

# Why We Need A Green Revolution: Insights And Opinions Of Thomas Friedman

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My husband and I went to see Thomas Friedman, a best selling author and NY Times columnist speak about his most recent book, Hot, Flat and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution - and How It Can Renew America, which is a follow up to his previous book, The World Is Flat: The World Is Flat 3.0: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century. We enjoyed his presentation which was full of vivid examples, memorable images, and humorous lines.

## American Industry Problems

According to Friedman, America has lost its way over the last decade or so. His entire book is about, as he put it, how America can get its groove back. His ideal solution is that the U.S. should become a world leader in the green innovation and technology that's needed to tackle the world's largest problems, which all stem from the fact that the world has become:

- Hot: As you can guess, this part of his book is about the climate crisis due to global warming.
- Flat: Straight from his last book, The World Is Flat, this term refers to the fact that far more people on the planet have high paying jobs that allow them to achieve the American standard of living.
- Crowded: The world's population is growing exponentially which is going to tax all the resources on the planet.

With the world in this three-pronged predicament, five significant global problems have arisen:

- Ecological and Natural Resources, Supply and Demand. Increasing demand for raw materials such as timber, water, and minerals is putting stress on the earth's ecosystems.
- Petrodictatorships. As the price of a barrel of oil decreases, the pace of freedom increases, and vice versa, in countries such as Russia, Iran and Nigeria. By continuing to purchase oil from these countries we are contributing to the problem.
- Climate Change. As the average temperature of the earth increases, look for the weather to become more extreme. Friedman prefers to think of this as global weirding rather than global warming. In a way he is correct. All weather patterns are going to become more extreme. Hot will become hotter, but cool will become colder. Wet and dry, the same thing. Weather patterns will shift dramatically with as little as one degree of temperature increase.
- Energy Poverty. A large portion of the world's population lives without electricity. No electricity means no access to the world's knowledge. Ignorance through lack of learning creates large scale problems.
- Biodiversity Losses. The world faces a mass extinction larger than when an asteroid wiped out the dinosaurs. Currently we are losing one species every 20 minutes, primarily due to loss of habitat. As the climate changes, animals will have to search for new habitats, but they are unlikely to evolve rapidly enough to survive the abrupt shift in their habitat.

## The Solution

Not one to despair over such large problems, Friedman sees one solution to these five problems: cheap, abundant, clean, reliable electrons

His hope is that our country will use the power of innovation, technology, government and businesses leadership to produce electricity that satisfies these requirements. He refers to this new industry as Energy Technology, or ET, the next generation of Information Technology, or IT.

## The Reality

As it stands now, the rest of the world is a step ahead of the U.S. Of the top 30 clean tech companies in the world, only 6 are American companies. If we don't take action now, we'll lose our place as an innovative force in the world.

What we need is a bold revolution to solve the climate crisis... a Green Revolution, so to speak. He described the current green effort as a party where everyone gets to continue enjoying life without making a commitment or sacrifice. A party, a change in lifestyle, is not enough! We need to take a stronger stand to get done what needs to get done. As he put it... a Revolution isn't a revolution unless someone gets hurt. There will be losers in this new world, the outdated, dirty, carbon based businesses that continue to contribute to the problem.

#### The Action

The ultimate goal of the green revolution is the disappearance of the word green from our vocabulary. It can happen as current green standards become embedded into our everyday lives and become the norm, rather than the exception.

To accomplish the goal of becoming an innovator in the race for clean, abundant, clean, reliable electrons, we need to create what he calls an Ecosystem for Innovation. To explain this, Friedman used an analogy of a rocket on a launching pad. The technology and innovation now bubbling up within entrepreneurial start-ups is the engine exploding with energy. For the energy of to be directed and focused, we need the second set of engines to ignite and the astronauts in the capsule on top to steer us toward the goals. Unfortunately, at this moment, the astronauts in the capsules (read politicians in Congress) are in disagreement about the flight plan.

That flight plan, the system of rules, standards, regulations, incentives and pricing, is essential to create the necessary infrastructure for this Energy Technology explosion. If we are committed to this goal, we need to focus our attention on getting leaders in all levels of government to believe in the cause and be willing to take action. One of Friedman's take away lines was... Don't change your light bulbs, change your leaders!

According to Friedman this is a critical moment in the history of planet earth. The next great global industry, Energy Technology, is just beginning to take shape. We must act now to reduce the world's carbon output. We must all take a part in turning the national conversation to issues associated with cheap, abundant, clean, reliable electrons.

Our actions can't wait. The word later must leave our vocabulary. There is no later when it comes to addressing climate change.

If we all start now, we have just enough time to solve this.

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