

Essay on the world is flat an analysis

[Economics](#), [Trade](#)



Themes. One of the biggest catchphrases of the 21st century is globalisation. Corporations use it in their mission statements, governments in their press releases and nearly every major event reported in the media that does not involve violence makes a reference to the term. Thomas Friedman, in his book, *The World is Flat*, throws light on this complicated term from various parts of the world through the perspectives of people that outsource their skills to America and other countries, through corporations and institutions that have evolved in wholly new ways, through economies that have taken leaps towards the ideal of 'free trade' and most importantly, the picture of the future as it appears to us now. A flat earth is a compelling picture as it is, and what Friedman means by it is that, according to his view, the merging of workforces from around the world, outsourcing and other global phenomenon level the playing field, giving equal opportunity to every competitor.

Friedman describes the work-styles and expectations of employees in major outsourcing nations like India and China and how those expectations and ideologies are no way threatening to the western industry. There is repetitive emphasis on the huge amount of people providing the same services as the skilled labour in America does, for far fewer amounts. In that regard Friedman discredits the lump of labour theory, which states that there are only a specific number of jobs for a specific industry (266). The book brings to light, the ever-changing status and structure of what the author calls a knowledge job and how one country cannot ever possess all the human resources to fulfil its knowledge requirements. One of the central themes of the book is that outsourcing and other economic phenomena that are

coming to raise due to globalisation are not impeding the personal growth of any one country and are definitely not depriving the citizens of one country of the jobs they are supposed to have, but creating new ones instead. The title of the book serves very well in visualising the change that Friedman describes. If the earth were really to flatten, the need of the hour will be to fill the gaps it creates through innovation. As Wilfred Bion puts it, “ Discard your memory; discard the future tense of your desire; forget them both, both what you knew and what you want to leave space for a new idea” (Bion 11).

Relevance to Democracy in America. *The World is Flat* describes in great detail, the current social and economic conditions of America and the spirit with which the globalisation phenomenon must be embraced by the American society. Time and again, Friedman goes back to the roots of American society and the ideal of free trade, addressing in various ways, whether or not outsourcing and distribution of work flow and services should still be allowed without barrier in the American economy. In the book, *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville describes a similar phenomenon, but one that happened a couple of hundred years ago - the dissipation of aristocracy and the rise of equality in American society. de Tocqueville describes individualism in fine detail and the help it rendered in developing a distinct society where trade and commerce flowed freely. It is to be noted that de Tocqueville, a French economist, too travelled to America with the intent of studying its society much the way Friedman did in *The World is Flat*. Friedman describes conversations with entrepreneurs and employees alike from several outsourcing hotspots, especially Bangalore. He notes the attitudes and the eagerness with which the youth in India and

China are willing to perform jobs like filing tax returns or upgrading databases and other jobs he notes as the kind that require skill, but are ultimately redundant or rather dead-end. Friedman's question about how an individual in America can compete with the large and cheap workforce of equally skilled professionals in India explores the various tenets of American society and the attitude with which a young professional in America goes to work in contrast to his counterpart on the other side of the world. de Tocqueville, in his book, mentions the habits of the American mind which are more or less responsible for the unique way in which its society functions. He describes the American phenomenon of 'self-interest rightly understood' as a unique element for the democratic sustenance in the country. While many nations thrive on virtuosity and ideals as a basis for their thinking, Americans serve their own interests first and make no mockery of it. It gives an individual space to process his or her needs first and as de Tocqueville puts it disciplines them "in habits of regularity, temperance, moderation, foresight, self-command." Friedman alludes to this concept by describing the importance of creativity and its role in the current global economy. If other countries are happy to perform the tedious jobs at low cost through their enormous work-forces, the American population should concentrate on directing this productivity into fields that have never before been explored. Friedman details new kinds of jobs like Search Engine Optimization, blog and internet marketing, content convergence, work-flow management and so many other avenues that are opening up due to the shift of knowledge jobs to the other side of the world. He explains that there is a lot of opportunity out there for the individual who is ready to grab it.

Field Notes from a Catastrophe. As in the World is Flat, Field Notes from a Catastrophe too describes a period of change in the global atmosphere-literally. In this book, Kolbert describes the conditions caused in several places across the world due to the recently discovered phenomenon of global warming and examines how effective the measures taken by governments, especially, the U. S. to prevent further harm to the environment really are. In both the books, America's position as a forerunner in the global scene is recognised and hence it's responsibility too, is emphasised. While Friedman maintains his stand against the restricting policies being newly implemented against free trade, Kolbert insists that the U. S. government is not doing nearly as much as it should in preventing further exploitation of the environment. On a local and a global level, Kolbert urges America to take action and especially take more seriously the effects of pollution.

Public Affairs Implications. The flattening of the earth is a real phenomenon. Every second of every day, more and more connections are being made overseas and the maps of work-flows are expanding. What it means to the working of a government is of profound importance as, the vision of the future is shifting before our very eyes. In his 1970 book, Future Shock, Alvin Toffler explains a term which is all too common now-a-days and yet equally disturbing, ' information overload' (318). Toffler explains the effect of information overload on an individual through both physical and psychological perspectives, explaining how too much information can curb an individual's productivity. The same can be said today, of governments across the world, flooded by the influx of foreign investments and business

connections. Friedman maintains that America should allow its free-trade ideal to continue, especially in the current atmosphere, with the promise of an eventuality where there is overall gain for the citizens of the country. Personally, I agree with him, that although, at the outset it looks like American economy is losing out to the competition offshore, in the end there will be more gain than loss as America is primarily, the consumer of all these knowledge goods being produced elsewhere. By restricting jobs or trade, the government will suffer from saturation. There is an information overload at the moment because of the changing roles of citizens, not just in America, but all over the world. And the only way, an equilibrium can be reached is by opening up to all kinds of possibilities and reforming laws in such a way that free trade will still be possible and the flow of commerce is unrestricted.

Works Cited

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