

## It's Not Easy Being Green

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Okay. Let's get some of the standard critiques of Thomas Friedman out of the way.

Yes, the *New York Times* columnist did support the Iraq War. In one of his more memorable columns, just days before the war began, he told us—and not very reassuringly—that George W. Bush had decided to “throw away the steering wheel” in his game of chicken with Saddam Hussein and that we should brace ourselves “for the crash and hope for the best—because we're all in the back seat.” And yes, Friedman did repeatedly say that the situation in Iraq would be clarified in the next six months—and kept saying so nearly every six months until we lost count.

So Friedman got the war wrong. But *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* is part of his larger work on globalization, an arena in which he has been less often wrong. Even in this arena, of course, Friedman has overreached. His thesis that “No two countries that both have a McDonald's have ever fought a war against each other” failed to keep Serbia and the US-led NATO from fighting; likewise with Georgia and Russia. Still, at some point, even the most adamant Friedman critic has to acknowledge that professional prognostication is a field ripe for failure. If we want to indict opinion mongers for getting things wrong, we have a host of them to choose from. The *National Review's* Kathryn Jean Lopez, for example, told us in October 2007 that Barack Obama's 15 minutes of fame were over. Yes, she still is writing.

And in any case *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* is not a book devoted to prediction. It is instead a Friedman cri de coeur, aimed at reminding his readership that we, as a planet, are on a path that is environmentally unsustainable. The political and economic orders erected in the modern age are also at risk as a result. But Friedman argues that the world's governments and international

institutions, rather than focusing primarily on politics and economics, need to pay immediate attention to the environment. Going green, he suggests, is the only way forward in the twenty-first century.

Friedman begins by sketching out just how hot, flat, and crowded the world is. The “heat” comes from global warming. Combating climate change must be “Plan A” because there is no “Plan B” in this “Energy-Climate Era.” (The book is a tour de force of such linguistic constructions, carried along by

an enthusiastic writing style that in the hands of a lesser author would resemble the overwrought prose of business books.)

Those who have read Friedman's previous book, *The World Is Flat*, already know that “flatness” refers to the idea that hierarchical information relationships are breaking down because of the internet and the microchip. So “flatness” is not a problem, but rather a means by which we can find solutions both to global warming and to the increasing demands that the planet's burgeoning population (the “crowded” part) places on the earth. *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* is at heart an attempt to spell out the looming consequences of global warming, and also to show that Americans can seize the project of creating a new world order grounded in greenness. Green-based economics would mitigate threats posed by climate change. It would also create a new geopolitical landscape devoid of undemocratic petrostates, the kind that help breed the terrorism that has proliferated in the first decade of this century.

Too simplistic in analysis and conception? Yes. But genius is often disguised in simplicity. It may not be easy being green, but it is considerably better than being hot and crowded. And maybe in this brave new green world, countries will indeed see cooperation rather than military competition as the path to national greatness—whether or not they have a McDonald's. ■

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