services and manufacturing, creating an explosion of wealth in the middle classes of the world's two biggest nations, giving them a huge new stake in the success of globalization? And with this "flattening" of the globe, which requires us to run faster in order to stay in place, has the world gotten too small and too fast for human beings and their political systems to adjust in a stable manner? In this brilliant new book, the award-winning New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman demystifies the brave new world for readers, allowing them to make sense of the often bewildering global scene unfolding before their eyes. With his inimitable ability to translate complex foreign policy and economic issues, Friedman explains how the flattening of the world happened at the dawn of the twenty-first century; what it means to countries, companies, communities, and individuals; and how governments and societies can, and must, adapt. *The World Is Flat* is the timely and essential update on globalization, its successes and discontents, powerfully illuminated by one of our most respected journalists.

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Customer Reviews

Tom Friedman is a well connected journalist. His columns appear on the op-ed pages of the New

York Times and his previous works LONGITUDES AND ATTITUDES and THE LEXUS AND THE OLIVE TREE are part of the "conventional wisdom" of most American decision makers. This new book, THE WORLD IS FLAT will also find its way into the "conventional wisdom." Unfortunately, it is at best a misdiagnosis of the factors that have led to the ability to substitute labor across geographical boundaries. However, although it is as wrong as could be, many of our power elites will read or hear of this, and will base their decisions on the assumption that this book contains the truth. The reason that you should read it is that it is conventional wisdom and you are perhaps better off understanding this and how it is wrong. Friedman's explanation is a simple one - the world has transformed from a three dimensional phenomenon, a sphere, to a two dimensional flat plane where there are no entry barriers into the labor market. So, a radiologist in Boston can be easily substituted for a radiologist in Bangalore. Oh, how it would be nice if it were this simple. But alas it is not. Friedman, I believe, is well intentioned, but he mistakenly believes that he can find the truth through anecdotes. So, his empirical evidence comes from stories of things that he does not understand instead of the use of reliable demographic and economic databases. He believes that 10 exogenous forces can explain how "the world became flat." While doing this, he solely looks at the labor market and ignores the effects of the consumer, monetary, raw material/energy, and fixed investment markets. He cannot distinguish between a symptom and a cause.

I'd forgotten the pleasure reading good prose brings. Friedman not only writes well, but does so on an important subject- globalization. He states, "It is now possible for more people than ever to collaborate and compete in real time with more people on more different kinds of work from more different corners of the planet and on a more equal footing than at any previous time in the history of the world." He claims, "When the world is flat, you can innovate without having to emigrate". But, how did the world 'become flat'? Friedman suggests the trigger events were the collapse of communism, the dot-com bubble resulting in overinvestment in fiber-optic telecommunications, and the subsequent out-sourcing of engineers enlisted to fix the perceived Y2K problem. Those events created an environment where products, services, and labor are cheaper. However, the West is now losing its strong-hold on economic dominance. Depending on if viewed from the eyes of a consumer or a producer - that's either good or bad, or a combination of both. What is more sobering is Friedman's elaboration on Bill Gates' statement, "When I compare our high schools to what I see when I'm traveling abroad, I am terrified for our work force of tomorrow. In math and science, our fourth graders are among the top students in the world. By eighth grade, they're in the middle of the pack. By 12th grade, U.S. students are scoring near the bottom of all industrialized nations. . . . The

percentage of a population with a college degree is important, but so are sheer numbers. In 2001, India graduated almost a million more students from college than the United States did. China graduates twice as many students with bachelor's degrees as the U.S.

An enlightening essay on the nature of the business world and how the global interconnectedness and outsourcing has leveled the playing field. Completely wrong, and based on an oversimplified and factually inaccurate premise, but well-written and enlightening. In Friedman's "flat" world, it's possible for a call center in India to take orders which then get processed by a shipping service in Indiana which forwards the order to a warehouse in Oakland that stores merchandise made from parts made in Taiwan and assembled in Malaysia. All this is written in such a way as to make the Corporate Executives of the world look like the good guys for somehow coming up with a win-win scenario whereby they bring jobs to third-world countries, at the same time saving themselves money while increasing their productivity and efficiency - a fine premise in the ideal, but hopelessly impractical on several realistic human levels. The book is very well-written, but Friedman fails to take into account the realities surrounding the fact that in order for such a system to work with any kind of sustainability it needs to create jobs to replace the ones that have been outsourced. Friedman's answer to this is that creativity and inventiveness will take the place of the grunt-work that's been outsourced, an idea that looks good on paper but fails to consider that our society's most financially successful businesses have never invented or innovated anything, instead relying on finding new ways to produce an existing product in a way that's cheaper and faster than their nearest competitor - thus fostering an environment that's not very conducive to innovation. The developers of new technology rarely if ever are the ones to reap the majority of financial benefit from its sale.

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