

The world is increasingly becoming hotter, flatter and more crowded.

This is the premise for Thomas L. Friedman's latest book, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution—And How it Can Renew America*, which I recently finished on a vacation on Topsail Island, N.C. Laying a hot and crowded beach, Friedman's assertions seemed pretty accurate.

As a sequel to *The World is Flat*, Friedman uses this second book as an opportunity to show his greener side. Now, in addition to globalization, or the "flattening" of the world, Friedman is taking on climate change and rapid population growth, or as he calls it, "too many carbon copies." The book is founded on the belief that these three elements: hot (climate change), flat (globalization) and crowded (rapid population growth) are converging in way that could make our planet dangerously unstable.

Friedman's inner environmentalist comes out in the first half of the book, which is a diagnosis of where we are and how we got here. His argument is simple: We are heading into an Energy Climate Era, where the world's biggest problem is the issue of energy. It's nice to see such a powerful thought leader embrace his inner greenie, and it's even more refreshing that throughout his book, Friedman works to rescue the green movement from the far left. "This is not about the whales any more. It's about us. And what we do about the challenges of energy and climate," he writes.

Friedman's analysis of the state of the world using a fresh environmental lens is certainly engaging, wrought with elaborate metaphors and journalistic anecdotes. The information, however, is nothing new.

Unless you've been living under a rock for the last few years, you've heard these arguments before. And if *An Inconvenient Truth* didn't impact you,

Michael Pollan doesn't make you reconsider your diet, and you don't find Paul Hawken inspiring, chances are Friedman isn't going to do it for you. Still, the first half of the book outlines the problems of a growing demand for scarce energy supplies, the political issues associated with the massive transfer of wealth to oil rich countries, the complications of accelerated climate change and biodiversity loss and—perhaps the most interesting—the growing gap between the "energy haves" and the "energy have-nots."

These explanations set the stage for the book's culmination: "How Do We Move Forward?" It is in this section that Friedman argues the business case for the U.S. to solve the world's current energy crisis. With a "we can do it" attitude, Friedman champions the American way of life and asserts the notion that the U.S. can remain the greatest country in the world if — and only if- we undertake a green revolution.

Friedman asserts that in an Energy Climate Era, the U.S. is "a beacon of hope, and the country that can always be counted on to lead the world in response to whatever is the most important issue of the day."

In these arguments, Friedman can come across as a bit cavalier: Do all countries *really* want to emulate the American way of life? What about the European Union, what about South America, what about *the rest of the world*? Don't they have a role to play in solving the energy crisis? But the overtone of patriotism has a purpose, because it is clear that Friedman is speaking directly to the *American businessperson*, and he's speaking loud and clear. From an economic standpoint, he argues, the idea of green meeting big business not only makes sense for the environment, it makes sense for our economy. Making the U.S. the world's greenest country is "not a selfless act of charity or moral indulgence. It is now a core security and economic interest," he writes.

On this point I could not agree more. Developing an innovative energy infrastructure gives this nation a competitive advantage. And the best part about Friedman's energy solution? It already exists. Friedman proposes the creation of an Energy Internet—a system that allows different sources of energy at different times and different prices to be used, and eventually sold back to the grid. This is possible, but the challenge is changing the existing system. And in an era that relies more and more on the actions of Awakening Consumers to bring about change, I believe this too is possible.

Awakening Consumers make decisions everyday based on many of the issues explored in the first half of *Hot, Flat and Crowded*. Some choose to use alternative fuel in an effort to stop funding "retrodictators," some choose to buy socially responsible brands, or pay more for renewable energy sources to help combat climate change. And as we enter the dawn of the Energy Era, it will be the second half of Friedman's book that will call upon Awakening Consumers to not only redefine the market by voting with their dollars, but redefine our energy system entirely.

If a crowded Topsail beach isn't an affirmation of Friedman's theories, his well-written and compelling arguments certainly are; this is a must-read for anyone who is working toward change, or even the least bit interested in what change may look like. Just try and keep it out of the sand.