



Reading Group Gold

The World Is Flat

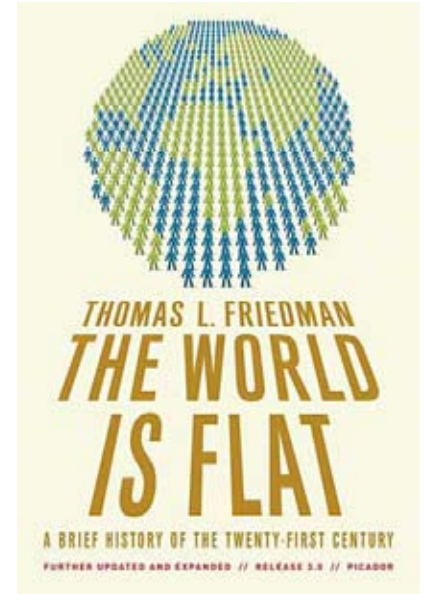
A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century

by Thomas Friedman

#1 *New York Times* Bestseller

#1 *Wall Street Journal* Bestseller

#1 Book Sense Bestseller



About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The World Is Flat* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The World Is Flat*.

About the Book

A New Edition of the #1 Bestseller

Three-time Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman delivers a vivid account of the human element behind both the triumphs and perils of globalization. This timely and essential report from the front lines of offshoring, outsourcing and other “flattening” factors in our world makes sense of the often bewildering economic, political, and security issues currently at play in the international realm. Friedman examines hundreds of fascinating pieces in this puzzle—from the intricate systems that produce rich rewards for Wal-Mart to Y2K’s role in rocketing the careers of computer scientists in India—and assembles them with refreshing clarity.

Whether in Bangalore or Beijing, Friedman asks brilliant questions of everyone he encounters. The truth he distills from their responses brings a new perspective to the ways in which CEOs and religious radicals, entrepreneurs and garden-variety consumers, all create ripples that stir the geopolitical tide. *The World Is Flat* shows how each of us has an undeniable stake in globalization.



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Praise for *The World Is Flat*

“[An] exciting and very readable account of globalization...[Friedman] provides a compelling case that something big is going on...One mark of a great book is that it makes you see things in a new way, and Mr. Friedman certainly succeeds in that goal... In his provocative account, Mr. Friedman suggests what this brave new world will mean to all of us, in both the developed and the developing worlds.”—Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The New York Times*

“*The World Is Flat* continues the franchise Friedman has made for himself as a great explicator of and cheerleader for globalization, building upon his 1999 *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. Like its predecessor, this book showcases Friedman’s gift for lucid dissections of abstruse economic phenomena, his teacher’s head, his preacher’s heart, his genius for trend-spotting...[This book] also shares some of the earlier volume’s excitement (mirroring Rajesh Rao’s) and hesitations about whether we’re still living in an era dominated by old-fashioned states or in a postmodern, globalized era where states matter far less and the principal engine of change is a leveled playing field for international trade.”—Warren Bass, *The Washington Post*

“Nicely sums up the explosion of digital-technology advances during the past 15 years and places the phenomenon in its global context...[Friedman] never shrinks from the biggest problems and the thorniest issues...Ambitious.”—Paul Mangnusson, *BusinessWeek*

“Excellent...[This book’s] insight is true and deeply important... The metaphor of a flat world, used by Friedman to describe the next phase of globalization, is ingenious...The book is done in Friedman’s trademark style. You travel with him, meet his wife and kids, learn about his friends and sit in on his interviews... [This method] works in making complicated ideas accessible...Friedman has a flair for business reporting and finds amusing stories about Wal-Mart, UPS, Dell, and JetBlue, among others, that relate to his basic theme.”—Fareed Zakaria, *The New York Times Book Review* (cover review)

About the Author

Thomas L. Friedman has won the Pulitzer Prize three times for his work at *The New York Times*. He is the author of three bestselling books: *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (FSG, 1989), winner of the National Book Award for nonfiction and still considered to be the definitive work on the Middle East; *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (FSG, 1999); and *Longitudes and Attitudes: Exploring the World After September 11* (FSG, 2002). He lives in Bethesda, Maryland, with his family.

Discussion Questions

1. The first chapter in *The World Is Flat* recalls the voyage of Columbus, colonization, and industrialization. Are the motivations behind twenty-first century globalization much different from the ones recorded through history?



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2. Thomas L. Friedman discusses the many occupations that can now be outsourced or offshored, including his own job as a journalist. Could your job be done by someone in another country? Could you do your job better from home, as the JetBlue telephone agents do? Would you feel comfortable knowing that your taxes had been prepared by an overseas accountant, or your CAT scan read by an overseas radiologist? (Chapter One)
3. The second chapter outlines “Ten Forces That Flattened the World,” ranging from the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, to the open-source software movement. In what way did politics influence entrepreneurship in the 1990s? What psychological impact did November 9 have on the world, particularly when paired with new means for global communication?
4. What is your opinion of the open-source movement? Should there be any limit to the amount of freedom, including “freedom” from the demand to make a profit, in the technology marketplace? (Chapter Two)
5. What qualities enabled India to take center stage when the looming Y2K scenario generated unprecedented demand for programmers? What can other nations learn from India’s success in this realm? What are India’s greatest vulnerabilities? (Chapter Two)
6. Discuss the ruthless efficiency demanded by supply-chaining. In the long run, does it benefit consumers? Do you believe it enhances or reduces production quality? (Chapter Two)
7. Were you familiar with the concept of “insourcing” prior to reading *The World Is Flat*? Does it matter to you whether your computer is repaired by an employee of Toshiba or of UPS? Should it matter? (Chapter Two)
8. Friedman calls the tenth flattener “steroids.” Are these crucial to success, or are they luxuries? Will the globe’s nonsteroidal citizens be able to compete without them? (Chapter Two)
9. In what ways has the Triple Convergence affected your day-to-day life? (Chapter Three)
10. Discuss the “Indiana versus India” anecdote, recounted in the second section of Chapter Four. Which approach benefits Americans more: offshoring state projects and cutting taxpayer expenditures, or paying higher wages to maintain job security at home?
11. Chapter Six, “The Untouchables,” features the story of Friedman’s childhood friend Bill Greer. What does his story indicate about flattening in the creative fields? Will illustrators lose out to Illustrator? What would it take for you to become an untouchable?
12. Chapter Seven, “The Quiet Crisis,” outlines three dirty secrets regarding American dominance: fewer young Americans pursuing careers in math and science, and the demise of both ambition and brainpower among American youth. What accounts for this? What would it take to restore academic rigor and the enthusiasm enjoyed during the “man on the moon” days?



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13. Which of the proposals in Chapter Eight, “This Is Not a Test,” would you be able to implement?
14. In Chapter Nine’s third section, “I Can Only Get It for You Retail,” Friedman offers a vivid portrait of the “neighborhoods” comprising various parts of the globe today. How will those neighborhoods look one hundred years from now? Will America still be a gated community, and Asia “the other side of the tracks”?
15. Friedman contemplates the cultural traits (such as motivated, educated workers and leaders who don’t squander the nation’s treasure) that drive a nation’s success. He uses this to illustrate why Mexico, despite NAFTA, has become the tortoise while China has become the hare. Does America fit Friedman’s cultural profile as a nation poised for prosperity? (Chapter Nine)
16. Do you work for a company that is implementing any of Friedman’s coping strategies? Which of them would be the most controversial in your industry? (Chapter Ten)
17. What do you make of the approach taken by Bill Gates’s foundation to combat disease? In your opinion, what are the roots of the public-health crisis in the Third World? (Chapter Eleven)
18. How did the book’s images of India compare to your previous perceptions of it, from the country-club atmosphere described on the first page to the tragedy of the untouchables? (Chapters One and Eleven)
19. Compare *The World Is Flat* and *Longitudes and Attitudes* to Friedman’s pre-9/11 books, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* and *From Beirut to Jerusalem*. Has the author’s approach to current affairs changed much since 9/11? Has al-Qaeda achieved any of its goals in the fifteen-year span represented by all four books?
20. Do you have faith in Michael Dell’s theory of conflict prevention? What can we do to ensure that the strategic optimists win? And when they do, what dreams do you have for the world they will create? (Chapter Twelve)

Further Reading

The New Economy: And What It Means for America’s Future by Roger Alcala; *20:21 Visions: Twentieth-Century Lessons for the Twenty-first Century* by Bill Emmott; *China, Inc: How the Rise of the Next Superpower Challenges America and the World* by Ted C. Fishman; *The Eagle’s Shadow: Why America Fascinates and Infuriates the World* by Mark Hertsgaard; *The Red Carpet: Bangalore Stories* by Lanvanya Sankaran; *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* by Amartya Sen