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The More Climate Changes, the More it Remains the Same

by Pierre David

THE CLIMATE CONSENSUS IS IN RUINS, OR, AT LEAST, A GOOD BIT of trouble. What was once taken for granted — that the earth is growing ineluctably warmer due to human beings — is now in doubt. It may be the case that the earth's climate is, in fact, becoming more tropical and that the polar ice caps are melting and that the end is nearer than we'd like to believe, but we can't be so sure any longer. With the email scandal late last year at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and environmentalists' unfounded warnings of melting glaciers in the Himalayas, and growing criticism in academic quarters of

the science behind the theory of global warming, there's plenty of reason to rethink some of the premises and conclusions that underlie our thinking about the planet and its temperature.

This much, however, can be said without so much as a scintilla of doubt: Winter, as it was once experienced, came back this year — perhaps only for a season, and perhaps not in California or Hawaii, but most everywhere else, and with a great and snowy vengeance. Planes were grounded, schools closed, Congress delayed, traffic brought to a halt. Of course, everyone knows that

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Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime

by John Heilemann and Mark Halperin

JOHN HEILEMANN AND MARK HALPERIN'S RECENTLY RELEASED "Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime" has garnered tons of press thanks to its abundance of titillating vignettes from the 2008 presidential campaign. We learn about the marital woes of John and Elizabeth Edwards, the many shortcomings of Sarah Palin, the arrogance and myopia of many of now-President Obama's senior lieutenants. Our darkest expectations are confirmed over and over and over. Politics in America today is a pale shadow of the more vibrant and substantive debate the nation needs and deserves. Now more than ever we sense the time has come for the adults to stand up and lead. Economic collapse, global instability, vast and seemingly insurmountable divisions at home and abroad — all this points to a new urgency, a feeling that the dog and pony show that is Washington, D.C., must yield to a more serious place with a more serious politics.

What makes Heilemann and Halperin's book so enjoyable is its oversupply of carefully reported details. (Heilemann is a reporter at New York Magazine; Halperin writes for Time Magazine.) To their credit, the authors have done their work: Their reporting is thoroughly sourced; their observations are vividly painted; their conclusions, their final summations, are relatively modest by today's standards. In short, they offer a rich and complicated portrait of America at a crossroads. Anyone who wants to know what really happened during that riveting eleven-month sprint, from the Iowa caucuses to Election Day, must read "Game Change."

But it's hard to avoid the feeling that somehow Heilemann and Halperin have missed something critical here. Yes, they've done their job as journalists. But journalism may not be up to the task of making sense of the morass of movements and events that give shape to the national zeitgeist. Journalism may tell us what is happening (or what just happened), but time and again it seems congenitally unable to explain the how or why. The complicated historical and political vectors that define the parameters of our discourse, the underlying psychological forces behind our politics and candidates, the cultural upheavals and inclinations of different subsets of the American body politic — all this seems well beyond the scope of this otherwise highly entertaining tome.

Granted, this is asking a lot of a book about a single election in a single year. But elections are not just about choosing leaders. They are reflections of our aspirations, our lurching and seeking and hoping that tomorrow, as we're told again and again, will be better than today. Our failure to make sense of these reflections, these national contests that are not really contests so much as over-heated conversations with ourselves, undermines our capacity to govern ourselves. If we do not understand how and why we pick the government we do, we cannot begin to understand our political selves, our political identity — we cannot

make sense of where we are, and where we want to go.

This is more important today than in previous decades because there is little doubt that most Americans are deeply unhappy with the status quo. As we all know by now, most Americans want "change" — without a doubt the No. 1 lesson of the 2008 campaign — but they want a specific and meaningful change that will deliver us from our national predicament. The victors of 2008 have, so far, failed to produce the goods. One only hopes that the upcoming elections help forge a more fruitful consensus — on what to do about our economy, our schools, our environment, our status in a world that seems to be spiraling out of control.

One very good way to arrive at that happy end point is for our journalists, our writers, our many thinkers and pundits, to offer something more than the run of the mill analysis. We need depth, clarity — vision. Heilemann and Halperin have done a good job, a solid job. "Game Change" is great fun. But it's not terribly deep. It doesn't go far enough. We need books — we need a conversation — that takes this conversation to its nth degree, that forces the politicians and the cognoscenti to rethink the way we are doing things. We can't keep doing them the way they've been done. — PD



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The More Climate Changes, the More it Remains the Same

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a single winter does not make a repaired globe. If indeed the earth is becoming warmer and sicker by the year, a cold spell won't do anything to reverse that. Nor does a little frostbite somehow invalidate a broader trend that has nothing to do with day to day precipitation. But this much is clear: For a few months, beginning in December and continuing through February and dragging into March, winter as it has traditionally been understood has been the proverbial law of the land, and it's been lovely, freezing and nostalgic. We have become accustomed to controlling most everything. The climate change consensus, in fact, was predicated on the assumption that we did and could quite literally change the world. If the temperature had risen too high, that was our doing, and if we wanted to bring it back down, we could do that, too, given the foresight and political will. What this winter suggests is that we have less control over our world — and perhaps our destiny — than we previously thought. With all our hypersophisticated technology and our insistence on maintaining a steady flow of goods and services, we couldn't do much, if anything, to preempt the inconvenience and delight that comes from an unexpected storm. In the end, thirty inches of snow overwhelmed all our collective intelligence.

This is a good thing. The beauty of nature is its power not simply to inspire or enchant but to remind us that we are impermanent features of a far more permanent world. This has plenty of depressing implications, and there's no need to dwell on that here. What's critical is that we recall our inability, at root, to reengineer or manipulate the most central tenets of daily life. Yes, perhaps we can do something about climate change (assuming, that is, that the climate has changed and that it would be desirable to change it back). But there are plenty of other things that we believe, all too often, that we can modify in the service of some greater good — wealth, happiness, national or political ambition — that cannot and should not be modified. Human beings will always love, grieve, suffer, strive, grow, ponder —

change. This is why we have literature and philosophy, to answer the questions that cannot be answered by politicians or social scientists or even scientists or mathematicians. The human condition is a timeless enigma. So long as we exist we will not know why we are here. We will have but theories and beliefs.

All this from one winter. But it's not just one winter. It's an indication of our place in the world, a signal (natural or otherwise) that we are not always the masters of our own universe.

One hopes very much that the climate is not changing a great deal, if at all. Images of a natural-born Armageddon are terrifying. We've all seen movies that feature submerged Statues of Liberty, and post-apocalyptic deserts. Still, hard as it may be to believe, there's a more pressing concern than the end of times, one that often goes overlooked — that of the human state. We may very well be in the middle of a period of unprecedented warming. One thing is for sure: We have become untethered from our cultural-historical beginnings, our sense of who we are. What we seek is steady improvement, material acquisition. What we need is something more introspective. This is why the winter of 2010, all of its many inconveniences notwithstanding, is so important. It is a reminder of where we come from and what we are made of, our powers and our limitations. —PD

The right side of the brain:

- A. controls the right side of the body
- B. is responsible for language
- C. does much less than the left side
- D. processes nonverbal behavior
- E. is usually dominant



ANSWER: D The right side of the brain interprets the meanings of nonverbal behavior. It controls the left side of the body, is not the language center of the brain, is every bit as active as the left side and is not the dominant side of the brain.

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN WORKERS' COMPENSATION

March is Women's History Month — a good time to consider gender differences in California's Workers' Compensation system.

Nearly half the American workforce is made up of women, and economists estimate that with the current economic downturn women will soon make up the majority of workers. Women make up 46 percent of management positions in the county. And in 2002 women constituted 16 percent of the senior positions at Fortune 500 companies.

So with women becoming such an integral part of the nation's workforce, how has this affected workers' compensation claims?

According to researchers at the California Workers' Compensation Institute significant age and gender shifts of injured workers took place during the 1990s. These trends,

however, did not continue into this past decade.

The CWCI's research considers more than 2.1 million claims made by injured workers (roughly 95 percent of the total) between 1993 and 2000. "The proportion of claims filed by women soared," according to CWCI, "jumping from about a quarter of all claims to about a third."

Despite these increases, men still continue to file the majority of compensation claims — the average for the 1993-2000 period was nearly 70 percent male.

What's interesting to learn is that the gender distribution trend of the 1990s did not persist past 2000. When researchers looked at data through 2005, the gender split appears to have leveled out, with approximately 62 percent male claimants and 38 percent female.

— Sabrina Leigh Schaeffer

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