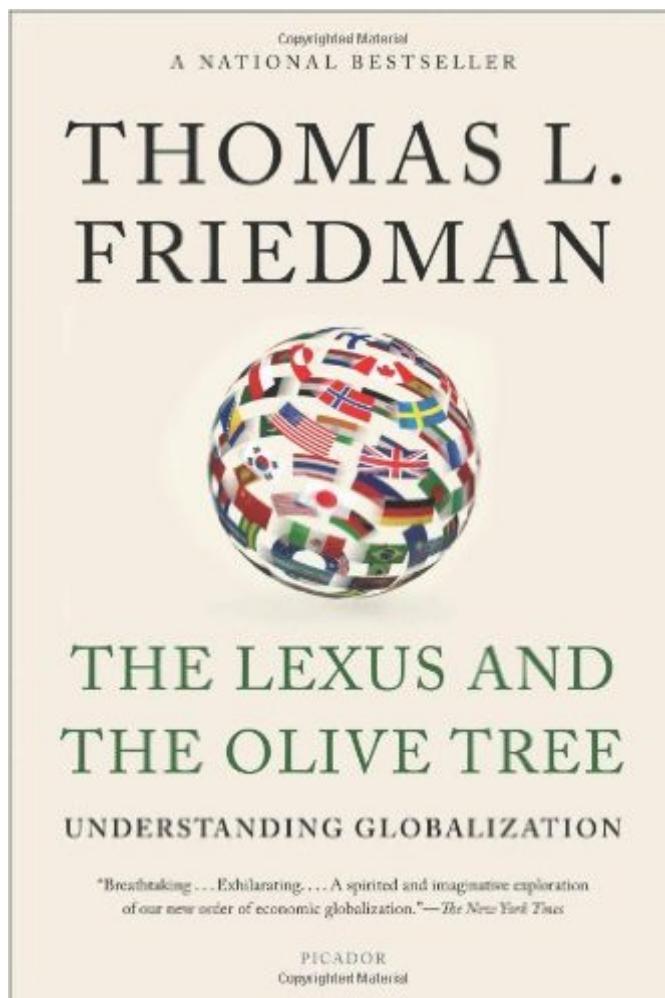


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The Lexus And The Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization



Synopsis

"A brilliant guide for the here and now."---The New York Times Book ReviewIn this vivid portrait of the new business world, Thomas L. Friedman shows how technology, capital, and information are transforming the global marketplace, leveling old geographic and geopolitical boundaries. With bold reporting and acute analysis, Friedman dramatizes the conflict between globalizing forces and local cultures, and he shows why a balance between progress and the preservation of ancient traditions will ensure a better future for all. The Lexus and the Olive Tree is an indispensable look at power and big change in the age of globalization.

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Customer Reviews

The writer of this book, Thomas Friedman, has impressive credentials as a globetrotting journalist and expert on international economics. I'm sure that on the job he is required to be objective and impartial. But that's not the case in this heavy-handed and very arrogant book on globalization. You may find this book informative and fun to read, but beware that you're not getting anything close to the full story on this phenomenon. Friedman's writing style is mostly conversational and easy to read, though he tends to talk about his own friends and adventures way too much. Also, Friedman can't stop making up his own terminology, like Golden Straitjacket, Electronic Herd, Globalution, Glocalism, and the especially irritating DOScapital. The problem is, Friedman merely throws these terms at numerous and scattershot examples of phenomena that may possibly lend them meaning, but fails to adequately describe them himself. Parts One and Two of this book are actually quite strong as Friedman remains mostly objective in describing the rise of globalization and where things

stand today. He also includes a surprising amount of coverage on the negative effects on the environment and non-Western cultures (for the time being). Unfortunately, this book collapses into a firestorm of arrogance in Part 3, which is misleadingly titled "The Backlash Against the System." Here Friedman actually spends more time criticizing those who can't or won't jump on the sacred globalization bandwagon. He uses the derogatory term "turtles" for people who are being left behind by the new economic realities around the world, and doesn't care if it's not their fault. He demeans concern for disadvantaged peoples and countries as "politically correct nonsense" (pg. 355).

A very wide ranging book written by an experienced journalist about the dilemmas created as globalisation transforms the world around our local communities and cultures. He won two Pulitzer Prizes for his reporting as bureau chief in Beirut, and it is this background from which the analogy of the olive tree comes. He explains how his career has enabled him to slowly come to see the many different dimensions of globalisation, how they link, and what we can do about it. It is a very systemic perspective. (Thurow, Lester: Building Wealth is complementary to it. Korten, David: When Corporations Rule the World provides a 1995 counterblast. Any of the books and pamphlets by Robert Theobald and also Harman, W.: Global Mind Change provide creative ideas on how globalisation can be redirected to achieve societal as well as economic ends.) The book is in four parts. Part one explains how to look at the system we call globalisation and how it works. Part two is a discussion of how nation-states, communities, individuals and the environment interact with the system. Part three is a good look at the backlash. Part four is an even better look at the unique role of the USA in this new world. To understand and convey the complexity of what is going on, Friedman believes that he had to learn to combine six dimensions or perspectives in different ways and weights to understand the systemic interrelationships at play and then tell stories in order to explain it. This is what he does in the book. He also identifies what he believes to be the key driving forces to globalisation and the conditions necessary for a society to succeed in a globalised world.

When dealing with a subject as broad as globalization, operational definitions can rarely communicate its scope. In May of 1997, The International Monetary Fund attempted to define globalization in World Economic Outlook as, "the growing economic interdependence of countries worldwide through the increasing volume and variety of cross-border transactions in goods and services and of international capital flows, and also through the more rapid and widespread diffusion of technology." Although this definition is operationally sufficient, it does not remotely begin to convey the primacy that the subject matter deserves in economic, political, environmental and social

circles today. Fortunately for those of us that are not globalization experts, Thomas L. Friedman has penned what, quite possibly, might be the best book that has been published on the topic to date. In The Lexus and the Olive Tree, Friedman uses many analogies and illustrations from his travels as the foreign affairs correspondent for The New York Times to fashion a layman's understanding of the globalization process. Friedman initially notes that: "Globalization is not a phenomenon. It is not just some passing trend. Today it is the overarching international system shaping the domestic politics and foreign relations of virtually every country, and we need to understand it as such" (p. 7). The author argues that as a result of the end of the cold war, the world order has turned to globalization due to "the democratization of technology" (p. 41), "the democratization of finance" (p. 47), and "the democratization of information" (p. 54).

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