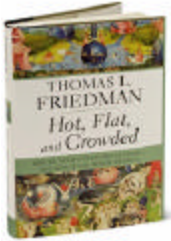


Book Review

Hot Flat and Crowded

Author: Thomas L. Friedman

First published in 2008 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux (448p)



Thomas L. Friedman's *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need A Green Revolution-and How It Can Renew America* is the right book, by the right author, at the right time. Just when it is becoming apparent that the days of petroleum are ending we get a book that can serve as a platform for future discussion on the energy situation and may even form an outline for

future action. This is a positive book and is also a realistic one. Readers will appreciate the proof he includes as he makes his points. For example, don't think that the flattening of the population is causing shortages in a variety of materials? How about scrap iron? Manhole covers (p. 65) have been disappearing all over the world. Initially in the Asia, the stealing has reached Chicago and will continue to spread. Copper is the latest in scarce materials that is being stolen.

Whether Friedman is discussing fuels from hell or fuels from heaven, his approach is intelligent, positive and, in my opinion, dead on target. There is opportunity in this crisis for however many people want to and invent our way out of it. Friedman's first law of petropolitics states that "as the price of oil goes up, the pace of freedom goes down". Certainly this isn't going to be a topic of debate among the readers of this book. Can anyone doubt that we have fewer freedoms today than say thirty years ago and that much of that is related to the price we pay for petroleum based products?

Among the many points that Friedman makes is our half-hearted attempts that have been made on behalf of the environment. Certainly "going green" is a popular phrase in the United States today. I know, I saw a bumper sticker on the back of a large Ford SUV a few weeks back announcing "Earth Day." Up to now being environmentally aware didn't require a lot of sacrifice. That, I think Friedman would agree with, is about to change.

As a solar energy advocate for more than 30 years I've often been frustrated by our inability to wean ourselves from not just petroleum, but from all fossil fuels. The federal government has been reluctant for any number of reasons to provide the leadership on this effort, and the private sector, while seemingly the one sector that should see the huge economic pay off of using solar energy where possible has been slow to lead the way. I guess that as long as cheap oil was available many felt that the investment in alternative energy sources just wasn't worth the effort...NO PROFITS. That is going to change.

Thomas L. Friedman's *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* isn't a book that tries to point the finger at any individual or group. In fact, the book is remarkably problem and solution oriented giving it a certain amount of legitimacy. While it does point up our short falls in the past, it also offers hope for the future.

Reviewed by Robert Busko

Sent your comments to:

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