

# STAY CONNECTED

■ Anna Dai



## CHANGING VIEWS SHIFTING LANDSCAPES

Though far from a recent development, the issue of climate change has once again reared its head. The more pressing the issue seems, the more polarising the opinions become. One side paints a sombre picture of an apocalyptic future, of an earth ravaged by human carelessness. The other denies it firmly and loudly. Global warming first made front page news in the 1980s, when NASA scientist James Hansen testified to the United States Senate. Three-and-a-half decades later, the issue still divides the US Senate — amplified of course, by the presidential election.

The recent visibility of the issue can in part be attributed to the December 2015 Paris Agreement on global climate change, which once again signals the politicisation of climate change. As with any

international climate change agreement, words such as “historic” and “a new direction” are bandied about with abandon. It remains to be seen whether the agreement deserves these platitudes. It does though, signal a global consensus in regards to the environment — in contrast to the disagreements at Copenhagen in 2009, when world leaders failed to come to a common understanding.

However, the recent consensus threatens to be fractured by certain US Republican candidates of the presidential primary, who all hold the libertarian belief that government regulation of the environment should be severely limited. It could be said that their views are regressive — Republican Senator Ted Cruz (also a presidential candidate) for example, held a three-hour hearing criticising the science of global warming - he called it. “Data or Dogma?”. This illustrates why climate change — despite being obvious to many — has not been addressed with the urgency, frequency or attention it deserves: such matters are in the hands of global leaders, and what are they, but individuals with their own beliefs?



## MAKING A **MURDERER**

Wisconsin man Steven Avery spent 18 years in prison for first-degree sexual assault, attempted first degree murder and false imprisonment of Penny Beernsten. The catch — Avery had an alibi. He entered prison in 1985 protesting his innocence, and left in 2003 still maintaining it.

Avery however, had the makings of a murderer: he buglarised a bar at the age of 18, a year later he poured gasoline on his cat and threw it into a fire and in the year of his most famous arrest, he pointed a gun at his cousin and ran her off the road. Indeed, his history of violence, unrepentance and animal cruelty does not suggest

innocence. DNA evidence though, proves otherwise. In 2002, the Innocence Project took up Avery's case and aided in his exoneration based on DNA evidence — DNA found on the crime scene in 1985 was linked to a man named Gregory Allen.

Crime seemed to follow Avery — or rather, Avery seemed to follow a life of crime, because in 2005, Avery was charged with the murder of photographer Teresa Halbach, after she disappeared the day she was scheduled to meet Avery. On the one hand, Avery had already been wrongfully accused once, on the other, his character was far from irreproachable. It is possible though, that the Wisconsin authorities had an agenda to fulfill. The 2015 Netflix series, *Making a Murderer* (following in the footsteps of the wildly successful *Serial podcast*) explores this very possibility. The original case resulted in changes in the legal system, with a passing of the Avery Bill, which aimed to prevent wrongful convictions.



## OSCARS **SO WHITE**

Hollywood is no stranger to criticism — and plenty have abounded over the years: it's too appearance-focussed, too sexist, ageist, corporate and ruled by nepotism rather than talent. All valid points, it must be said. And it matters, due to the visibility of the film industry — it both reflects and influences attitudes and standards in society. Monkey see, monkey do.

So the latest furor — the lack of racial diversity in both the film industry and awards nominations — is perhaps a step in the right direction for everyone. The discontent has been brewing for a

while and kicked up a notch at the start of the awards season, with Viola Davis' much lauded Emmy Awards speech giving voice to the injustice. She stated why she is first African-American to win an Emmy for best actress in a drama: "You cannot win an Emmy for roles that are simply not there."

The same excuse cannot be used for the 2016 Oscar Nominations: a sleuth of films, including *Creed*, *Straight Outta Compton*, *Chi-raq* and *Beasts of No Nation* had African-American and Asian talent involved, whether as directors or actors. Despite this, there was nary a nomination in sight, prompting a backlash of insurmountable proportions. This year however, the Academy listened, with the president, Cheryl Boone, announcing plans to combat the diversity issue. This hasn't quelled the snowballing resentment, with Spike Lee and Will Smith calling for a boycott. The Screen Actors Guild Awards fared better, perhaps showing that change is afoot — albeit at a glacial pace, with Idris Elba (who was snubbed by the Oscar nominations) winning an award for his work in TV series *Luther*. It seems there is hope yet.



## ZIKA VIRUS

In January 2016, public health officials in El Salvador issued a drastic announcement: “We’d like to suggest to all the women of fertile age that they take steps to plan their pregnancies, and avoid getting pregnant between this year and next.” The reason? The Zika virus, spread by the *Aedes* mosquito which cause mild illness with fever and rash, usually lasting under a week. For pregnant women and their foetuses however, it can be devastating. Should the virus spread to the foetus, it can cause microcephaly, resulting in infants born with abnormally small heads due to brain shrinkage. At the very least this limits a child’s intellectual and physical development, at the worst it can result in death.

With 23 countries in the Americas infiltrated with the virus, it has reached epidemic proportions, with the World Health Organisation

(WHO) declaring it a public health emergency. WHO Director Margaret Chan described it as “an extraordinary event and a public health threat to the other parts of the world.” Brazil has been affected the most, with over 3500 documented cases of microcephaly over four months.

The severity of the epidemic is compounded by the rapidity in its spread, the general lack of symptoms and the lack of vaccination. Since up to eighty percent of people infected by Zika do not show significant symptoms, it is even more of a “silent threat” than one would imagine, especially since the most serious danger lies in the microcephaly it causes among newborns. It also comes as no surprise that the virus is most potent in comparatively underdeveloped countries, which also means that the infrastructure is insufficient to effectively combat Zika. Over 220 000 troops have been mobilised in an attempt to kill the breeding grounds of the *Aedes* mosquito in Brazil. Brazil’s president acknowledged that this was a desperate solution, “[but] as long as [the mosquitoes] are reproducing, we are all losing the battle.” ■