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The World Is Flat
A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century

by

Thomas L. Friedman
2005

MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Laurie Lahey

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KEY FIGURES

Nandan Nilekani – CEO of Infosys Technologies Limited, “one of the jewels of the Indian information technology world.” Friedman describes Nilekani as “one of the most thoughtful and respected captains of Indian industry.”

Ann – Friedman’s wife. Ann is a first-grade teacher and Friedman’s confidant throughout the text.

Orly and Natalie – Friedman’s daughters, whom he references throughout the text.

David Ricardo – is the Ricardo to whom Friedman refers in the subtitle of Chapter 5, “Is Ricardo Still Right?.” Ricardo (1772-1823) “was an English economist who developed the free-trade theory of comparative advantage, which stipulates that if each nation specializes in the production of goods in which it has a comparative cost advantage and then trades with other nations for the goods in which they specialize, there will be an overall gain in trade, and overall income levels should rise in each trading country.”

G. Wayne Clough – is the president of Georgia Institute of Technology. When Clough became president of the college the graduation rate was only 65% and the atmosphere was dull. By altering the…….

Other figures are outlined in the complete study guide.

SHORT PLOT SUMMARY (Synopsis)
In Part I, “How the World Became Flat,” Friedman visits India, where he realizes that the playing field has been leveled, meaning that a much larger group of people can compete for global knowledge. He pursues examples of this metaphor in other places, such as Iraq, China, Japan, and the United States. Friedman argues that there are primarily ten forces that flattened the world and describes each of the following “flatteners”: 11/9/89, the fall of the Berlin Wall; 8/9/95, or the date that Netscape went public; workflow software; uploading; outsourcing; offshoring; insourcing; in-forming; and the steroids. Next Friedman explores what he calls “the triple convergence,” or the way the ten flatteners converged to create an even flatter global playing field. The first convergence encompasses how the ten flatteners came together in such a way that they created a global, Web-enabled platform that allows for multiple forms of collaboration. The second convergence…..

BIOGRAPHY - Thomas L. Friedman
Thomas Friedman was born in St. Louis Park, Minnesota on July 20, 1953. He graduated in 1975 from Brandeis University with a Bachelor’s degree in Mediterranean Studies. In 1978, Friedman received a Master’s degree from Oxford University in Modern Middle East studies. Friedman began working as a correspondent for the New York Times in 1981 and spent many years reporting…….

GENRE
Non-Fiction

CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND ANALYSIS
How the World Became Flat: Chapters 1 - 4
Summary
Friedman concludes that the world is flat on a visit to Infosys Technologies Limited in India, where he travels with Discovery Times. Friedman is impressed by the campus’s advanced technology such as the glass-and-steel buildings and large flat-screen televisions. Nandan Nilekani, the company’s CEO, tells Friedman that the playing field has been leveled; now countries like India can compete for global knowledge. Friedman realizes
that the world is flat, which fills him with both dread and excitement. Friedman believes there are historically three great eras of globalization. The first was from 1492-1800, which he calls Globalization 1.0; the second was from 1800-2000, which he calls Globalization 2.0. Friedman argues that we are now in the midst of Globalization 3.0 is a period in which the world shrinks from small to tiny, flattening to such a degree that individuals can collaborate and compete globally. Friedman tells the reader that the purpose of this book is to understand how the world became flat as well as the implications of that development.

Friedman spends a night in an Indian call center. Twenty-five hundred twenty-somethings work in this multi-floor facility; some are “outbound” operators, selling various items, others are “inbound” operators, tending to the customer-service needs of various companies. Friedman notes that there are about 245,000 Indians working in this industry, which offers them high-paying, high-prestige jobs. Employees are trained how to speak with American, British, or Canadian accents. In India, Friedman visits various technology industries in India and is further convinced that the world is flat and that India is a key player in 21st century global economy. Friedman then visits Japan, where he learns that Dalian, a northeastern port city in China, has become for Japan what India is for the United States—“outsourcing central.” Friedman visits Dalian and sees first-hand, by talking with the mayor and reading the names on the buildings (GE, Sony, Microsoft, Dell, etc.), that the city is an example of how China is rapidly developing high-tech cities.

Friedman explores further. He talks with a woman in Salt Lake City who works for JetBlue airline from her home office. In Iraq, Friedman witnesses how the military has been “flattened” through the use of computer technology: low-level officers and enlisted men now have access to sensitive information and can make important decisions. Back home in Bethesda, Maryland Friedman continues to be shocked by world-flattening trends—in three states there are McDonald’s restaurants that take customers’ orders via a call center in Colorado; American students can be tutored by people in India through the Internet. In Washington D.C., where Friedman has an office, he learns the U.S. made a trade agreement with Oman by using a flat-screen television and that reporters writing for the Internet can use low-cost technology to reach a large, interactive audience.

In chapter two, Friedman argues that there are primarily ten forces that flattened the world. He describes each force. The first flattener is, 11/9/89, the fall of the Berlin Wall. Friedman argues that this event “flattened alternatives to free-market capitalism” and unlocked “pent-up energies of hundreds of millions of people in places like India, Brazil, China, and the former Soviet Empire” (53). Perhaps more importantly, the fall of the Berlin Wall allowed for the concept of the world as a single market, for the notion of global (not Eastern or Western) policy. After 11/9 (Friedman’s play on 9/11), knowledge could flow more freely, including economic policies.

The second flattener is 8/9/95, or the date that Netscape went public. Essentially Friedman describes two phases in Internet and World Wide Web technology, which he differentiates. The Internet (which connects computers) and the Web (which houses information) came together to connect people, globally. The first phase, “the Apple-PC-Windows phase” allowed individuals to interact with a contained network, such as a group of people sharing an office. The second phase, “the Internet-e-mail-browser phase” allowed anyone with this technology to interact with anyone else who had the same technology.

The third flattener is workflow software. Friedman describes the advent of workflow software as a quiet revolution that no one realized was happening; it became effective in the mid-1990s. Workflow software allowed more people to collaborate within and between businesses and continents, at a faster pace than ever before. For these separate entities to communicate they needed interoperable software; this became possible
with the rise of standards. Web-standards such as XML, HTML, HTTP, and SOAP eliminated the “Tower of Babel” roadblock and allowed everyone to speak the same language.

The fourth flattener is uploading. Uploading allows individuals or communities to put information on the Web. The flat-world platform has allowed these individuals and communities to produce “really complex things” with much less hierarchy and money than before. Friedman explores three examples of uploading: community-developed software, wikipedia, and blogging/podcasting. Friedman argues that uploading appeals to a basic human need to participate and be heard; thus, of the ten flatteners, uploading has the potential to be the most disruptive. Currently, the number of uploaders is relatively small. However, Friedman believes that as more people get positive feedback, uploading will grow faster and “every big institution or hierarchical structure will feel its effects.”

The fifth flattener is outsourcing. Friedman quickly details how the United States benefited from India’s seven Institutes of Technology (IIT), created in 1951. These highly-competitive schools, which are subsidized by tax dollars, churn out highly-qualified, highly-skilled professionals in need of jobs. Y2K created jobs for Indian software engineers because a large number of techs were needed to remedy the millennium bug. Moreover, the fiber optic boom, which occurred at the same time, allowed any “service, call center, business support operation, or knowledge work that could be digitized” to be outsourced. Thus, the dot-com bust resulted in jobs for Indians, who would work for less money than Americans and could perform the tasks in India because of their education as well as the technology of the PC, the Internet, and fiber optics.

The sixth flattener is offshoring. Offshoring is when a company moves one of its factories to another country (not just a specific task, as with outsourcing) for various reasons, such as cheaper labor and resources, fewer trade barriers, and fewer taxes. When China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, offshoring reached new heights because China now had to comply with international law and standard business practices, therefore assuring investors that establishing factories in China would be financially beneficial.

The seventh flattener is supply-chaining. Friedman describes supply-chaining as “a method of collaborating horizontally—among suppliers, retailers, and customers—to create value.” Friedman describes how supply chains both flatten the world and are enabled by its flattening. As an example, Friedman considers Wal-Mart, the world’s biggest retail company, which makes nothing. Wal-Mart is essentially a hyper-efficient supply chain. For example, during the Christmas season, Hewlett-Packard sells four-hundred thousand computers each day through Wal-Mart’s four thousand stores. Continuing to cite Wal-Mart, Friedman considers the costs and benefits of supply chains. Stores like Wal-Mart are great for consumers because they keep costs very low. However, because Wal-Mart is under pressure to provide competitive prices, employees often suffer low salaries and little or no benefits.

The eighth flattener is insourcing. Friedman argues that when the world became flat, small companies “could suddenly see around the world,” meaning that they became aware of more avenues to sell and produce their products as well as to buy materials. Because most companies did not have the capacity or the desire to develop a supply chain as complex as Wal-Mart’s, they hired other companies to do it for them. To explore this concept more concretely, Friedman considers UPS’s role in insourcing. For example, if a Toshiba laptop breaks while under warranty, the customer can drop the computer off at a UPS store to have it shipped to Toshiba. But what actually happens is that UPS repairs the laptop in Louisville in a UPS workshop. A few years ago, Toshiba was criticized for taking too long to repair broken computers, so Toshiba collaborated with UPS to make the process go faster.
The ninth flattener is in-forming, Google, Yahoo!, and MSN Web Search. Friedman defines in-forming as “searching for knowledge” and having the resources to become “your own self-directed and self-empowered researcher, editor, and selector of entertainment without having to go to the library or the movie theater or through network television.” Friedman argues that world becomes flatter as resources like Google become more readily available. As knowledge becomes more accessible (Google can already be searched in 100 languages) more people become empowered. Friedman also considers how this knowledge jeopardizes our privacy. Friedman claims that it will be increasingly difficult to keep information about our pasts private as we leave electronic footprints behind.

The tenth and final flattener is what Friedman calls “the steroids.” Friedman calls certain technologies steroids (digital, mobile, personal, and virtual), because they augment and strengthen other flatteners. An example Friedman offers is voice over Internet protocol, or VoIP. This service allows customers to make unlimited, local and long-distance, phone calls through the internet for the cost of local calls. This will revolutionize telecommunications because companies will no longer be able to charge for distance and time. Connecting via telephone, anywhere in the world, will become extremely cheap.

In chapter 3 Friedman explores what he calls “the triple convergence,” or the way the ten flatteners converged to create an even flatter global playing field. The first convergence encompasses how the ten flatteners came together in such a way that people could see that things were different after 2000. The convergence of these flatteners created a global, Web-enabled platform that allows for multiple forms of collaboration. The second convergence is the appearance of a set of business practices and skills—managers, innovators, business consultants, business schools, designers, IT specialists, CEOs, and workers—that make the most of the ten flatteners, thus enhancing the flatteners’ potential. The third convergence is the entrance of some three billion people onto the playing field. During the 1990s the economies and political systems of China, India, Russia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Central Asia opened up in such a way that the citizens of these nations were able to join the free-market game. Thus there has been an explosion in the number of workers in the global economic labor force.

In chapter four, “The Great Sorting Out,” Friedman describes what he believes will follow the triple convergence. The triple convergence is likely to cause some chaos and confusion; the great sorting out will recalibrate the ceilings, walls, and floors that define us. Friedman offers some examples of the issues that result from the triple convergence that will have to be negotiated in the great sorting out, such as when an Indian company won the contract to upgrade the unemployment department of the state of Indiana because it was able to place a bid 8.1 million dollars lower that its competitors. Some questions that arise are: what should be the relationship between companies and the communities in which they operate?; how do we navigate our multiple identities as consumers, employees, citizens, taxpayers, and shareholders?; who owns what, particularly in the case of intellectual property?

Notes
There are two glaring issues in this section of text. The first is the parallel that Friedman draws between himself and Christopher Columbus by claiming that Columbus had to prove to his contemporaries that the world was round (while Friedman will prove that it is flat). As James Lowen deftly demonstrates in his book Lies My History Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong (Touchstone, 1995) most Europeans and Native Americans knew the world was round when Columbus set sail. The idea that Columbus was challenging the status quo was popularized by Washington Irving in his biography of Columbus, written in 1828.

The second issue that emerges in this section is also related to metaphor: Friedman’s concept of the world as
flat. It seems this notion emerges from the convergence of two ideas—the first, that the global market has become a level playing field, and the second, which describes the complexities of 21st century globalization. While this metaphor works because Friedman can weave it throughout his narrative, which is at times unwieldy, it may not accurately portray what Friedman is arguing. After all, Friedman contends that Globalization 3.0 is “shrinking the world from a size small to a size tiny” (10). One must ask if a “tiny” world with greater access is necessarily a “flat” world. ……..

STRUCTURE ANALYSIS
When examining a piece of non-fiction writing, the reader should always be concerned with methodology. An author’s methodology is the way he or she constructs the argument. This includes the sources the author uses as well as the way he or she presents the argument—what evidence the writer includes and the order in which the evidence is presented. The main reason for evaluating methodology is to consider the author’s methodological assumptions and to decide for oneself if the argument is convincing.

In this work, Thomas Friedman primarily uses interviews secondary, scholarly monographs, or primary documents (such as the 9/11 Commission Report) to probe the flattening of the world in…….

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS
Title: The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century
Author: Thomas L. Friedman
Date Published: 2005
Genre: Non-Fiction

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS - MEMORABLE QUOTES
Edition: 2006, The Updated and Expanded Version

1. “The playing field has been leveled.” Nandan Nilekani says this to Friedman, causing Friedman to conclude that the world is flat (7).

2. “Girls, finish your homework—people in China and India are starving for your jobs.” Friedman gives this advice to his daughters in the flat world (277).

3. “All fixed, fast, frozen relations, with their train and ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify.” Friedman quotes Karl…..

MEMORABLE QUOTES QUIZ
Match the quote with the attribution below.
1. “All fixed, fast, frozen relations, with their train and ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify.”

2. “An astronaut, a doctor, a pediatrician, a poetess, physics and chemistry, a scientist and an astronaut, a surgeon, a detective, an author.”……...

A. Nandan Nilekani says this of terror organizations like al-Qaeda and companies like JetBlue (549).

B. Friedman describes this method of cultivating the right hemisphere of the brain as a survival strategy (309)…..
VOCABULARY
Work flow Software - Interoperable software that allows more people to collaborate within and between businesses and continents, at a faster pace than ever before.

Offshoring - is when a company moves one of its factories to another country (not just a specific task, as with outsourcing) for various reasons, such as cheaper labor and resources, fewer trade…….

STUDY QUESTIONS - MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

Multiple Choice

1. During a visit to what nation does Friedman first discover that the world is flat?
   A. Iraq
   B. India
   C. China

2. According to Friedman, who are the untouchables?
   A. People whose jobs cannot be outsourced, digitized, or automated
   B. People who will be in the lowest caste of the new global social order
   C. People who will be able to thwart intellectual property laws because they will be in cahoots with authorities in the flat world…….

Answer Key
1.) b 2.) a 3.) c 4.) a 5.) a 6.) c 7.) b 8.) b 9.) b 10.) c 11.) a 12.) b 13.) a 14.) c 15.) b

ESSAY QUESTIONS - BOOK REPORT TOPICS

TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION / IN-CLASS WRITING

Chapters 1-4
1. In Friedman’s attempt to draw a parallel between himself and Christopher Columbus, he misrepresents Columbus as someone who had to prove to his contemporaries that the world was round. Does this misinformation hurt Friedman’s argument by making him less credible?
2. How many of the ten flatteners have affected your life? Do you think Friedman left any flatteners out? Is the importance of any of the flatteners he lists overstated?
1. In this section Friedman notes how prescient Marx and Engels’s assessment of capitalism was in the Communist Manifesto; do you think this text relates well to Friedman’s argument, or did he simply choose one section that supports his viewpoint? What similarities and differences do you see between the Industrial Revolution and the flattening of the world?…….

TOPICS FOR TAKE-HOME ESSAYS

Chapters 1-4
What are the benefits/ detriments of the “world is flat” metaphor? What is Friedman trying to convey with this image? Is the world he describes really flat? Think of another metaphor that would better explain (or explain just as well, if you buy the idea that the world is flat) what Friedman details in these chapters.

Chapters 5-9
In this section Friedman goes to great lengths to suggest how to better prepare students for the rigorous task of undertaking careers in the physical and mathematical sciences as well as engineering, which are seemingly essential to the United States’ survival as the world……..