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# The Flattening of the World in The World is Flat by Thomas Friedman

## Introduction

There is no doubt that we live in a globalized world. Companies, organizations, corporations, individuals, etc. seek to broaden their horizon beyond their native ground. We are all connected in some way economically due to the expansion of technology within the past years. Undeveloped countries are now able to compete with powerful nations offering their skills and labor better and cheaper than the developed. Thomas L. Friedman, the author of the World is Flat, examines the various phenomenon such as the technological advancements that has created a flat world which continues to be flattened even today. Science has proven that the world is indeed not flat, however, Friedman concluding that the world is flat was a brilliant analogy to manifest how we are all connected and able to work together no matter where you are located on the globe. He supports his argument with his many experiences and examples, some of them being redundant.

## The Comparison with Columbus

Friedman compares Columbus sailing to India for riches to his embarkment to India for what we would call riches today such as, "software, brainpower, complex algorithms, knowledge workers, call centers, transmission protocols, breakthroughs in optical engineering," (Friedman 4). Was he more successful than Columbus? It can be concluded that Friedman's journey was not as difficult as Columbus's due to the fact of the technological differences they both had. "I knew exactly which direction I was going thanks to the GPS maps displayed on the screen.... I landed safely and on schedule," (Friedman 4). Columbus was not fortunate enough to have the resources we have today. What would have been the outcome if he knew exactly where he was sailing to? Just like Columbus was able to use Indians or Native Americans for their knowledge; American corporations use Indians from India for their knowledge and skills. They can now do our jobs that we used to do straight from their own country. They can do this because of outsourcing and easy accessible collaboration. Americans complain that immigrants are taking their jobs, but what they should be worried about is people in other countries taking their jobs without physically even being in the United States.

## The Flatteners

In order for us to understand why the world became flat, Friedman dwelled deep into the events that made it that way. These events were described as "flatteners" and was explained greatly in detail; and the reason to why it was significant for making the world flat. The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 11, 1989 was a critical event and the peak of the world becoming flat. It made authoritarian governments think more democratic. It broke down barriers and enable the world to think globally and not single handedly. It opened doors for other countries to expand their market. It also led to the first Windows operating system; "only six months after the wall went down" (Friedman 55). This enabled individuals to create and share beyond their home.

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Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the internet and Netscape was developed making the world even flatter by enabling us to access information and expand globalization. Anyone could have this resource at the tip of their hand. Without Netscape, a web browser, we could not use the internet. Soon after Netscape, the operating system Windows 95 was developed with the internet in mind. This caused a surge in things becoming digitized, therefore making material more accessible and flattening the world even more. Now in 2018, almost everyone uses the internet their everyday lives and it's never been easier to access. From online shopping to research, anyone can find anything on the internet. However, is everyone fortunate enough to have access to the internet? What if they cannot afford a computer or what if they could not pay a company to give them internet? This is important to think about.

## Uploading and Offshoring

All of this led to people wanting to share everything and internationally. "People like to upload...uploading has the potential to be the most disruptive," (Friedman 125). Not only was this true when this book was published in 2006, it is still completely true today. The internet can be a dangerous place and get you in a lot of trouble. You must watch what you say on the internet, specifically on social media, or it will haunt you forever. Uploading is a flattener because it gives a voice to people that want to be heard. It allows us to share our opinion to a greater audience no matter who you are or where you are located.

Another significant event occurring on December 11, 2001 was China joining the World Trade Organization meaning that they were becoming a part of the global world. 'Beijing agreed to follow the same global rules governing imports, exports, and foreign investments that most countries in the world were following.' This ultimately led to the concept of offshoring. Offshoring is basically moving a factory in the United States to China to make the same products with cheaper labor making them cheaper for consumers to buy. That is more than likely the reason why a lot of products seen in the United States say 'Made in China'. A big question is why companies in the United States, such as Nike, hike their prices up even though the cost to make it in China was way cheaper. China also agreed to protect foreign companies by international law making them a perfect foundation for international companies to work with them. Not only is China paving their way to a flat world, 'the more attractive other developed and undeveloped countries competing with it have to make themselves.' It's like a game of who can make what for who cheaper. Friedman discusses the huge breakthrough of web search. According to Google's cofounder, Sergey Brin, everyone has the same means of information on the internet as anyone else. Some people could question this and argue that not everyone have the same access. Some countries like Cuba and North Korea controls the internet and what people can see. Friedman did not argue against Sergey; but agreed with him and expanded on why web search has made the world flat. Web search did indeed make the world flat by allowing basically anyone to readily available information, but not everyone has the same access.

## Conclusion

The flattening of the world has been to our advantage. It continues to open up new doors making us all one big force. Soon computers will be able to do almost everything for us. Friedman had numerous examples to help the reader better understand the flat world; some details could have been omitted. He could have expanded more on the political effects of a flat world. The important events (some political) of the twenty first century and advancements in

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technology has expanded globalization where everyone is able to work together no matter who they are or where they live. More people now have multiple methods to universally thrive. It is up to them to acquire the necessary skills and compete to be the best.

## **Works Cited**

Friedman, Thomas L. *The World Is Flat A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2006.

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