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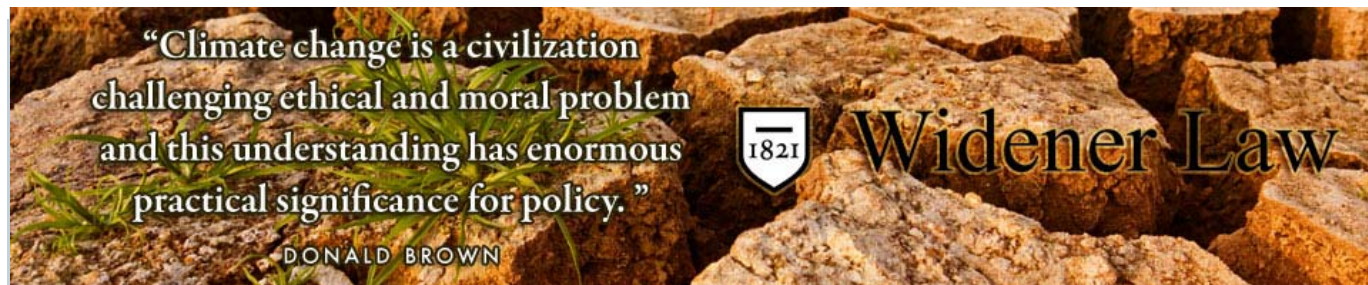
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Ethics and Climate

Donald Brown



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The Grave US Media Failure to Communicate About The Consistent Barrier That The United States Has Been To Finding A Global Solution to Climate Change.

I. Introduction

This is the fifth in a series of articles that examines grave communications failures of the US media about climate change. In this series we examine how the American media has utterly failed to communicate to US citizens about five essential aspects of climate change that need to be understood to know why climate change is a civilization challenging problem that requires dramatic, aggressive, and urgent policy action to avoid harsh impacts to hundreds of millions of people around the world. EthicsandClimate.org has developed a video that summarizes these failures: **Five Grave Communication Failures of US Media on Climate Change** that can be found at: <http://blogs.law.widener.edu/climate/2012/10/15/five-grave-communications-failures-of-the-us-media-on-climate-change/>



This is the fourth paper that examines in more detail the issues briefly examined in the video. In previous entries we examined the failure of the US media to communicate about: (a) the nature of the strong scientific consensus about human-induced climate change, (b) the magnitude of greenhouse

gas emissions reductions necessary to prevent catastrophic climate change, and (c) the practical significance for policy that follows from understanding climate change as essentially an ethical problem. In this paper we look at the failure of the US media help educate US citizens about the consistent barrier that the US has been in international climate negotiations that have sought for over twenty years to find a global solution to prevent harsh climate change impacts.

The last paper in the series will examine the failure of the US media to help Americans understand the well-organized, well-financed climate change disinformation campaign.

II. The World Waits In Vain For US Leadership On Climate Change.

Most Americans are completely unaware that the United States has consistently been a barrier to achieving a global solution to climate change despite the fact that the United States is an indispensable party to a global climate change solution. To understand the importance of the US solving the global climate change problem, one must keep in mind that: (a) the United States is by far the largest historical emitter of global greenhouse gases that have caused the existing problem, (b) the United

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States is near the top of national greenhouse gas emitters on a per capita basis, (c) the United States is second only to China in total tons of greenhouse gases emitted, and (d) the United States has the worst record among developed countries in making commitments to a global climate change solution.

Although the United States is an indispensable participant in solving climate change because of the size of the US contribution to the global problem, the United States has a dismal record in over twenty years of international efforts to achieve a global solution to this civilization-challenging global problem. In **American Heat, Ethical Problems With the United States Response To Global Warming**, (Brown, 2002), this writer documented in detail the negative role in achieving a global approach to climate change that the United States played in the first decade of climate change negotiations from the late 1980s through the year 2000. Among other things during the negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) between 1990 and 1992, the United States, virtually standing alone, successfully prevented the UNFCCC from including enforceable national emissions reductions targets for developed nations.

In a book to be published this month, **Navigating the Perfect Moral Storm, Climate Ethics**, this writer documents in detail the failure of the United States to be a leader since the conclusions of the UNFCCC negotiations in 1992, (Brown 2012).

Among other things, since the UNFCCC negotiations:

- The United States has been the only developed country in the world to fail to ratify to the Kyoto Protocol and thereby commit itself to a binding interim emissions reduction target.
- George W. Bush announced that the United States was not only unwilling to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, it was withdrawing the United States from the Kyoto Treaty all together.
- When President Obama was elected, there was wide-spread hope the United States would change course on climate change. Yet, the United States under President Obama has approached climate negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009, Cancun in 2010, and South Africa making only a voluntary commitment to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 17% below 2005 emissions levels by 2020 thereby making the US promise: (a) the weakest of all of the developed country commitments, and (b) far short of what is required of global greenhouse gas emissions reductions necessary to prevent dangerous climate change.
- Although there is evidence that President Obama hope to make the United States, for the first time, a responsible participant in an adequate global approach to climate change, since the Republicans took over the US House of Representatives in November of 2010, the United States has been unable to make meaningful national commitments on climate change and will not likely to be able to do so until well into 2013 at the very earliest.
- There is no evidence that the United States is willing to make commitments to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to levels consistent with what the world needs to do to prevent dangerous climate change, a matter discussed in the second paper in this series.

Although there are several countries that have frequently failed to respond to what justice would require of them to reduce the threat of climate change, the United States, more than any other country, has consistently failed to respond to its ethical duties to reduce its emissions to the its fair share of safe global emissions during the over two decades that the world has been seeking a global agreement on how to

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respond to climate change.

Because the United States is such a vital player in any global solution to climate change, the United States response to its obligations to reduce the global threat of climate change has been an immense impediment to an urgently needed global climate change solution. And so the world continues to wait for ethical leadership from the United States on climate change as significant damages are becoming more visible around the world. As the world is running out of time to prevent significant climate change, the United States continues to ignore its global obligations. Yet coverage of climate change debates in the US media rarely mention the negative role the United States has been playing in developing a global solution.

The world awaits US leadership on climate change at a time when human-induced climate change harms are becoming more obvious. Yet there is little evidence that US citizens understand their obligations to poor people around the world for climate change damages and the United States has been significantly responsible for delays in reaching a global solution to climate change. This is both a tragic failure of domestic leadership and a failure of the US press to help educate Americans about the negative role the US has played in finding a global solution to climate change.

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