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Occupying--Not Rioting--Wall Street

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The purpose of Occupy Wall Street is simple: gather as diverse a group of demonstrators as possible to make a peaceful statement about government corruption and the privileging of big business and the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans in policy making.

Yet, if one were to read the *New York Times* [article](#) published Friday or see the front page of Sunday morning's *New York Post*, one would think that Occupy Wall Street was disorganized and full of naïve rabble rousers looking to riot for rioting sake.

However, these portrayals could not be further from the truth.

On Sept. 24, I had the opportunity to spend time at the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations in Zuccotti Park. I had been downtown at the beginning of this past week and had witnessed the early stages of the protests, but had heard little about the evolution of the demonstrations in the media as the week wore on. Due to the lack of media attention being given to Occupy Wall Street, I decided to head downtown and see it for myself.

To say that the demonstrators are only hippies and radicals pining for 1968 would be a gross misstatement. Rather, the demonstrators come from diverse backgrounds: environmentalists, feminists, former and current Wall Street bankers, traders and brokers, anarchists, socialists, members of the LGBTQ community, teachers, students, Republicans, Democrats, libertarians, people of color, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Atheists, retired NYPD police officers, members of the FDNY, journalists, musicians, photographers...the list could go on and on. Yet, the one thing that this varied group of people has in common is that they are tired of government corruption and the privileging of corporations and the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans by the American government.

Additionally, the demonstration was not as disorganized as some media outlets have argued. Rather, it was highly organized and based on consensus. To make announcements, a "mic check" would take place. Whoever wished to speak would yell, "Mic check!" to gain the attention of fellow protestors. The speaker would then share four- or five-word snippets and those around her or him would loudly repeat what was being said to allow the message to reverberate

throughout the park. If a decision regarding whether or not to take some form of organized action needed to be made, a consensus amongst the demonstrators first had to occur. Schedules for the day were distributed in the morning and alterations were made when necessary--alterations based on consensus.

When the demonstrators did decide to take action, all those who were considered to be "high risk," such as children, the elderly and pregnant women, had yellow balloons tied to their wrists. That way, in case the demonstrators were attacked, those with yellow balloons would either be protected or quickly moved out of harm's way.

One of the most impressive aspects of the demonstration was the conscious effort that was made to ensure that the voices of people of color, women, religious minorities and members of the LGBTQ community were heard by not only the other protestors, but also by the few media outlets that were present at Zuccotti Park. During one "mic check," a young Muslim woman wearing a hijab made an announcement as she stood next to a young white man in rainbow leggings, who stood next to a Latino man in jeans and a t-shirt. The faces of the protest were as diverse as America is itself.

Reports that demonstrators were arrested are true: dozens of the protestors were arrested for marching peacefully down Broadway on Saturday afternoon. A group of young women were sprayed with mace after they had already been quarantined by the NYPD--none of the women were acting aggressively. One young man was violently thrown to the ground by a police officer simply for trying to film the protest with his iPhone.

At approximately 6 p.m. on Saturday, a caravan of NYPD vehicles slowly began to surround Zuccotti Park. Taking that as my cue to leave, I began to make my way up Broadway only to find that the entrances to many of the nearby subway stations had been mysteriously barricaded. I asked a nearby police officer why the entrances were closed. He ignored my question and told me, "Do yourself a favor and get out of the area before a riot breaks out."

"If there's going to be a riot, it's not going to be because the protestors started it," I said, pointing to the Eyewitness News van making its way down the block. "But I'm sure that's how it's going to be spun."

He shrugged again and started to walk away.

"Wait," I called after him. He turned and looked at me, "Yeah?"

"Before you arrest any of them," I said, "please remember that the group of men who founded this country did so because of unfair taxation."

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