Cain's new book is short on answers

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DR. GLENN C. ALTSCHULER
BOOK REVIEW

This fall, Republicans began raising Cain, making the former CEO of Godfather's Pizza their top choice for the GOP nomination for president. More recently, the candidate has been dogged by gaffes (about abortion rights, electrified fences, the Palestinians' "right of return," China's nuclear weapons program, Libya, and the Taliban) and allegations of sexual harassment. Lots of folks, one might say, are now intent on razing Cain.

Since Cain's 15 minutes of fame may well be coming to an end, it's time for a post-mortem on his rise and fall. His campaign biography, "This is Herman Cain," is the best place to start.

He won't fail

In the book (and on the stump) Cain presents himself as a charming, candid, commonsensical, can-do businessman. There are three kinds of people in the world, he writes: "People who make things happen, people who watch things happen, and people who say, 'what in the heck happened.'" He promises to lead, of course, and to inspire Americans to "get off their anchovies" and get with the program.

Cain insists that because he has "the will, the fire in the belly," his goal, "making America whole again," is "eminently attainable." How will he do it?: "The short answer" is that he will do what he did at Burger King and Godfather's Pizza. Failure is not in his DNA.

Unfortunately there is no "long answer" in "This is Herman Cain," a book that devotes more space to the significance of the number 45 in his life than to plans for boosting the economy. There are only sound bites, slogans and assertions that an unregulated "free market" Tea Party can solve all of our problems.

Simple solutions

Cain would reduce everybody's taxes – and cut federal spending across the board. He'd "revamp" Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, "taking this entitlement society to an empowerment society." He'd drill America into energy independence. And he'd "outgrow China, with an aggressive leadership that's courageous enough to propose and implement new economic strategies."

Cain wants to have it both ways. He is running on his record as a businessman, but acknowledges that what he has done in the past is not as important as what he will do in the future. He wants voters to believe that he knows what he is talking about – and that he is not the kind of man to "fall into a comfort zone, of letting other people, no matter how competent and well-meaning," make decisions for him.

He has also said, however, that he does not have "all the information" and, as president, would hire experts to formulate policies for him.

Tapping a strain of anti-intellectualism that has been all too pervasive throughout American history (and which remains much in fashion today), Cain emphasizes that he is "a leader, not a reader." Apparently, he believes that Pokémon is an inspiring poet. He has mocked anyone who would ask him to identify the president of Uzbekistan. And he believes that you "don't have to have years in the State Department" to figure out that our foreign policy should be "know who your enemies are and don't throw your friends under the bus."

Not so easy

Americans, with good reason, are frustrated with political paralysis. One can understand, moreover, why they're attracted to an "outsider" who promises to cut the Gordian Knot with a single stroke.
Unfortunately, it's not that easy. Government cannot – and should not – be run like a business. Experience in politics matters, as does good judgment, intellectual curiosity and command of information. Herman Cain is right about one thing: to secure America's future, "we are all going to have to be a little smarter."

Dr. Glenn C. Altschuler is the Thomas and Dorothy Litwin Professor of American Studies at Cornell University. He wrote this review for the Florida Courier.

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