

Free Will and A Century of Unanticipated Consequences
Wilson L. Thompson, Ph.D.

George Friedman concludes his forecasts of “The Next 100 years” (Doubleday, 2009) with a perceptive observation that “Free will is beyond forecasting. But, what is most interesting about humans is how unfree they are” (p-252). Life is full of unanticipated, predestined (Calvinistic) consequences. As Friedman sees inexorable progress in American technology, he notes that NASA engineers using microchips to build onboard computers did not envision ultimate development of the iPod. A similar unintended consequence in affluent America, can be seen in the fact that “It is possible for people [families?] to have ten children, but hardly anyone does. We are deeply constrained in what we do by the time and place in which we live” (p-252).

Friedman takes the “birth dearth” in the West and now Japan in stride. He fails to realize that empty cradles threaten economies of all industrialized nations including the United States. It represents a sea change at odds with the Industrial Revolution’s signature, demographic growth. Like industrializing societies since 1820s, Great Britain’s improvement of diets and wardrobes sharply reduced mortality rates for infants and adults. As a result the British population nearly doubled in the eighteenth century. Its population again doubled from 1800 to 1850. Such tectonic demographics and huge social problems stirred Malthus to issue a trend-setting alert to danger that population growth could outstrip resources, unless restrained by varied death, war, etc.

The social template of industrialization was an unanticipated consequence of polarization in Great Britain. The Crown, the nobility and Anglican clergy were pitted against Puritan preachers and fellow-traveling merchants. The Puritans were Calvinists intent on radical church reform; mindful of God’s dominion mandate to “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). Their merchants opposed arbitrary award of royal monopolies in spices, tea, etc. Puritan tenets melded with merchants’ business savvy to produce world-class business leaders. These dominion-driven entrepreneurs worked for “the glory of God” and soon heaped up sufficient capital reserves to realize economies of scale in production; driving prices down.

In centuries since the British *population explosion*, dire Malthusian prognostications have not been confirmed by the facts. Unanticipated agricultural improvements produced a “green revolution” that helped feed growing populations of the world. The Paddocks predicted “Famine 1975” (Little Brown & Co., 1967), and that failed to materialize. Then, R. J. Rushdoony presciently warned of the dangers of depopulation in his monograph on “The Myth of Overpopulation” (Thoburn Press, 1975) Finally, economist, Julian Simon pointedly declares, “The standard of living has risen along with the size of the world’s population since the beginning of recorded time” (The Ultimate Resource, Princeton University Press, 1981). In short Malthus was wrong, wrong, wrong.

Malthusians today focus on the present pressing costs of population growth. Like Malthus, they are oblivious to remote, long-term economic benefits of a growing population, politically subsidized welfare clients excepted.

Britain’s “exploding” population to be sure posed a plethora of unanticipated social problems. In a century-long industrial boom with a 400 percent gain in GNP, Britain also produced impoverished and orphaned children, whose plight Charles Dickens tellingly portrayed in his popular novels. Nevertheless, Britain’s Industrial Revolution and its synergistic population growth soon transformed the world economy for the better.

Friedman instructively assesses North America’s strategic geographical advantage. He also credits the current power posture of the United States to “Jackson’s stand at New Orleans, the defeat of Santa Anna at San Jacinto, the annexation of Hawaii, and the [1940 “lend-lease”] surrender of British naval bases in the Western Hemisphere” (p-252). Friedman is certain the United States is not in decline, but has “just begun its ascent” (p-251), contrary to Buchanan’s powerful documentation of “The Death of the West” (St. Martin’s Press, 2002).

Friedman uses past trends in geopolitics and current intelligence estimates to formulate compelling forecasts. But, he fails to consider unanticipated consequences (divine judgment) upon our nation, a nation that permits slaughter of some 3,700 unborn Americans every day. Ezekiel (20:24-26) decried legalized infant sacrifice that weakened Judah prior to its 70 year Babylonian Captivity. It may well be that Friedman's projection for the rise of Mexico, also with a two-ocean advantage, will be accelerated. Mexican immigrants with Roman Catholic commitment to the family already have raised our country's sagging demographics to fiscally viable levels. Population growth requires godly parents. It is still true that, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."