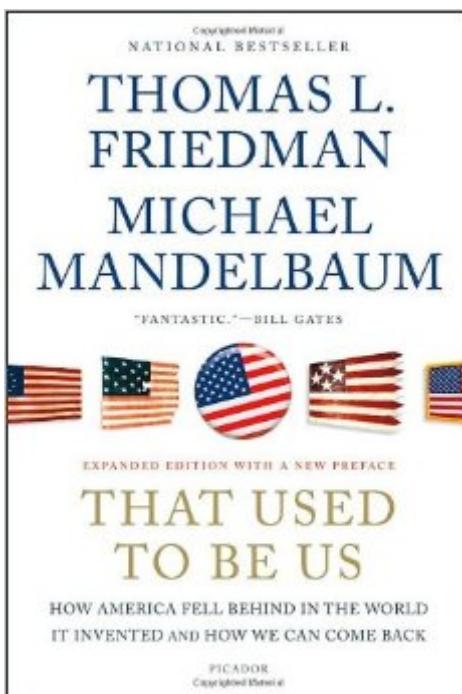


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That Used To Be Us: How America Fell Behind In The World It Invented And How We Can Come Back



Synopsis

A New York Times Book Review Editors' ChoiceA Los Angeles Times Best Book of 2011In That Used to Be Us, Thomas L. Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum analyze the four major challenges we face as a country---globalization, the revolution in information technology, chronic deficits, and our pattern of energy consumption---and spell out what we need to do now to preserve American power in the world. The end of the Cold War blinded the nation to the need to address these issues seriously, and China's educational successes, industrial might, and technological prowess in many ways remind us of a time when "that used to be us." But Friedman and Mandelbaum show how America's history, when properly understood, offers a five-part formula for prosperity that will enable us to cope successfully with the challenges we face. That Used to Be Us is both a searching exploration of the American condition today and a rousing manifesto for American renewal.

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Customer Reviews

I wasn't sure whether I should purchase this one. After all, what is it about these problems that is already not widely known, what suggestions/prescriptions can the authors come up with which has not been mentioned by someone or the other. I jumped in anyway.I don't see a Look Inside for this book; maybe, they'll add it later, but I'll add a quick summary of the book. The book is divided into 5 parts:Part 1: The DiagnosisImitating the DHS's campaign message "If You See Something, Say Something", the authors say that the symptoms of America's decline is all around for us to see. He contrasts the Chinese gusto in completing a convention center in 8 months--which he visited for the

WEF summer summit--to the lackadaisical attitude he sees at the Washington Metrorail; talks about his visit to the White House where a door handle came off while he was opening it, only to hear the Secret Service agent remarking, "Oh, it does that sometimes". The authors goes on to say that America as a country has failed to adjust itself to the post cold-war era and failed to address some of the biggest problems, including Education, Deficits, Energy needs and Climate Change; our ability to react and respond to challenges and opportunities has drastically come down. The worst part of this decline, according to the authors, is that it's slow in coming and hence, we fail to even recognize the existence of the problem. A depleted America will not just be bad for the Americans, but to the whole world as well because, according to the author, the US plays a constructive role in world economy and politics and that will be hard to replace.

Thomas Friedman is one of my favorite columnists, and I looked forward to 'That Used to be Us' because it addresses America's #1 problem - our sagging economy. However, Friedman and co-author Mandelbaum's analysis of the causes and cures for our economic malaise is confused and often erroneous. The book begins with Friedman comparing two projects - the six months required to repair two D.C. Metro escalators with 21 steps each near his Bethesda home, and China's building its new Meijiang Convention Center (2.5 million square feet, with gigantic escalators) in eight months. The comparison symbolizes how China's economic dynamism makes 21st-century America seem sickly and inept. Unfortunately, the authors attribute our current state of affairs to a loss of intensity and purpose after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Reality, however, is that our relative decline vs. China began with Premier Deng Xiaoping's 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' in 1979, and intensified after 9/11 as the U.S. became preoccupied with terrorism and paralyzed by increasingly partisan politics, while the Chinese began moving, largely unnoticed, up the economic value chain. Continuing, the authors contend that America faces three other major challenges - the IT revolution, our chronic and growing deficits, and our world-leading energy consumption. The 'solution' - reviving the values, priorities, and practices that we have used to succeed in the past. The remainder of the book consists of underlying details and their blueprint for doing so. Globalization (and the hollowing out and weakening of the American economy) was largely initiated by American firms transferring American technologies and management skills while seeking lower-cost production.

An important book because it's provoking discussion. Friedman readers (like myself) know Friedman has his finger on the pulse. Thomas Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum note some of the many

issues facing the USA in "That Used to be Us." What makes this book worth buying and reading is the vast array of topics discussed relating to the United States and the world in our age of globalization. "That Used to be Us" will lead a reader to think and also more importantly - question the authors on some subjects they discuss. It's thought provoking. The authors use an appropriate term you'll learn about in the book: Sustainable vs. Situational. I agree with many of the observations of the challenges that exist for the US now and in the future, however the solutions to some of these issues is where I think that these remedies are either not feasible and/or not the proper solution: For example, spending more on education. The US already does spend more than any nation in the world. Look at the results of this spending. The racial breakdown was not noted, also. Maybe parents are far more influential than more money going to Educrats. Look at the costs of just BA and the jobs that these grads are getting, regardless of their field of study. Add an MA to the cost & debt burden. This was not even noted. In addition, research into education for over 4 decades has not improved education combined with low teacher pay. But the authors did mention the ticking time bomb of Medicare and the need for cuts. Some of the many other American problems noted are the well-known dilemmas that have festered for decades, such as the National Debt.

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