

# **That Used to Be Us: How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How We Can Come Back Study Guide**

**That Used to Be Us: How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How We Can Come Back by Thomas Friedman**

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# Plot Summary

"That Used to Be Us," by Thomas L. Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum, subtitled, "How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How We Can Come Back," describes the current state of deterioration in which America finds itself. The authors first describe the current state of America. They explain what is wrong and what has been abandoned from what we used to be. They describe how America was the beacon for democracy and success and admired as the leader of the free world. Millions wanted to emigrate to America and share its dream.

For the last decade however, beginning in 2000, America has been in an obvious and steady decline, which was triggered by changes that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1979, President Nixon abandoned the gold standard and was the first to engage in deficit spending. He took these actions so the country could avoid a recession due to the exorbitant cost of the Vietnam War.

During the Reagan administration, drastic tax cuts were passed, mainly for the wealthy, and governmental regulations were eased to theoretically stimulate business. When Reagan saw the damage that the unpaid tax cuts were beginning to cause to the economy, he was appalled and tried to reverse their impact by passing a series of tax increases. The damaged economy persisted and both President H. W. Bush and President Bill Clinton were forced to increase taxes in order to increase revenues. By the time President Clinton left office, the deficit was turned into a surplus.

The entire economy began to implode however, after President George W. Bush took office. Under his administration, two large tax cuts for the wealthy were passed into law along with an unpaid for Medicare pharmaceutical program. At the same time, he waged and instigated paying for two wars. Deficit spending increased to the point that the country was forced to borrow from China and India in order to pay its bills. Bank deregulation and the decrease in congressional oversight allowed Wall Street titans, driven by avarice and lack of basic ethics, to herald in an decade of risky loans and illegal speculation. This in turn, caused a housing bubble that in 2008, almost destroyed the American economy and that of the entire world.

As a result of the reduction of revenue due to the unpaid for tax cuts, the government let our education system plummet in comparison to those in other industrialized countries. Infrastructure such as our bridges, roads, and public building have deteriorated. Also America has decreased her investment in research and development, placing the country at risk of losing our position of a superpower and the status that the country had earned of "exceptionalism."

The impact of all these missteps by our leaders was exacerbated and greatly accelerated by the merger of IT with globalization.

The American government has ceased to function due in part to the hyper-partisan nature of politics that exists in the US government. Other contributing factors that have



paralyzed our political system is the influence of lobbyists and special interest groups who contribute millions for the reelection campaigns of our legislators. There is a segment of leaders who choose to ignore the warning signs that have been confirmed by the vast majority of experts and scientists that global warming will destroy our nation and our planet. Many of American elected representatives are refusing to learn from our history and deny the inevitability of a dismal future.

There is hope that America can reclaim its greatness and dream. Leaders have to return to the five pillars that have always been the formula for prosperity: 1) Public education must be provided for more and more Americans; 2) the national infrastructure must be continually maintained and modernized; 3) the doors to immigration must be kept open; 4) basic research and development must be funded by the government; and 5) private economic activity must have necessary regulations.



# Chapter 1: If You See Something, Say Something

## Chapter 1: If You See Something, Say Something Summary and Analysis

In September 2010, Tom Friedman traveled to Tianjin, China, to participate in the World Economic Forum summer conference. Just five years before, a three-hour car ride from Beijing was the only way to get to the over-populated, dirty city. In 2010, there was a sleek modern glass building that housed an ultramodern station for the world-class high-speed train that raced at 72 mph to the renovated city of Tianjin. The beautiful new conference building was built in just eight months. He compared that time frame with the Metrorail in his Maryland hometown that had been under construction for almost a year to just for modernization.

Tom checked around and found that people who rode the Metrorail from Maryland to DC had gotten used to the horrible sounds it made while running and the inconvenience of the escalators that were in disrepair. It represented a sense that America's best days were behind it and China's best days were ahead. At an education conference in San Jose, a junior high student told him that the Chinese people have more ambition than Americans. She didn't know where that idea came from, it was just in the ether. Governor Ed Rendell of Philadelphia complained that America had gone soft when the NFL canceled some games because of a snowstorm. A reader wrote to Tom that America no longer embraced challenge. The potholes and disrepair in Washington, DC, the nation's capital, surprised foreign visitors.

It is not a foregone conclusion that while America dominated the last century, that China will dominate this one. American ingenuity, talent, work ethic, and optimism can turn this perception around. While there are independent examples of initiative and philanthropy, America needs action on a big scale. The authors of this book are following the example of Homeland Security who urges that if you see something, say something. In other words, if there is something suspicious, let the authorities know.

Authors Thomas Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum see something and are saying something: America is in disrepair and neglected and in decline. It is time that the country pulls together and takes on the challenge of reversing this trend. The decline has four main causes. First, leaders have stopped recognizing what America needs to thrive in today's world. Second, some of the most important matters that are suffering from neglect are education, deficits and debt and climate change. Third, we have stopped investing in our future. Fourth, our political system is paralyzed and ineffective.

Why is there a growing urgency to address these issues? America has depleted its resources on costly wars, cheap credit, and unnecessary tax cuts. The authors do not want America to survive, they want America to regain and maintain its greatness.



China has brought millions of its people out of poverty and modernized its society. China is improving economically but it still suffers under the weight of its corruption, pollution, lack of personal freedom, and an effective yet inorganic education system. Its political system is not superior to America's. Its future success is threatened by its eventual inability to maintain a cheap labor force. America's problem is not that it's not keeping up with China. Instead, America is not keeping up with what America was.



# Chapter 2: Ignoring Our Problems

## Chapter 2: Ignoring Our Problems Summary and Analysis

Worse than not getting what you want can be actually getting what you want. The end of the Cold War is a vivid example. In 1946, George Kennan wrote a cable that became known as the "Long Telegram" as well as the most famous diplomatic communication in the history of the US. The cable warned that America needed to wake up. The world had changed! This communique established US policy on the Cold War—the containment of the USSR's military power and the vigorous support of global resistance to communism. It led to the Marshall Plan; NATO; a permanent presence of US troops around the globe; America's involvement in the Korean and Viet Nam civil wars; the nuclear arms race; and, the political and military rivalry of the US and the USSR. America was shocked but believed the message and became vigilant, creative and united. America was under the gun! It shepherded in an age of innovation and progress the world had never seen before.

The Cold War came to an end in 1989 with the overthrow of communism in Eastern Europe. When the Berlin wall came down, America thought it could relax. Communism was defeated. It was a huge political victory. But by ending the Cold War, America opened the global door to two billion more people who would be living like us and would be competing for our jobs. "The world we are living in was the world we invented." (16) Globalization was immediately placed on the fast track. America was now competing with people who had the same dreams, ambitions and opportunities as its people had. We had traded our stiffest competitor for colleagues.

But by losing that competition, we began to rest on our laurels. We had been kept stronger and sharper by the existence of an enemy. Technology was evening the playing field - providing the same opportunities to developing countries that were available in our nation. America boasted of high-skilled and high-paid workers. Asia began to grow a populace of high-skilled and low-paid workers. America was slow to understand what was happening. America was suffering from "cockiness and complacency." We needed someone to send us a telegram.

The four major challenges that face America are: 1) how to adapt to globalization; 2) how to adjust to the IT revolution; 3) how to cope with soaring budget deficits; and, 4) how to manage rising energy consumption and increasing climate threats. How America succeeds in facing these challenges will define its future.

America faced an economic challenge from Japan in the eighties but in only two industries: auto and electronics and threatened the economy of only one American city, Detroit. China, on the other hand, is a threat across the board. America recognized the threat of Japan to its economy and took steps to understand it, reposition itself and re-





emerge even stronger. The threat of China will require more sacrifice, political will and a united effort on the part of America.

The IT revolution has eliminated old jobs forever and the new jobs it's created are more demanding and require advanced education. America's debt has expanded to dangerous levels since the Cold War because of the political aversion to raising taxes and increasing revenues to support the amount of government spending necessary to deal with globalization and the IT challenge.

America has lost its fiscal discipline by printing its own money and issuing debt infinitely. This at the same time the largest group of people, the baby boomers, are retiring and depending on financial support through governmental social programs. States and cities are running out of money and cannot support the money owed to pension funds. Doubts about US credit worthiness are increasing. The threat of fossil fuels to the earth's atmosphere is a direct result of the increase in energy consumption which was caused by globalization and Asia's adaptation to free-market economics. The planet is at risk until solutions are formulated to deal with global warming.

All four challenges need a collective response from all Americans. Americans must learn new skills and entrepreneurs must create new jobs. Americans must spend less, save more and accept that they must pay higher taxes for the foreseeable future. Methods must be devised to expend less fossil fuels. Since these challenges are all of a global nature, they should be discussed on a global basis. How America responds to these challenges will shape our future.



# Chapter 3: Ignoring Our History

## Chapter 3: Ignoring Our History Summary and Analysis

The Tea Party that swept the Republican party into leadership in the House of Representatives in 2010, believes that the lawmakers must follow the Constitution to a letter. They believe in throwing all case law out. But that's a formula for failure. America must renew and refresh its formula to keep up with the demands of the modern world. There are five pillars to prosperity that if ignored will be at America's peril. They are: 1) Public education must be provided for more and more Americans; 2) our infrastructure must be continually maintained and modernized; 3) the doors to immigration must be kept open; 4) basic research and development must be supported by the government; and, 5) private economic activity must have necessary regulations. These five pillars have been key to the success and advancements the America has realized over the past two centuries. And it is the formula that has inspired dreamers from around the world to want to become a part of it.

America has always been fortunate enough that the right leader emerged when a course correction was necessary. These leaders have been astute enough to recognize the challenges of changing tides and the direction in which the country needed to be headed in order to face them. Alexander Hamilton saw the need for a strong and active although limited federal government. Public education has always been supported by our leaders. Thomas Jefferson insisted that his gravestone be marked with the fact that he had founded the University of Virginia. The continued standards of education had, by the end of the 20th century, resulted in sixty-three percent of high school grads advancing immediately to institutes of higher learning. America's focus on education has reduced income gaps and readied the population for new technological advancements.

Abraham Lincoln understood where the future would be taking America. Despite the unthinkable pressures he had during the Civil War, Lincoln signed into law legislation that helped transition America from an agrarian to an industrial society. As business began to boom, Theodore Roosevelt understood the importance of transparency and regulation. These safeguards helped limit corruption and held businesses accountable for their activities. Franklin Roosevelt invested in America's infrastructure like never before. FDR stabilized the country's economy by supporting legislation that saved capitalism and created social safety-nets like the Social Security that serves to ensure the stability of a free-market society.

Harry Truman saw to it that returning soldiers were given an advantage for serving the country with the institution of the GI Bill of Rights. He also established the National Science Foundation where billions have been distributed to keep America at the top in research and development. Eisenhower created the interstate highway system and supported a robust immigration policy. Lyndon Johnson expanded immigration to Asia

and India allowing for some of the brightest minds in the world to become a part of American society.

The fifth pillar, the regulation of business activities in our society, should not be taken lightly. There is a conservative push to reduce regulations in order to stimulate business; however, markets grow like wild flowers and need to be shaped appropriately to provide the most benefit to the nation through regulation and oversight. Wartime eras have produced the most advancements because they evoke a spirit of unity and sacrifice. In 2011, America needs that kind of national response in order to meet the challenges of the modern, competitive world that globalization has produced.

# Chapter 4: Up in the Air

## Chapter 4: Up in the Air Summary and Analysis

The blending of globalization and advanced technology is eliminating jobs by the millions. This merger is creating a new reality in the markets as well as in the political and economical segments of society. The new reality creates jobs that demand higher skill sets. Information technology which is the driver of the new reality is making changes at a furious rate. Globalization has opened the floodgates to workers from around the world who are as skilled as Americans and who will work for lower wages. It is also leveling the playing field for those conducting business in the global market.

Three factors brought about the new flat world of globalization. The personal computer provided a tool in which people could create their own content. The Internet and the World Wide Web gave people the venue on which to send their content across the globe in literally seconds. The development of the languages of the Internet; i.e., HTML, JAVA, SML, and many more made it all possible. The world became everyone's next door neighbor.

The cell phone has allowed for even more global connectivity. Communication advanced beyond phones in ways never imagined: social networking like Facebook, Twitter, Clouds, Google, and Skype. All these venues have allowed for increased communication and knowledge sharing in the global market. These new methods of communication are about generating and sharing new ideas. A significant political result of these communication innovations is the Arab Spring. Leaders in the Middle East could no longer hide the brutality that took place under their regimes—photos and videos and reports could be sent round the world in seconds.

Every educator, parent and worker needs to understand the fundamental restructuring that is going on in the workplace. Pressure is on companies to produce more products and services for less money. As jobs are lost and recessions develop, recovery takes longer and doesn't return the jobs that existed pre-recession. That is why the economy recovers on Wall Street but, for main street, it is a jobless recovery. Economic stimulants (tax increases, increased government spending) can temporarily ease conditions but long term, the new structural challenge in the labor market must be addressed in a more permanent sense.

The new economy rewards workers with college and graduate degrees with job offers and raises while those with less education receive pink slips. Today's job market consists of three categories: jobs that require high-level critical thinking abilities like those necessarily possessed by engineers, programmers, designers, athletes, doctors, lawyers, writers, among others; jobs requiring middle-skilled workers who work complex assembly lines; and jobs that have to be done manually like dental hygienists, bakers, policemen, plumbers, and others. Workers in the top level are enjoying lucrative pay increases. The lower skilled workers have job security and a reliable income. It is the

middle-skilled worker who is being squeezed out by the IT and globalization merger. To meet today's challenges, a better education is needed for every American so that more people can rise to the top. And those in the top category must challenge themselves to be more innovative and more creative which will create more jobs beneath them. This is a trickle-down theory that can really bring America back to greatness.

# Chapter 5: Help Wanted

## Chapter 5: Help Wanted Summary and Analysis

Employers today are looking for workers who are capable of critical thinking, who can deal with non-routine tasks and work in collaboration with teams either in-house or globally. They look for people who can think outside the box, improve their jobs, and even reinvent it. While the functions of many American companies are outsourced to India and other developing countries, the technological platform often remains in this country. This means that the best jobs, the highest paying jobs remain in America but they also require the highest of skills levels.

We have to recognize that when a company moves off-shore or outsources many of its functions, we are not only losing current jobs but also jobs of the future. To draw clients, law firms are adding a new type of attorney—chief innovation officers. The responsibility of this position includes recruiting, training and inspiring attorneys to go that extra mile—to not only perform routine and expected legal functions but to invent the legal practices of tomorrow. Many firms are weighing the capability to be innovative into their decisions on annual bonuses. Critical thinking is no longer considered a laudable asset—it is expected and fundamental to employment.

General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recognized that soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq were being handed great powers and responsibilities due to the advancement of technology. However, he realized that the young people, chiefly men, were not being trained to take on this responsibility. That type of training had been reserved for commanders. Today's military looks to recruit soldiers with high values who are team players, who are inquisitive and able to communicate. The future of a effective military depends on a staff of soldiers who are innovative and have the ability to adapt quickly as situations call for, especially those that are unexpected. We are facing a decentralized enemy. This type of enemy, terrorists who have no army and serve no nation, makes it impossible to provide adequate training for every possible scenario. The ideal military recruit today has an insatiable hunger for information and intelligence. There is a de-emphasis on physical fitness in favor of critical thinking. Army training has abandoned the practice of rote memorization in basic training. Drill sergeants recognize recruits who have leadership skills. Often a young captain on the battlefield knows more about the war than a visiting colonel or general, a fact that is recognized by all ranks.

The CEO of DuPont looks for employees who have "presence." All the jobs that were formerly done by rote are now done by machines. The need now is for people who can think and work in collaborative efforts. In order for an employee to have presence, he has to pay attention and know what is going on in the company and with other employees. DuPont recently established a production management system wherein all employees were asked to take a product or process and improve it. When DuPont decides to build a new plant, it looks for an area whose populace is highly educated.

People on the bottom rungs are becoming more empowered which results in innovation coming from the bottom as well as the top.

"Carlson's Law," named for the CEO of SRI International, Curtis Carlson, says that innovation from the bottom is smarter than that from the top but is in need of some editing and organization. The process worker knows more about the process than does the Executive VP of Operations.



# Chapter 6: Homework x 2 = The American Dream

## Chapter 6: Homework x 2 = The American Dream Summary and Analysis

The top twelve teams in the 2011 Association for Computing Collegiate Programming contest broke down as follows by country: The top prize went to a team from China and the second prize went to a team from Michigan, USA. Of the remaining ten spots, five were won by Russian teams; and one each by teams from Poland, the Ukraine, Germany and Canada. The winners of these competitions are referred to as the smartest people in the world.

The merger of IT and globalization has impacted more than the job market. Raising math, science, reading and creativity levels in school is the most important determinant of our economic growth. The technological merger with the world market has caused education to be more important than ever and widens the productivity gap between countries that are highly educated with those that are not. Everyone needs to be better educated in order to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills along with the reading, writing and arithmetic. America needs to learn to work harder than our competition in order to reclaim and maintain the American dream. The gaps between the minorities have to be closed. A gap in scholarship also exists between the average white student and students from other developed countries that needs to be closed as well.

Minorities suffer in the education system because so many of these children are forced to attend schools that are dangerous, understaffed and underfunded. These children have no hope of even becoming average much less advanced. Even kids in safe school in nice areas that have adequate funding suffer because many teachers are not well-educated. Great teachers should be rewarded and recognized. Teachers' unions should not protect teachers who do not perform up to expectations. There are six crucial elements to improving the country's educational system: 1) better teachers and principals; 2) involved parents; 3) politicians who support education; 4) taxpayers willing to support education; 5) business leaders committed to raising standards; and 6) students who are ready to learn while sitting in the classroom.

The Federal Government cannot reform America's 14,000 school districts overnight but state and local governments can implement change. They can create successful models that can be imitated across the nation. The focus of successful models is on recruiting the best teachers and retaining them based on performance rather than tenure. The aim of education should be to create better citizens and not just good test-takers.





# Chapter 7: Average Is Over

## Chapter 7: Average Is Over Summary and Analysis

Average is over. Competition is at a never-before-seen intensity. It's man against the machine but it's also the American man against a world of very talented people who are ambitious and eager to live the American dream even if it's on their own soil. In today's world it is necessary to invent a new product, re-invent an old one or re-invent yourself to be better than your previous best. In this hyper-connected world new ideas can literally go viral overnight. Being successful with an idea has never been easier if the idea is good, unique and improves on an old product or idea. It takes a risk-taker with resiliency to start a new company.

There are three mindsets when thinking about being a creative creator or a creative server: think like an immigrant, think like an artisan, think like a waitress. (137). An immigrant is just happy to be in America and doesn't think he's entitled to anything that he doesn't work hard for. An artisan takes personal pride in his work. A waitress can add a few extra pieces of fruit to a customer's plate as a way of distinguishing herself in a job she has little power in. In all cases, it's giving that "extra" that will lead to success.

The best education is one that focuses on the three "C's" - critical thinking, effective communication, and successful collaboration. Critical thinking involves asking the right questions not memorizing the right answers. The ability to collaborate in today's world is essential and one cannot collaborate unless he communicates effectively. Many students today abandon a liberal arts education in favor of a strong focus on math and science. By giving up art, music, journalism, film and the like we give up the very type of education that fosters creativity and innovation. A liberal arts education is superior to one with a narrow focus. Play should be promoted in school for it is through play that ideas are spawned and the spark of innovation is discovered. Steve Jobs recognized the importance of being allowed to "play" in his life. Many corporations are recognizing the value of creativity and allow their employees to "play" on projects of their own devise.

Education is sometimes designed for the needs of a certain group. The Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship first became popular with kids in high crime areas in New York because in addition to teaching them math and reading, it focused on how they could make money. The program started in 1987 spread across the country and has educated some 330,000 students. Some colleges have established programs that promote the arts in ways that will enrich the students' lives. The Idealab was established in Pasadena, California, in 1966. It supports companies whose products and services change people's lives. One of the chief obstacles to success can be fear of failure, something that the Idealab teaches students to overcome. The IT and globalization merger has created job killers who lurk on the world wide web looking for ways to make more money, be more productive and reduce manpower. Individuals must become their



own free agent and continually seek better employment and ways to improve their current positions.



# Chapter 8: This Is Our Due

## Chapter 8: This Is Our Due Summary and Analysis

Along with the IT and globalization merger, the climate crisis and our energy consumption has intersected with our country's growing deficit. America has failed to meet the challenge that is represented by this reality and has dithered and delayed on developing viable and plausible policies to combat this emergency. Part of the problem is that segments of the community and even some politicians deny that these issues even exist. Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill tried to warn Vice President Dick Cheney that the tax cuts the administration planned would pose a threat to the economy. Cheney cut him off saying that they had just won the mid-term elections and, "This is our due." (156) Senator Inhofe of Oklahoma refers to global warming as a hoax. When the Bush administration pushed through tax cuts, mainly impacting the wealthiest of Americans, they were unpaid for and further burdened the already growing deficit.

In the last twenty years, there has been an attitude of entitlement that has settled over much of the population. People want big cars but low gas prices; higher spending and lower taxes; booms without end. All this while America was spending literally billions a week in Afghanistan and Iraq.

If America does not invest in our traditional formula for success and reduce our deficit and address climate change and energy consumption America will decline and be at the mercy of Mother Nature and the the global market—neither of which have any mercy.



# Chapter 9: The War on Math (and the Future)

## Chapter 9: The War on Math (and the Future) Summary and Analysis

Due to excessive spending since the end of the Cold War, the economy has placed the old against the young. What is our priority: Pell Grants for college tuition or Medicare for our seniors? One thing is certain, that there will be spending cuts. We cannot go on with the current rate of spending. If we do not cut spending, increase revenues and invest in the future, America will pay a huge price.

Since the late 1960s, the US began the practice of deficit spending—spending money we didn't have—which, of course, continued to grow the national debt. By 2016, the debt is estimated to be \$16 trillion. The retirement of the nearly 80 million baby boomers will cause the costs of Social Security and Medicare to skyrocket. To satisfy the demands of entitlement spending, America has been borrowing money. An out of control national debt poses a serious threat to our national security and future. Banks have limited borrowing power. What is the borrowing power of the United States? It's difficult to determine because our economy is constantly changing and growing. But economists fear that the US is getting close to that limit. America does not want to become Greece or Ireland, countries which are virtually bankrupt and threaten to disrupt the economy of the entire world.

In 1971, the government ended the international monetary system established in 1944 which had tied the dollar to the price of gold. Currency could not be issued unless it was backed by gold. President Nixon scrapped the monetary system so that the US would not have to go through a recession due to the funding for the war in Vietnam. He listened to the advice of Milton Friedman who insisted that the free market would establish the correct value of the world's currencies. Deficits began to get out of control during the Reagan administration due in large part to tax cuts for the wealthy and his Defense Department buildup. When Reagan understood the deleterious impact that the tax cuts were having on the economy, he was appalled and tried to reverse the effect by supporting and passing a series of tax increases. Neither President George H. W. Bush or President Bill Clinton wanted to raise taxes but both saw that it was necessary. Clinton passed his tax increases without one Republican vote. The conservatives warned that the increases would cause a recession and unemployment. They were wrong. The tax increases heralded in one of the biggest boom times of the century and turned the deficit into a surplus.

During the administration of George W. Bush, the US stopped paying for anything. The huge tax cuts for the rich, two wars, and the Medicare drug benefit were all unfunded. Republicans have gone wild on tax cuts and have justified it by evoking Ronald Reagan—or rather an imaginary version of him. Reagan was against deficits and raised taxes

eleven times during his eight years in office to keep deficits down. That fact is something that today's Republicans seem to forget. The only way America has been able to stay afloat in the last decade was by borrowing from other countries, particularly our biggest competitor, China. Milton Friedman's theory that the market would assign appropriate value to currency was proven wrong because China and Japan both manipulated their currencies to support their export growth models. Democrats have spent wildly on pensions for public employees and unions. According to the Pew Center, state governments collectively face an unfunded \$1 trillion in liability. When the recession of 2008 hit, the budgets of many states crashed and burned from over-promising on pension funds.

What would happen if the lending stopped? America would have only three options: raise interest rates which would trigger an economic downturn; print money which would create inflationary concerns; or increase taxes and cut spending. Probably a combination of the three will ultimately provide resolution which, in any combination, will be painful. National, state and local fiscal policies demonstrate an unreasonable approach that has led to an unmanageable and unsustainable debt. It is the views of the partisan politicians that have led us down this path. It was in the 1980s that we lost our way.

To solve these urgent problems, we need to adhere to the following guidelines: 1) become serious; 2) reduce the deficit to pursue prosperity; 3) make cuts across the board; and, 4) increase revenues through taxation. The problem cannot be kicked down the road. It is an emergency that must be dealt with immediately.



# Chapter 10: The War of Physics and Other Good Things

## Chapter 10: The War of Physics and Other Good Things Summary and Analysis

America's worst nuclear accident occurred in March 1979 on Three Mile Island just outside Harrisburg, PA. If it had not been contained, exposure of the nuclear core could have rendered the entire state of Pennsylvania uninhabitable. Fortunately, no one was hurt or made sick and there was no long-term impact. But this close call stayed in the mind of the nation for what could have been. This incident along with the movie, *The China Syndrome*, released just 12 days before the Three Mile Island incident and the exorbitant cost of building nuclear plants and the inherent legal liabilities brought a halt to further constructions of the plants. Therefore, since America has ceased to include nuclear power to its energy mix and energy consumption has drastically increased, we have been forced to rely more heavily than ever before on fossil fuels—coal, crude oil and natural gas.

Complicating matters was a sharp increase in oil prices, the overthrow of the Shah of Iran and the take over of the country by the Ayatollah Khomeini. The Iranian Revolution led to the conflict between the Sunni Muslims and Shiite Iran which still wages today. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and Arab and Muslim, mujaheddin fighters drove the Russians out. This situation resulted in the waging of a jihad, or holy war against non-Muslims. Because of America's oil obsession, our money pours into the Middle East and has literally been funding the madrassas run by radical Islamist who preach the need to eradicate the infidels (us) to young men which eventually came home to roost on 9/11/2001.

The year 1979 was also the year that Ronald Reagan came into office and in 1981 implemented his free-market economics which helped expand globalization and the increased the worldwide need for energy. In 1979 the National Academy of Sciences issued its first warning about global warming. Despite indisputable evidence, a segment of the population, and most importantly many Republican lawmakers, believe that global warming does not exist. The escalation of greenhouse gases which is the driver of global warming is due, at least in part, to human consumption which has increased with the IT and globalization merger.

Vice President Cheney has said that if there's even a one percent chance that Al Qaeda could access nuclear weapons, that we must treat it at a certainty. The same should be said for climate change. It must be treated as a certainty. Climate change occurs gradually and would not be as immediately devastating as Pearl Harbor or 9/11 but its effect could be just as devastating. We should not wait until it's too late. Those politicians who don't believe in global warming vote against energy conserving programs such as cap and trade mainly because it may threaten their reelection. More

Republicans do not believe in global warming today than twenty years ago. Seventy percent of Tea Party Republicans say there is no evidence of global warming.

Republican lawmakers will have to understand that the special interest-driven rejection of science is bad policy and bad politics. In addition to Republicans blocking legislation to address this crisis, the Senate adopted a sixty-vote rule to stop a filibuster. Even with a Democratic majority in the Senate, it was impossible to get enough Republicans on board to pass significant environmental legislation. With proper efficiency standards, fines on carbon emissions and innovation, the price of clean power can be driven down. Most importantly, the future of America and the earth itself depends on it.



# Chapter 11: The Terrible Twos

## Chapter 11: The Terrible Twos Summary and Analysis

Our government injected economic "steroids" into the economy so that Wall Street could do participate in more speculation and Main Street could do more home buying where millions of people were approved for houses they couldn't afford. The housing bubble was fueled by low interest rates and deficit spending. We forgot who we were and abandoned the five pillars of prosperity. The first decade of the twenty-first century has been the worst in modern history. Job growth and earnings have stagnated—except on Wall Street. The economic decline of America is due to the unethical and illegal activities conducted by Wall Street and America's failure to maintain and upgrade our formula for success.

In a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, stated that America was ninth in the world in the number of college graduates per capita. He referred to America's education system as under-performing. Although nearly 70 percent of high school graduates enroll in college, only 60 percent of those students graduate. We can't hide from the results of an inferior education system. In Detroit, 47 percent of adults are illiterate.

Education is not the only area where America pales in comparison to other countries. It was the conclusion of the American Society of Civil Engineers in 2009, that our infrastructure is poorly maintained, unable to meet current and future demands and is unsafe. In March 2010, the majority of the finalists of the 2010 Intel Science Talent Search were the children of Chinese and Indian immigrants. This illustrates two realities, discipline and work ethic is not being taught in the home and the it is important to keep our doors to immigration open. Unfortunately, many immigrants educated here are returning home - mainly to India and China -because they believe that their chances for a better quality of life and opportunities for employment are better at home.

Friedman met with Kishore Mahbubani, a Singaporean academic and retired diplomat. They were discussing the funding of US research projects to find solutions for the most urgent energy problems facing the world. Friedman told Kishore that only three projects were being funded at \$25 million each. Kishore was sure that Friedman had misspoke and corrected him by insisting that the figure had to be \$25 billion each. Friedman was right. It was \$25 million per project. Kishore couldn't believe it. Back home, the government was expending \$1 billion for such a project in just the small city he lived in. The Washington Post reported in April 2011 that research and development spending had declined steadily since the last 60s. In a report entitled, "Rising Above the Gathering Storm," which was requested by Congress in 2005, statistics showed that funding of R&D as a percentage of GDP had declined by 60 percent over forty years. Five years later in 2010, the report was updated and showed that the nation's outlook had worsened in the areas of education, science and research and development.





During the Terrible Twos, some of the financial and energy sectors in the US suffered from too little regulation. Deregulation was partially behind the financial meltdown of 2008. The belief that the financial industry could be self-regulating was proven to be devastatingly wrong. Aggressive lobbying protected derivatives known as credit-default swaps from proper regulation. Better regulation may have totally avoided the economic collapse. Income inequality is a subject that is coming to the forefront of public discourse. The more divided a society is in terms of economics, the more the wealthy feel entitled to opt out of paying for public goods and common needs. (237)



# Chapter 12: Whatever It Is, I'm Against It

## Chapter 12: Whatever It Is, I'm Against It Summary and Analysis

The American political system is not only polarized but it is paralyzed. The country will not be able to get past the critical challenges it faces unless the federal government is functioning and willing to take on difficult issues. Although there has always been partisanship, it has never been near the current level that exists today. Partisanship has transformed into animosity and hostility. Whatever one side is for the other side is against. These politicians are at odds with the people they represent who want compromise and progress not stagnation and posturing.

President George H. W. Bush, who was a supporter of Planned Parenthood, was this brand of Republican leader. In the 1960s, there was a migration of southern democrats to the Republican Party due to the civil rights movement that was embraced by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Congressional districts were redrawn or gerrymandered in order to make districts safe for one party or the other. This process has been manipulated to the point that ineffective legislators are able to maintain their positions on a purely partisan basis. Another negative result from the hyper-partisan political environment that exists today is the public at large has lost trust in their elected officials who seem most concern with keeping their jobs.

The major goal of the modern Democratic Party is to preserve the social networks created during FDR's administration. The Republicans, whose icon is President Reagan, are focused on reducing taxes. The two sides spend more time arguing about their differences than they do trying to solve the problems of the nation. Lobbyists play one of the greatest roles in today's legislative process. They are paid individuals who wield the power of the individuals or special interest groups who fund them to press politicians to pass laws in their favor. Naturally, the only individuals who can afford lobbyists who make millions from their sponsors are wealthy people. The ordinary person does not have a lobbyist. Therefore, it is no surprise that laws are passed that favor the wealthy. Lobbyists are not new to the political scene. They used to literally hand out bags of money to legislators. At least today, they are more subtle although the amount of "money in the bag," in the form of campaign contributions.

Politicians are chiefly fueled by the campaign money they receive from special interests. In order to survive in the political world, politicians have to raise increasingly large amounts of money. And in order to raise those large sums, politicians must devote a large portion of their time and attention to campaign fund raising which of course distracts them from the jobs they were elected to do.

Senator Lindsay Graham tried to imagine what it would have been like if there had been a 24/7 cable news cycle when the Constitution was being written? How many leaks and how much speculation would there have been? Would it have ever gotten written? What

is said on TV and written in the blogosphere about politicians apparently has quite an impact on them and they spend time—time away from their work—stewing about these comments and trying to refute them. Many of the news agencies, like Fox News, seem to have their own agenda and targets their narrow audience which further solidifies partisanship. It seems that some in the media, including radio talk show hosts, want to do anything but help unify the two sides—they want to inflame them and want the animosity to perpetuate. Good for ratings!

However, the media stills plays a positive role. They are the voice of the people and can confront politicians with their statements and actions. They catch legislators talking out of both sides of their mouths and demand answers. What viewers and listeners need to be aware of is that there is little accountability on the part of some in the media. They sometimes make wild claims and accusations about politicians and legislators that have no basis in truth.

Just as the American dream is fading, the California dream is on life-support as well. The state's debt is in crisis and its unemployment is among the highest in the nation. The state has suffered since the end of the Cold War due, in part, to the decrease in military spending. California had been home to many of the largest defense contractors that have since been forced to close down, leaving millions unemployed. The Golden State is now tarnished. Is its decline symbolic of the entire nation since the state once was a glittering beacon to the rest of the world? California's demise is due to the clash between powerful public employee unions and powerful anti-tax activists and with neither side showing any willingness to compromise. If our political leaders don't take heed and we remain hyper-partisan and continue to bend to special interest groups, the entire country where will be California is. It will have no semblance of the California dream. Instead, it will be a national nightmare.



# Chapter 13: Devaluation

## Chapter 13: Devaluation Summary and Analysis

Wall Street of old was inhabited by honest men who conducted good business. That ethic has been replaced by liar loans and, "I hope I'm gone by the time this thing blows up" (p. 277). It is part of an overall decline in values in the nation that began after the Cold War. As far as investments, a sea change occurred that abandoned long-term reliable investments in favor of short-term, get rich quick opportunities. The loss of confidence in our institutions and leaders and a lessening of our sense of shared national purpose also contributed to the changing society. At the congressional hearings on the economic collapse, Wall Street titans saw nothing to apologize for when evidence was presented to them that they knew many of the deals they were selling their customers on were "crap."

The Tea Party gained strength in 2010 when one of its leaders declared that he had no experience in politics but added, "Look where the experts got us." (p. 286). This loss of trust was naturally followed by a loss of respect for leadership and a resultant decline of authority. People choose not to believe economic experts who warn that revenues must be increased and spending must be curbed but not slaughtered. People also choose not to believe scientists who warn of calamity if global warming is not addressed. This loss of confidence is why an absurd statement by Rep. Michele Bachmann that the Obama administration was spending \$200 million a day on a trip to India is immediately believed. It was far, far from the truth but the ridiculous lie was repeated on conservative airways and no doubt believed to this day by some of their listeners

In previous days, our political leaders were inspirations to the average American citizen. People wanted to help their leaders make the country better. Making sacrifices was part of that mentality. It's time that we start living up to the values of the past.



# Chapter 14: They Just Didn't Get the Word

## Chapter 14: They Just Didn't Get the Word Summary and Analysis

America is not a hopeless cause. There is still reason for hope and there are still people who want to invent the next best thing. Millions of people around the world want to become a part of our nation. And in our society, teachers and inventors to soldiers and small business owners are "just too dumb" to give up the dream. They didn't get the message that it was all over. College drop-outs Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg, against all odds, created the biggest countries in the world. There are Indian citizens who graduated from Yale who are promoting the electric car around their entire country. A disproportionate number of officers on the USS Chosin are women. These women are living proof that diversity is a vital part of America's strength.

Wendy Kopp, the founder of Teach for America, is not concerned with how much money she makes. She is certain that if America makes education its priority, it can be turned around to the benefit to one and all. Robert Stevenson family's business remains in Buffalo, NY, where it was founded in 1888. He has to tweak his operations to keep up with the current market and global requirements but he refuses to sell out.

As much talk as there is about China's proficiency, according to reliable studies, the US still far surpasses China in productivity. The value of the average American worker is greater than the value of the average Chinese worker. America is the place to dream something, invent something, start a company. There should be no reason why a company should decide to move out of America. A job creation strategy must be developed based on the new reality. Longing for the times of old and old solutions that won't work now is a waste of time. Key to our recovery is reminding our politicians that they were elected to do the work of our country not to get re-elected in the next cycle. A different set of incentives must be placed before them to encourage them to let go of the polarization that is ruining our country. It's not "us" or "them," it's "us and them."



# Chapters 15 and 16

## Chapters 15 and 16 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 15, the authors discuss how there is nothing fundamentally wrong with America's political system. The problem is that it is not functioning. The country is in need of shock therapy which could come from a number of sources including: an outside enemy; global economic collapse; Mother Nature; a grassroots movement from within; or, from the top of the political system. The country must move to higher ground in its political discourse. We need political hybrids that will seek compromise and put ideology in its proper perspective. A third-party candidate for the presidency would be a way to interject a shock into the system. But the process to even get on the ballots is difficult and third party candidates rarely win elections. It takes millions to wage a serious campaign—talk that a billion dollars will be raised for Obama's re-election campaign is not shocking anyone. However, a third-party candidate can make a difference by affecting the agenda of the winning candidate. One of the most important things that a third-party candidate could bring to the electorate is inspiration. Though such a person would probably not win the election, he or she could have a greater impact on the course of American history than the winner.

In Chapter 16, whether or not there is a happy ending to the story of America is up to all of us. The first step is the recognition that something is wrong and needs to be fixed. Political opponents of Barack Obama accused him of not thinking in terms of America's exceptionalism. That identity was bestowed upon America because of his freedom and liberty and power and wealth. However, being "exceptional" is not a life-time award. It is something that has to be earned from time to time. America must face the problems enumerated in this book, find solutions and return to the formula that has always made America great but understand that that formula must be updated to meet current conditions. If we want to preserve America for future generations, reading the Constitution out loud in the US House of Representatives isn't the answer. Clinging to the declaration that America is exceptional is an exercise in futility. We need to look back on our history and learn from it and adapt our former successes for today's challenges. America can be what it used to be. In fact, it can be more than it used to be. It's up to everyone of us.



# Characters

## Tom Friedman

Tom Friedman is a recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for journalism three times. He is a foreign correspondent for the New York Times and is the author of this book along with Michael Mandelbaum. As a journalist, Tom did his research thoroughly and went out in the field to gain information and knowledge necessary for writing this book.

Friedman attended the World Economic Forum summer conference in September 2010 in Tianjin, China. He had visited the city five years before and was amazed at the changes he saw in 2010. Previously, the only way to access the city from Beijing was by car. When he arrived for the forum, he was astonished at the sleek modern glass building in Tianjin that now housed a station for China's world-class high-speed train. In his mind, he compared the pristine building with the deteriorating station back in his hometown in Maryland that houses the Metrorail. It had been under repair for almost a year compared to the Tianjin station that was built in its entirety in just eight months.

Friedman was astonished when he canvassed some junior high school students at an education conference in San Jose who all believed that Chinese students were smarter than they were. Friedman considers the decline in education as the most serious problem facing our nation. It is a threat to our future and to our national security. If Hillary Clinton would have asked for his advice when offered the position of Secretary of State, he would have advised her to turn it down and ask to be the Secretary of Education instead. It's a much more important position.

## Ronald Reagan

It was in the 1980s during the administration of President Ronald Reagan that deficit spending began to get out of control and to adversely impact America's economy. The causes of this deleterious effect upon the economy was caused by massive tax cuts, mainly for the wealthy, supported and signed into law by President Reagan. When Reagan realized the impact of the tax cuts on the economy, he was appalled and tried to stem the damage by passing a series of tax increases.

During the Reagan administration, business got a boon from his administration's policy of deregulation. The deregulation of business standards and the easing of Congressional oversight began in the Reagan administration but was put on steroids in the administration of President George W. Bush. This deregulation, that had been in place and effective for decades, was a chief contributor to the 2008 financial meltdown. Without the proper regulation of the banking system, greedy and unethical Wall Street titans were able to making a killing in the housing market based on risky loans and illegal speculation. The theory that the banking industry could self-regulate was proven wrong in spades.



Current-day Republicans look at President Ronald Reagan as their idol and as the icon of tax cuts and deregulation. However, their image of him is distorted as they fail to recognize that he understood the risk that the economy had been placed in by slashing taxes too deeply. These cuts greatly reduced revenues to the country which were essential for America to pay its bills, invest in education and research and development and maintain and modernize our infrastructure. If Reagan ideologues were honest about what he really stood for, they wouldn't vote for him if he were running for office in the new reality.

## **Richard Nixon**

Richard Nixon was the first president to abandon the gold standard and engage in deficit spending. He did not want America to suffer through a recession due to the cost of the Vietnam War.

## **George H. W. Bush**

Even though George H. W. Bush was a Republican, he supported Planned Parenthood. He had to break his promise of no new taxes because of burgeoning deficits that began during the Reagan administration.

## **Bill Clinton**

President Bill Clinton had to raise taxes in order to deal with the deficits facing the nation. He was able to balance the budget and create a surplus by the time he left office.

## **George W. Bush**

President George W. Bush took the surplus that he inherited and turned it into a huge deficit from unpaid for tax increases for the wealthy, two world wars, and an expensive Medicare pharmaceutical program.

## **Steve Jobs**

Steve Jobs was a college drop-out but created one of the biggest companies in the world. He attributed his creativity to his being able to "play" with ideas as a young student.





## **Franklin D. Roosevelt**

President Franklin D. Roosevelt responded to the country's problems during and after the Great Depression by establishing social safety-nets such as Social Security. He also had the forethought to invest in the country's infrastructure.

## **Dwight D. Eisenhower**

President Dwight D. Eisenhower had the forethought to establish the interstate highway system. He adapted a robust immigration policy.

## **Arne Duncan**

Arne Duncan, the Secretary of Education, under the Obama Administration, warned about the need to improve America's education system. In a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, he reported that America was ninth in the world in the number of college graduates per capita.



# Objects/Places

## America

The subject of the book, "That Used to Be Us," is the decline of America. It describes what caused America's deterioration and ways in which the country can reclaim its greatness.

## China

China is America's chief competitor on the world stage in not only economic and military ways, but not in terms of personal freedom.

## Tianjin

Tom Friedman traveled to Tianjin, China, in September 2010 to attend the World Economic Forum summer conference. He was shocked at the city's modern railway system that put America's to shame.

## Republican Party

The Republican Party is narrowly focused on tax cuts for the wealthy. The Republicans must face the fact that the country will not be able to tax cut itself to recovery.

## Democratic Party

The Democratic party is narrowly focused on saving social programs that have grown too costly. They must face the fact that spending has to be reduced.

## Tea Party

The Tea Party swept Republicans into power in 2010. The Tea Party is focused on adherence to the Constitution. They must face the fact that times change and although the Constitution is the foundation of our country, legislators must address modern problems that were not imagined at the time the Constitution was written.

## IT/Globalization Merger

Advancements in Information Technology merged with globalization to create a new reality. Old jobs disappeared and new ones were created that require advanced skills and education.

## **Global Warming**

The majority of experts and scientists agree that global warming is a pressing problem that must be addressed. Some individuals, including some in the US government, refuse to recognize that it even exists.

## **Deficit Spending**

Deficit spending was first initiated under the Nixon Administration. Nixon abandoned the gold standard in order to avoid a recession during the Vietnam War.

## **Deregulation**

The deregulation of the banking system was partially responsible for the economic collapse of 2008. Without regulation, greedy Wall Street titans engaged in risky loans and illegal speculation creating a housing bubble that almost destroyed our economy.

# Themes

## The Decline of Education

The education system in America has been in decline for decades. Our students are not testing as high as students of other industrialized nations. Following are some specifics to back up that premise. Even American students themselves feel that their future is somewhat in jeopardy. At an education conference author Thomas Friedman attended in San Jose, a junior high student told him that the Chinese people have more ambition than Americans. Where does that sentiment come from? It just has become part of the American discourse. One of the main reasons people feel that China is leaving us in their dust is the inattention and lack of support for our education system that have been becoming more and more apparent in recent years.

Education is the key to our future. It will not only keep America on the top of the world market, it will also prepare our children for the ability to secure the jobs of the future that require highly skilled and educated people. What has increased the demand for an improved education system is the merger of globalization and the IT revolution which has eliminated old jobs forever and the new jobs it has created require advanced skills.

Author Tom Friedman points out that had Hillary Clinton asked him his advice on whether she should accept the Secretary of State position offered to her, he would have to her to reject it in favor of the position of Secretary of Education. That latter is more important to our economic future and to our national security.

Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, under President Obama, in a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, stated that America was ninth in the world in the number college graduates it produces. Although the under-performing education system sends nearly 70 percent of high school graduates on to college, only 60 percent graduate. We are at risk of a future populace of undereducated and under-skilled people who will need government support to survive and who are more likely to turn to drugs and crime due to their inability to survive in a world that has passed them by.

## Abandoning Our Keys to Success

America has lost its way. While the US Constitution sets out the framework of our beliefs and the foundation for our nation, our formula for success has always been based on the five pillars of prosperity. However, in the past several decades, our elected officials have abandoned those tried and true keys to success in favor of tax cuts for the wealthy and increasingly unaffordable social programs such as Social Security and Medicare. Revenues are down and spending is up. It does not take a rocket scientist to understand that something has gone terribly wrong.

America has been the leader of the free world for decades. As such, we were both admired and envied for our freedom and wealth and the benefits our position afforded to



our citizens. Providing the best education possible to our children was one of those benefits. However, during the last decade testing confirms that American students are under-performing when compared to students of many other developed countries. Costs have been cut for education and teacher unions are more concerned with protecting tenure than they are with providing the best teachers for our students.

While other nations are busy building their infrastructure, America's infrastructure is being neglected and abandoned. China has built a state-of-the-art high-speed railway system, which makes our deteriorating train and subway systems pale in comparison. Visitors to Washington, DC, are shocked at the pot holes in the streets and sidewalks of the nation's capital. Ideologues support the limitation of immigration—the very fabric of our society in favor of an isolationist posture. America needs to draw the best and brightest to its shores in order to reclaim our greatness. Deregulation allowed the banking industry and Wall Street to run rampant and create a destructive housing bubble with risky loans and illegal speculation that nearly sunk America's economy and that led to global instability.

Our elected officials must address these issues and find solutions. These keys to posterity created a nation that inspired and was admired by the entire world. They must act quickly to reclaim the American dream.

## **A Dysfunctional Political System**

Partisanship has always been part of America's political system. However, in the last several decades, partisanship has intensified to a level that it makes it virtually impossible to get anything accomplished legislatively. The system is broken and the country suffers from its paralysis. There were also always lobbyists or agents hired by wealthy individuals and special interest groups to influence the legislative agenda. But today's lobbyists are dealing in the millions of dollars in campaign contributions. Since only people or groups with money can afford the fees charged by these highly-paid lobbyists, it is the wealthiest in society who benefit from these influence-peddlers.

Special interest groups, such as the Tea Party, can have a detrimental impact on the work that needs to be done by the federal government. The Tea Party is strident about the Constitution and that it should be followed to a letter. However, a group that is so narrowly focused does not allow for modern problems that our framers knew nothing about when they wrote the Constitution was written. America has to renew and refresh itself as times change. The Tea Party influences legislation by threatening to pull support from elected individuals if they do not tow the party line. Elected representatives who fall into this category become more concerned with being re-elected than they do with doing the work that they were elected to do.

Compromise has become a bad word in some political circles and has caused gridlock in our nation's capital. With all the challenges that face our country, many of the representatives and senators would rather argue with each other about their ideologies than tackle the difficult matters which they should be addressing. Even when President

Obama has presented legislation that contains the very laws supported by Republicans in the past, most vote against it. "If you like it, I'm against it," is the prevailing attitude in Washington, D.C.

The political system needs to be shocked into action. Perhaps it is time for a third party candidate for the presidency to emerge. It is unlikely that such an individual could be elected. However, such an individual could have an important impact on the political discourse and shock our elected representatives into taking the critical action that is needed to save our country.

# Style

## Perspective

Journalist Thomas L. Friedman and writer, professor, and foreign policy expert, Michael Mandelbaum wrote "That Used to Be Us." Both men are seasoned professional writers and have written a detailed summary of what is wrong with America from their perspective, which is based on their obviously extensive research and information gathering as non-fiction writers. Friedman is a recipient of the Pulitzer Prize three times for his writing skill as a New York Times reporter. In addition to "That Used to Be Us," Friedman has written five other bestselling books, including in 2005, "The World is Flat."

Mandelbaum is a Christian A. Herter professor and Director of American Foreign Policy at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. Mandelbaum is also an author and has written twelve books, including "Free Markets in the Twenty-first Century."

The backgrounds of both men make them credible as authors of "That Used to Be Us," an important work which lays out the critical problems that face America, how the country got to such an untenable position, and offers possible solutions that will get the country to a better place to reclaim our former glory.

## Tone

"That Used to Be Us," was written by two writers and political experts, Thomas L. Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum, and the tone and style of the books appropriately reflects the authors' background. The book begins with a premise as to the state of America which is portrayed as one of decline. The writers make the case for how America's exceptionalism is waning and how our greatness is in the past. It lays out a historic tick-tock of how America has devolved into one that pales in comparison to other industrialized countries that are topping it in all keys areas including education, infrastructure, research, and development.

Unlike a story filed by a reporter, "The Used to Be Us" is not a dispassionate presentation of the subject. Although the report is filled with dates, details and data, the context is written as more of an editorial/opinion piece in which the authors provide possible solutions for the problems facing America based on their research and reporting.

The overall tone of the book is a plea for help for a once-great nation that is on the brink of becoming a second-rate nation. The title, "That Used to Be Us," tells of the greatness of America and how it got there. Although most of the book outlines what is wrong with America, the final section of the book provides specific ways in which America can reclaim its rightful place as the best and most-admired nation on earth.

## Structure

"That Used to Be Us," by Thomas L. Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum, is subtitled, "How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How We Can Come Back." The book begins with a Preface that gives a brief summary of the lives and careers of the authors. It also provides the reasons why two journalists who had both focused on foreign affairs during the majority of their careers came to write a book about the domestic problems that America is facing.

The book is separated into five main parts. Part I: The Diagnosis has three chapters and lays out what is wrong and missing in modern day America. Part II: The Education Challenge has four chapters and describes the deteriorating state of education in America and the reasons for the decline. Part III: The War on Math and Physics has three chapters that describe the dangerous feeling of entitlement that has settled over the country, even over some of its leaders. The section also outlines the threat that political leaders place the country in by ignoring facts and figures and science. Part IV: Political Failure has three chapters and describes the current paralysis that exists in the federal government due to hyper-partisanship, overzealous ideologues, lobbyists and an unwillingness to compromise. Part V: Rediscovering America has three chapters which present ways in which the nation can return to the American dream.

Following the last section is an "Acknowledgments" section and a thorough "Index."



## Quotes

"That sense of resignation, that sense that, well, this is just how things are in America today, that sense that America's best days are behind it and China's best days are ahead of it, have become the subject of water cooler, dinner-party, grocery-line, and classroom conversations all across America today." (Chapter 1, p. 5).

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change." (Chapter 2, p. 13).

"Over the past decade this process eliminated a lot of American jobs, but the booming economy both disguised it and cushioned us from its effects." (Chapter 4, p. 73).

"Critical thinking alone just doesn't buy what it used to buy...critical thinking has become the basic price of admission." (Chapter 4, p. 87).

"Carlson's Law: Innovation that happens from the top down tends to be orderly but dumb. Innovation that happens from the bottom up tends to be chaotic but smart." (Chapter 5, p. 98).

"Woody Allen's dictum that '90 percent of life is just showing up' is no longer true. Just showing up for work will not cut it anymore." (Chapter 7, p. 133).

"Arithmetic is not an opinion." ~ Italian proverb. (Chapter 9, p. 159).

"When we first started out on this project, we said, 'We're doing this for our grandchildren.' Then we said, 'We're doing this for our children.' Now we realize that this is for us." (Chapter 9, p. 181).

"Warren Buffet likes to say that when the tide goes out, you see who isn't wearing a bathing suit. The economic tide went out with the financial meltdown and deep recession at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, and it showed with brutal clarity who was swimming naked. It was us." (Chapter 11, p. 217).

"If all Americans could compare Berlin's luxurious central train station today with the grimy, decrepit Penn Station in New York City, they would swear we were the ones who had lost World War II." (Chapter 11, p. 223).

"Your proposition may be good but let's have one thing understood, whatever it is, I'm against it. And even when you've change it or condensed it, I'm against it." ~ Groucho Marx. (Chapter 12, p. 245).

"As we peer into society's future, we—you and I, and our government—must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering, for our own ease and convenience, the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. ~ President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Farewell Address (Chapter 13, p. 278).



## Topics for Discussion

Name the five pillars that comprise America's formula for success. Why have they been abandoned? What could shock America into returning to greatness?

What are the three factors that brought about the new flat world of globalization? What are the four main challenges that face America?

What has caused the political gridlock at the federal level? Why has partisanship escalated in recent years?

What is American exceptionalism? Why has President Barack Obama accused of not thinking in terms of America's exceptionalism?

What has the merger of IT and globalization caused? How must America address the new challenges presented by the global market and the new reality?

What mistakes were made in the Reagan Administration? What president abandoned the gold standard and began deficit spending?

What president created Social Security? What president developed the interstate highway system? What president balanced the federal budget and created a surplus as opposed to a deficit?