

[*Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution—and How It Can Renew America*, Thomas L. Friedman, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 448 pages]

## Globalist Meltdown

By Pat Choate

RACHEL CARSON received a letter in 1958 from a friend in Massachusetts describing the destruction of birdlife on Cape Cod caused by DDT spraying. Carson, a marine biologist and nature author, unsuccessfully tried to interest several magazines in an article about the dangers posed by the world's most powerful pesticide. Undeterred, she spent the next four years writing *Silent Spring*, which *The New Yorker* serialized in June 1962. It instantly became a worldwide bestseller.

The use of DDT was eventually banned in the United States and many other nations. As the Natural Resources Defense Council now notes, however, the book's strongest legacy was not that ban but the cultivation of "a public awareness that nature was vulnerable to human intervention." The dangers Carson outlined—contamination of the food chain, cancer, genetic damage, the loss of entire species—were so frightening that they made acceptable the notion of regulating industry. Environmentalism was born.

Fifty years later, Thomas Friedman in *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* sounds a similar alarm about the dangerous convergence of global warming, rising population growth, and economic globalization. The resulting brew, he argues, threatens world stability and even life itself. His solution is a massive global shift from dirty carbon fuels to clean energy and conservation. The shift would require innovation on a historic scale. Friedman envisions that the task can provide the basis for the renewal of the American spirit and economy, if U.S. leaders accept the challenge.

Friedman's description of "crowding" is nothing less than a neo-Malthusian portrayal of a rapidly growing world population that is overstretching its resources. Between 2008 and 2050, the United Nations projects, the world's population will grow from 6.7 billion people to more than 9.2 billion. Put into context, this is roughly equal to adding two Chinas to the world's population over the next four decades.

As the people of these countries struggle to find shelter and food, they are destroying forests and wetlands, converting arable land into urban slums, overfishing their streams, lakes, and oceans, even as they drain their available water supplies. Entire species of flora and fauna are disappearing as parts of the earth die.

Friedman notes that China, India, and a handful of other nations are creating a middle class that aspires to follow the lifestyles of Americans, Europeans, and the Japanese. Satisfying the needs of unfettered economic globalization creates demands for resources of all kinds, and the related production relies on dirty fuels—oil, coal, and natural gas. The current world economic crisis may reduce those demands in the short term, yet in the longer term they are sure to expand.

A world of growing need for goods and food, coupled with the corresponding rise in production that relies on carbon fuels, is releasing rising amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, where it remains for thousands of years. This Friedman calls hot. In turn, these gases are changing the heat balance between earth and the sun and are putting at risk the habitat of every creation on earth.

The problem, according to Friedman, is that the existing global dependence on coal, oil, and natural gas cannot be sustained. While large reserves of each exist, to continue our trust in them would be a form of long-term collective suicide. A clean, green alternative is required.

Despite the growing obviousness of the need for what Friedman terms "Code Green," dreadful obstacles exist. The global "petrodicatorship" is one.

Carbon-producing nations are the beneficiaries of a massive transfer of wealth that exceeds trillions of dollars annually. Those nations need only tap what is beneath their land to collect the riches of the world. This largest of all cartels has every incentive to cut production and raise prices while alternative energy sources are undeveloped and to raise production and lower prices whenever they need to stifle any innovation.

Another barrier is the existing investment in a carbon-based energy system. Imagine that some genius was to have a eureka moment and invent an abundant, cheap, clean, reliable, and safe energy source. The principal opponents to implementing this technology would be the existing energy providers—much as Edison tried to block Tesla's introduction of alternating-current electricity in the 19th century. Friedman quotes a historical fact attested to by Royal Dutch Shell: "Typically it has taken 25 years after commercial introduction for a primary energy form to get a one percent share of the global market." If change of the size and speed now required is to happen, says Friedman, then the world must take unusually aggressive approaches to bring about that progress faster.

The preferred path for developing a global clean-energy system, he writes, is to optimize simultaneously three elements: the generation of the cleanest electrons, efficient use of that energy, and conservation.

Yet the production of electricity in this nation is divided among 3,200 separate utilities, many of them operating under multiple regulatory authorities with an outdated grid system. Texas entrepreneur T. Boone Pickens's multibillion dollar investment to generate electricity with wind systems highlights the problem. His machines are located in the High Plains of Texas and Oklahoma, which contain a major wind corridor. While he can generate massive amounts of electricity, there is no major grid to carry the power to the rest of the nation.

"How do we move forward?" Friedman asks. First, he suggests, we need a goal. He proposes that the world should aim to

avoid a doubling of carbon dioxide entering the atmosphere by 2050. This target, he explains, could be met if the world were to accomplish 15 specific actions. One is to double the fuel efficiency of two billion automobiles. Another is to double today's nuclear power generation to replace coal-produced electricity. A third is to replace 1,400 large coal-fired electric plants with natural-gas powered facilities. A fourth is to increase today's wind-power generation by 40 times. A fifth is to halt the entire cutting and burning of forests. A sixth is to cut electricity use in homes, offices, and stores by 25 percent and cut carbon omissions by the same amount. The list of Herculean challenges continues.

Friedman correctly observes that a miracle would be required for the world to meet even one of these goals because they demand radical changes in our everyday lives. Are you prepared to live in a world in which governments set the weight, speed, and engine size of automobiles; ration electricity on a monthly per capita basis; or impose taxes on fossil fuels to make gasoline cost at least \$9 per gallon?

His solution is innovation on a massive scale, which is most likely to come not from some massive Manhattan-type project but from thousands of innovators working to satisfy a market demand for reliable, green, inexpensive solutions.

Friedman argues for "the right" mix of taxes, regulations, incentives, and disincentives to create and stabilize that market. In effect, he calls for a global green industrial policy, led by the United States.

*Hot, Flat, and Crowded* makes a convincing case for its proposed Code Green. Nonetheless, the book also has a major omission, as well as an ideological trap.

Friedman ignores the importance of U.S. and global patent policies. The market-based approach he advocates relies on tens of thousands of innovators taking their creations to market, where their investments can be returned and multiplied. Strong and efficient patent-protection systems are essential in this process. Alexander Graham Bell filed

his patent on the telephone on Feb. 14, 1876. The Patent Office issued patent number 174,465 on March 7, 1876—21 days later. Later, the Bell patent withstood 600 lawsuits, five of which went to the Supreme Court.

Today, however, the average patent processing time is almost 33 months. For advanced innovations, such as green technologies, it can take five years. The Patent Office warehouses in Northern Virginia now contain almost one million unprocessed applications. Put into perspective, a patent application on a complex technology that could shift the world from dirty to clean technologies filed on Jan. 20, 2009 is unlikely to be issued before the spring of 2013. The Patent Office has become the principal bottleneck to the rapid deployment of U.S. innovation.

Equally troublesome, a group of giant corporations is trying to weaken the U.S. patent system today, just as Wall Street weakened U.S. financial regulations during the Clinton and Bush administrations. The greatest threat these giants face is from some lone inventor or small company creating a breakthrough technology that makes their investments outdated. The corporations leading the lobbying are Apple, Cisco, Dell, HP, Intel, Micron, Oracle, and Microsoft, all of which were once startups in someone's garage challenging the giants. Now they are the establishment.

Investors in green research and development require the means to recoup their investment. A strong patent provides that, while sharing knowledge with the public. Simply put, the massive innovation required for Friedman's Code Green will be impossible if U.S. patent laws and protections are weakened to the point of meaninglessness.

The ideological, and more distressing, flaw with *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* is Friedman's monomaniacal devotion to unregulated globalism, which he mistakenly labels "free trade." A true free-trade agreement would be a one-sentence document that reads, "There will be no barriers to the sale and movement of goods and services between the United

States and the nation of X." The 1,000-page plus documents that Friedman and others call free-trade agreements are actually compendiums of first, second, third, and lesser choices or bargains. They are managed-trade arrangements.

Where trade is involved, facts apparently do not matter to Friedman. In a 2006 interview on CNBC with Tim Russert, Friedman said that he had recently given a speech in Minnesota and a man had stood up and asked, "Mr. Friedman, is there any free-trade agreement you'd oppose?" "No, absolutely not," I said. "You know what, sir? I wrote a column supporting the CAFTA, the Caribbean Free Trade Initiative. I didn't even know what was in it. I just knew two words: free trade."

Had Friedman taken the time to study the many free-trade agreements he has endorsed in books, columns, and speeches, he would have learned that, despite intense opposition from environmental groups, the Clinton and Bush administrations refused to include environmental provisions in these trade pacts, beginning with NAFTA.

Imagine how much greener the world would be if the U.S. had required that Mexico, China, India, and dozens of other nations adopt and monitor environmental codes to bring their standards up to ours. Were we serious about the environment, the flow of imports from those nations would be based on some formula for environmental improvement. Instead, dozens of other countries operate as dirty fuel, water, and air sanctuaries from which both their domestic producers and runaway transnational corporations can produce, pollute, and export with impunity.

Despite these flaws and the author's irritating style—this book is really a long op-ed and Friedman has an unpleasant habit of name dropping—*Hot, Flat, and Crowded* is a landmark work with the potential to do for dirty fuels what *Silent Spring* did for dangerous pesticides. ■

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# League of Our Own

If it's January, the Buffalo Bills must be scattered to the greens of 50 golf courses, far from the howling winds and abundant snows of their autumnal "home." Only

one Bill, backup linebacker Jon Corto, is native to the region. The remainder are about as Buffalonian as Caroline Kennedy.

The localist solution is a territorial draft. The Bills would be of Buffalo and not just mesomorphic mercenaries. Of course this would lead to an NFL based in California, Texas, and Florida, with western New York kicked into a minor league. That's okay. Majors have cash but minors have soul.

Far removed from the glory days of four consecutive Super Bowl appearances in the early 1990s, the Bills' only recent distinction came from the Sunday morning boosting of my old boss Tim Russert of South Buffalo. I remember Tim before he was a saint, when he was a hail-fellow political operative picking off Pat Moynihan's hapless Republican would-be challengers with all the zest of a giddy teenager zapping aliens in a video game. I'll bet ex-Bills QB Jack Kemp was more afraid of Russert than he ever was of Buck Buchanan.

While the Bills skidded to another sub-.500 record this season, I contented myself with Larry Felser's *The Birth of the New NFL: How the 1966 NFL/AFL Merger Transformed Pro Football*. Felser was present at the creation, covering the formation of the American Football League in 1960 for the *Buffalo Courier-Express*, though I suppose his greatest distinction came in marrying Beverly, who defeated my mother in the Elba Onion Queen pageant of 1957. I don't know if mom has forgiven her yet.

Those beautiful old AFL names—Houston Antwine, Gloster Richardson, Cookie Gilchrist—evoke the dawn of my football consciousness in that antediluvian age of the tie game, the straight-ahead kicker, and the white cornerback. Felser was there and he took notes. The AFL was a spirited underdog but it was no pastoral dream: the San Diego, née Los Angeles, Chargers were named after owner Barron Hilton's hotel chain's credit-card operation. What a loathsome derivation!

But consider Felser's take on the cartoonish villain Al Davis, owner of the Oakland Raiders. Davis, as commissioner of the AFL, hired ex-*Buffalo Evening News* sportswriter Jack Horrigan as his PR man. When Horrigan was diagnosed with leukemia, writes Felser, "Davis, a Jew, bought a votive candle in a Catholic religious supply store. Back in his office, he lit the candle as a devotion, a prayer in flame—a Catholic custom. When the office was about to close that evening, a cleaning lady informed him it was against building policy to leave a burning candle unattended. Davis took off his coat and stayed the night."

That doesn't make up for yanking the team out of Oakland for 13 years, but Al can't be all bad.

Pro football today is nigh unwatchable due to the chronic TV timeouts that interrupt the flow of the game and remind the assembled just who is boss. After scores or changes of possession, the 22 behemoths on the field wait meekly for a spindly TV semaphorist to

give the referees the signal to resume play. What would happen if the players defied the Great God Television and just started playing? There would be consequences, I imagine.

Mauling women, popping loudmouths in bars, shooting steroids: these things the mansters of the gridiron will do, but disobey television—never.

The major-college game is just as compromised, though the exigencies of recruiting give most teams a regional accent. My football preferences are outré: I am a Catholic peacenik whose favorite teams were Brigham Young and Army before the University of Buffalo Bulls staggered into Division I in 1999. UB had the worst program in college football until Turner Gill, a devout Christian gentleman and miracle worker, came to town three years ago. Gill vitalized the team with local products James Starks of Niagara Falls and Buffalo's own Naaman Roosevelt, so that the Bulls of Buffalo are, in some sense, representative of Buffalo. This year UB played in a postseason game for the first time ever—the unfortunately named International Bowl in Toronto.

Bulls fans expected a bittersweet end: Gill would leave town at season's conclusion, lured by a fat contract from a football factory. No one—well, almost no one—would have blamed him. In America, people are expected to move for money. Loyalty is penury. Immobility is for suckers and losers.

But Turner Gill is staying. Passed over for the Auburn job—reportedly for the stupid racist reason that the coach, who is black, has a white wife—Gill is casting down his bucket where he is, at least for now.

Stay is such an underrated word. ■