

Oh, David Brooks

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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I'm a big fan of The Conversation, the *New York Times* online feature in which Gail Collins and David Brooks have a casual chat. I think the appeal is supposed to be that the two are reasonable, amicable and witty columnists who clearly like each other a lot. That's all nice, but what I enjoy is the palpable pleasure the hilarious Collins takes in needling the less intentionally hilarious Brooks. (His act is so tired: Is he an orthodox conservative, a bipartisanship-obsessed beltway cliché or an armchair sociologist who just [makes stuff up](#)? Depends what day it is.)

[Last week's entry](#) has some good material about policy compromises the two would be willing to make with each other if they comprised Congress. But first you have to get through Brooks's jokes about Occupy Wall Street:

Every time you give up something the left wants I'll try to give up something much bigger that the right wants. Just so long as you understand this whole exercise is in direct violation of the spirit of the Occupy movement. You shouldn't be negotiating with me. You shouldn't even be talking with me.

Occupy Wall Street intentionally, explicitly welcomes people of a huge variety of political persuasions. The "99 percent" language captures this: the group aims to include [the many that runaway inequality has left behind](#), not just a subset of them who share a particular analysis of how to fix this. It is governed by consensus-based direct democracy, with no barriers--ideological or otherwise--to participation.

As those of us who have dabbled in intentional community know, this essentially means that the group spends a huge amount of time debating, negotiating and compromising amongst themselves--and again, "themselves" refers to a vastly expansive entity. In short: what the hell is Brooks talking about?

He closes with this: "We better not show our faces in the park. This [conversation about compromise] is exactly the sort of thing they are trying to wipe out."

No, it really isn't. But I wish I could wipe out the habit of comfy media stars using their soapbox to mock popular movements instead of working to understand them.