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Book Report: *Hot, Flat and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution—And How It Can Renew America* by Thomas L. Friedman

PR Management

The world is facing the biggest problem it's ever known-- global warming and climate change. In Thomas Friedman's book, *Hot, Flat and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution—And How It Can Renew America*, it is the combination of this hot, flat and crowded globe that is described as completely unsustainable. Friedman argues that “ global warming, the stunning rise of the middle class all over the world, and rapid population growth have converged in a way that could make our planet dangerously unstable” (Friedman, 2008: back cover). His call to action is that America must therefore be the leader of green innovation for the Energy-Climate Era, because it has been the world's leader for a long time and is uniquely capable of leading in a green revolution. He says that “[t]he best way for America to get its ‘groove’ back-- is for us to take a lead in solving the world’s big problem” (Friedman, 2008: 5). This message is conveyed through an argument displayed with scientific evidence, testimonial and the personal journey and anecdotes of the author Thomas Friedman.

Thomas Friedman is “an internationally renowned author, reporter, and columnist—the recipient of three Pulitzer Prizes and the author of six bestselling books” (Official Bio). Friedman has travelled all around the world working as a reporter and playing championship golf which is his favorite pass time (Official bio). In 1981, he began working for the New York Times and has served as both a writer and editor for the Times’ since (Official Bio). He is the author of many books including his number one best-seller *The World is Flat*, which serves as a

sort of prequel to this book. He holds a wide array of opinions on many controversial issues as has never hesitated to write about those opinions and share them with the world.

The realities of our environment become ever clearer with the explanation of the book's title: Hot, Flat and Crowded. Hot, refers to the global warming occurring in our environment. The book explains, and backs it up with scientific evidence, how since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, increased global warming has been caused by human activity. The term for this human effect on our climate is called “the enhanced greenhouse effect”, Friedman explains that “by pumping man-made greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, human are altering the process by which naturally occurring greenhouse gases, because of their unique molecular structure, trap the sun's heat near the earth’s surface before that heat radiates back into space” (Friedman, 2008: 35-36).

Flat refers to the growing number of people who have access to an American middle class lifestyle. What has caused this to happen is “a combination of technological, market and geopolitical events at the end of the twentieth century [which has] leveled the global economic playing field in a way that [is] enabling more people than ever... to enter the middle class” (Friedman, 2008: 29). This compounded with the advent of the Internet, which connects all these people together, provides instant information from all over the world and globalizes society, has flattened the world even further and caused the need for energy to power all these Internet-capable devices, to skyrocket.

Crowded means that there is an extreme population growth occurring globally. The world in 2016 has approximately 7 billion people with an estimated growth of 2.2 billion more by 2050 (Friedman, 2008: 28). What becomes really dangerous is when flat meets crowded . This

phenomenon is referred to by Friedman as a growth in “Americums” or “any group of 350 Million people with a per capita income above \$15,000 and a growing penchant for consumerism” (Friedman, 2008: 56). The world is changing rapidly due to technology and the resources necessary to keep up with that change is simply not available for the billions of people currently living and expected to live on this planet in the future. “We will go from a world population in which maybe one billion people [are] living an ‘American’ lifestyle to a world in which two or three billion people are living an American lifestyle” (Friedman, 2008: 55). “The effect of rising population depends on how much people consume and produce, and as the world gets flat, more and more people are going to be consuming and producing more and more” (Friedman, 2008: 65).

The entire world, and the United States in particular, have been incredibly negligent in addressing the increasing issue of global warming and of unsustainable energy consumption. This problem has been going on for some time and the United States who has been the leader in innovation has taken a backseat stance to this issue. In fact, in the 1980s “Reagan ran not only against government in general but against environmental regulation in particular. He and his Interior secretary, James Watt, turned environmental regulation into a much more partisan and polarizing issue than it had been before” (Friedman, 2008: 5). Friedman argues this trend must change, that in fact the future of the United States global power depends on it becoming a leader in green innovation (Friedman, 2008: 23).

Friedman lays out the five big problems facing the world that are all a result of utter mismanagement by humanity of our environment and our planet. He begins with discussing the problem of energy supply and demand. The issue with energy supply and demand stems directly

from the growing “Americum” issue, there is simply not enough energy to supply to exponentially growing demand. By 2050 the world will need twice the energy it currently consumes to sustain everyone (Friedman, 2008: 39). This addiction to energy, oil in particular, has led to the second big problem, petrodicatorship. Increased dependency on oil has empowered oil rich nations, many of which are dictatorships. In particular, American addiction to oil has motivated further tensions in an oil rich region, fraught with political strife and animosity towards the United States-- the Middle East. Friedman states, “Our addiction to oil makes global warming warmer, petrodictators stronger, clean air dirtier, poor people poorer, democratic countries weaker, and radical terrorists richer” (Friedman, 2008: 81). In fact, Friedman found a correlation between the price of oil and the pace of freedom in oil-producing states (Friedman, 2008: 94).

The third problem is a contingency of the first two issues-- energy poverty, the fact that most people in the world are living without sufficient energy. This is directly related to energy supply and demand, there is just too much demand and not enough supply. Place such as Africa suffer from constant power outages and there are whole regions of the continent that live completely in darkness, off the grid (Friedman, 2008: 45). The fourth problem is an obvious one that has been discussed multiple times in this book but still must be recognized as a product of human mismanagement, and that is climate change. Finally, the last problem which is clearly a result of human mismanagement of our environment is biodiversity loss. There is a larger rate of living species than ever before and it is directly related to human activity such as pollution, poaching and overuse (Friedman, 2008: 46).

This book demonstrates some good management strategies in its strong call to action that insists that the United States take a lead role in creating green innovation and a green revolution for the Energy-Climate Era. Friedman calls this need for an environmental revolution, “Code green... making America the world's leader in innovating clean power and energy efficient systems and inspiring an ethic of conservation toward the natural world which is increasingly imperiled” (Friedman, 2008: 7). This, of course, is a tall order. In the past twenty years increasing efforts have been made to address the climate issue, but it has not been aggressive enough, more like a green trend or party, than a revolution (Friedman, 2008: 204).

However, Friedman does make some proposals for how the United States can make better efforts to effectively manage our, and the world's, environmental and energy policy. He explains that to begin to stimulate the new innovation in green technology in the United States there needs to be “generous tax incentives, regulatory incentives, renewable energy mandates, and other market shaping mechanisms that create durable demand for these existing clean power technologies” (Friedman, 2008: 188). Meanwhile, as new cleaner energy is being developed, Friedman calls for the implementation of any eight of 15 immediate specific objectives, that he calls wedges, that can be done to cut carbon emissions-- which is currently on its way to becoming double the parts per million of CO₂ in our atmosphere than there was before the Industrial Revolution, which was 280 ppm (Friedman, 2008: 212-213). Friedman insists that the United States take a lead role in solving the climate change and energy crisis not only because solutions to these problems are imperative but also because “[g]reen is not simply a new form of generating electric power. It is a new form of generating national power-- period” (Friedman,

2008: 23). In this way, the United States can and will usher in a new era of global hegemonic power.

I chose to read and report on this book I was interested in learning more about environmentalism and green technology. My mother gave me this book a few years ago and after reading the first chapter I never got around to finishing it. I plan on being a domestic American political leader and, as Hillary Clinton states in the first debate, the greatest challenge facing the United States moving forward is the environment (First Presidential Debate, 2016). Therefore, I felt it was necessary for me, a person who wished to be a decision-maker in the American political system, to begin delving into the topic and increasing my arsenal of information about global warming and the impacts of a hot, flat and crowded world.

References:

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