



National Assessment Specialists, Inc.
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News Gram

OCTOBER 2011

VOLUME 19, NO. 4

\$49.95/year



The Gulf States — Nowhere Land for a Nowhere Man

by Pierre David

FOR THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, WE'VE BEEN HEARING ABOUT ALL the good things going on in the United Arab Emirates and nearby Qatar. The UAE had transformed itself into an international finance hub, and Qatar had tapped into a booming, liquid natural gas (or LNG) market. Both countries had become fabulously wealthy, building huge, gleaming skyscrapers and attracting hordes of capital from around the world. Five-star restaurants, ritzy hotels, fancy clubs and even fake islands became hallmarks of the new Persian Gulf.

More recently, the UAE, in particular, has come in for criticism. Its economy is not nearly as virile as once imagined.

Less has been said about the very peculiar, and very unsettling, sociology of this swatch of seaside desert. Both the UAE and Qatar depend on large numbers of foreign laborers — from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the Middle East — to build office towers, wait on tables, pick up garbage, drive cabs and buses and do all the other, menial things that make these countries go. These people are not slaves or indentured servants. They come here of their own volition because the money

is good. They live in run-down apartment blocks and are usually alone, far from their families. They are disconnected from everything they know. On most nights, the red-eye from Abu Dhabi or Dubai or Doha to Karachi or Mumbai or Colombo is packed with young men shuttling home after a long stretch abroad. They have had to save for a long time for those tickets.

There are two big things that distinguish immigrant populations in the United States and those in the Persian Gulf: The workers who come to the Gulf have very few rights and, in fact, can never become citizens of their host countries; and they vastly outnumber locals. In other words, the vast majority of the people who live in the UAE and Qatar — the people who envelope you when you're sitting in a hotel lobby or at a stoplight or on a street corner — are not from this place and can never be. This is not merely a legal, or political, distinction. It has deep, psychological implications. It defines the whole look and feel of this part of the world.

This place is not so much a place as a diorama. It is a
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Anti-Intellectualism in American Life

by Richard Hofstadter

RICHARD HOFSTADTER'S *ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN AMERICAN Life* may seem a bit dated. It came out in 1962 and was, in some sense, a reaction to the McCarthy era of the early and mid-1950s, during which time thousands of Americans were hounded, prosecuted and otherwise harassed for having ties to the Communist Party, real or imagined.

But the thesis at the heart of Hofstadter's book is as prescient today as it was then, and we should pay close attention his analysis of American history — especially as we head into the 2012 election season.

Hofstadter argues, in essence, that a large majority of Americans, from the very beginning, has viewed intellectuals — people who read books and argue about ideas and have very strong opinions about politics and history and the meaning of life — with a great deal of wariness and even hostility. This has led us to elect political leaders who are openly disdainful of ideas and lack intellectual ambition. And it has made us suspicious, more generally, of culture and thought; it has made us dumb.

Hofstadter, to put it very gently, overstates the good and understates the bad that the intellectual class, in the United States and elsewhere, has wrought. Big ideas have been responsible for some of the world's greatest calamities. We should not assume that people with PhD's are better suited to lead or manage.

But he's onto something very important that persists to this day. Not only do our politicians feel the need to align themselves with "the American people" or "the invisible majority" or, more recently, "the 99 percent." They insist on erecting a false dichotomy between this imagined majority and the so-called intellectual elite. They do this because they always have — since the days of Andrew Jackson, in the 1820s. And they do it for the same reason that Jackson and his supporters did it — because it works, because voters love to imagine themselves oppressed by invisible forces in Washington or New York or on some fabled, ivy-filled campus.

As Hofstadter understands very well, there is, of course, a better way to do things. One need not create camps or walls or differences without distinction. But this is not the way of politics: Politics is about power, and people will do whatever necessary to acquire power, and if that leaves an unfortunate aftertaste or alienates or sows deep, nationwide divisions, so be it.

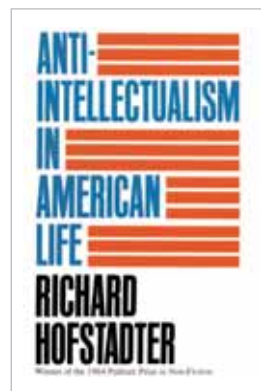
The better way to do things is to acknowledge that ideas matter and that people who are smart and well read have important things to offer to the national conversation. Does this mean excluding non-intellectuals from senior policy circles? Of course not.

Alas, our politicians would have us believe that there are too many smart people mucking everything up. Rick Perry, the Texas governor and would-be GOP presidential nominee, is proud that he received a D in Meat Science. Mitt Romney, the Republican frontrunner, is said to be worried about his high-tone resume lest "ordinary voters" be scared away. Even our president, formerly of Harvard and the University of Chicago, feels the need to sprinkle

his speeches with frequent references to "folks" and to disparage ideas (about the economy, school policy, foreign affairs) that he knows little about but do not focus-group well.

One wonders why all these men feel the need to act dumb, to celebrate that which is gray and ordinary, to kowtow to Americans' baser instincts. Or, better yet, one wonders if there will come a day when our politicians start treating us as thoughtful, self-governing grown-ups, people who are practical and grounded, to be sure, but also appreciative of important ideas.

We are about to embark on a very long and nasty presidential campaign. The journalists will, inevitably, ratchet up the fireworks. The interest groups will pour hundreds of millions of dollars into the campaign. There will be emotion and outburst and lots of scorn and ridicule. But none of this means there cannot also be reflection, argument, candor — thoughtfulness. No doubt, that's wishful thinking, but who knows? Hofstadter understood the nature of American history and politics and the ways in which our politicians frequently abuse powers they have been granted. We would be wise to read him, with great care, once again. —PD



NO WC TAX DEDUCTIONS FOR MEDICAL MARIJUANA SHOPS

It's well known that the federal tax code is convoluted and difficult to navigate. But now it appears the IRS may just be the biggest weapon in the war on drugs.

Despite the fact that California legalized medical marijuana back in 1996, the IRS prohibits marijuana dispensaries from making standard deductions that benefit conventional businesses.

As Conor Friesdorf at *The Atlantic* writes, "it's a story about the clash between federal and state drug laws." At the center of the story is Harborside Health Center, the largest medical marijuana dispensary on the West Coast. And the question is whether or not the facility should be allowed to write off typical business expenses in the way any other business would.

Harborside has 83,000 members and paid more than \$1 million in local taxes last year alone. Still, federal tax law may interfere with business as usual for Harborside. Specifically, as *The Bay Citizen* explains, "The IRS insists that medical marijuana dispensaries must obey a section of tax code that prohibits companies from deducting most expenses if they are 'trafficking in controlled substances.'"

Bottom line: Harborside is prohibited from deducting rent, payroll, health insurance or workers' compensation insurance.

Pete Stark (D-CA) has introduced a bill to change the federal tax code and equalize the playing field for medical marijuana dispensaries. But with federal opposition to medical marijuana still strong, it's not clear if President Obama will ultimately sign the bill into law.

— Sabrina L. Schaeffer



The Gulf States — Nowhere Land for a Nowhere Man
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simulacrum of a place —neat, well swept, ordered, gleaming, bold. It’s filled with money and neon-lit mosques and hotels that cater to people who will be here for a night or two. What is sorely missing is anything permanent. What it feels like is a very big, very intricate exposition at a convention center or amusement park. It feels like this will all be packed up and shipped away soon, or turned into something else, or sold off.

There are no communities here. There are demarcations, streets, grids, sidewalks — physical breaks and boundaries that create the impression of a neatly fitted together city. But Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Doha are not real cities. They are not organic. They did not grow out of some seedling of a development several centuries ago and blossom into a sprawling mesh of skyscrapers. They are reflections of someone’s idea of what a contemporary city should look like. They are fake.

This doesn’t mean they’re not lots of fun. Las Vegas is the original fake city. In a way, all resorts and getaways are variations on this particular breed of artificiality. —PD

But there’s a difference: Las Vegas is where you go for a short while (to get away, to gamble, to be bad). People are supposed to live in the UAE and Qatar, and unlike Vegas or Aspen or Hilton Head, there’s no substrate there — there’s no history or connectedness or sense of time or place that stretches back, before the bright lights came on. All there is is...Vegas.

This has created a new kind of person — a person who is, in some way, ideally suited to our time. The people of the UAE and Qatar are not, in fact, from anywhere. They are not connected to anything long-lasting or meaningful. Their lives are weirdly virtual. They are here, in the way that a laptop computer sits on a desk or a counter or an airplane tray-table, but very soon — tomorrow or the day after — they may not be. Location is a precondition or necessary component of their existence, just as it is for everyone, but *this* location, this particular place, is irrelevant. This makes them not only strange but diaphanous, as if they were not really here. And this makes being here, visiting for a night or a week, lonely, as if you were stepping into any empty room full of people who cannot see you. Of course, they see you, but not really, and not for long. —PD

CHANGING STATE PSYCHIATRIC FACILITIES TO HELP CURB WC CLAIMS

The California State Assembly and Gov. Jerry Brown have taken legislative action following a series of violent attacks at Napa State Hospital last year, which resulted in the death of a 54-year old psychiatric technician. In 2010 alone there were 8,300 “aggressive incidents” throughout the state hospital system, resulting in more than 5,000 injuries to other patients and staff, lost work days, increased overtime and greater workers’ compensation fees.

That’s why Assemblyman Michael Allen (D-Santa Rosa) wrote AB 366, intended to save resources and improve protection for workers and patients by simplifying the legal process necessary for approvals of involuntary medication.

Allen has been a champion for safety at the state’s mental facilities – especially the Napa hospital – and has worked to document incidents in which staff has been abused by difficult patients. According to a report in the Los Angeles Times assaults in the hospital system have risen sharply in recent years. At Napa hospital alone, there were 2,828 patient assaults, 54 of which required medical treatment or hospitalization, during a 12-month period spanning 2010-2011. During that same timeframe there were 855 assaults on staff, 128 of which required a doctor’s visit or hospital stay.

The existing law only allowed the courts to provide involuntary medication if the patient himself consented to medication at the time of his original hearing. If an individual withdrew that consent following admission to a state hospital, a new hearing was required – a process that can take months. AB 366 changes the procedure significantly, allowing courts to make decisions about involuntary medication for patients deemed to be a danger to themselves or others at the same trial in which patients are originally committed to the facility.

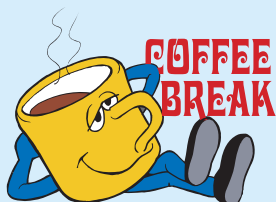
Allen insists the new law “does not erode any current due process for patients.” In fact, he argues that AB 366 will add a new patient protection provision, namely a periodic court review of medications.

— Sabrina L. Schaeffer

The least plastic group of stem cells is:

- A. unipotent
- B. pluripotent
- C. omnipotent
- D. multipotent
- E. oligopotent

ANSWER : A
 Stem cells are commonly classified in terms of the kinds of cells they may become, e.g. muscle, nerves, bone, etc. Unipotent stem cells are sharply restricted to a very narrow set of possible mature cells. They are confined to become either skin cells or those that constitute the liver. The investigation of stem cells is likely to yield the most important results of medical research ever made.



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December 6, 2011 • 6:00–8:00pm
 Location: Sportsmen's Lodge – Studio City

December 8, 2011 • 6:00–8:00pm
 Location: South Bay (exact location TBA)