I don’t like the top 1% of anything. Intelligence? Boring! Fun? Exhausting! Thoughtfulness? Annoying! Hairiness? Too hairy!

So I get why the Occupy Wall Street protesters gained momentum with their slogan WE ARE THE 99%. Everyone loves the 99%. You can have a beer with the 99%. You can eat with your hands in front of the 99%. You can talk about TV shows with the 99% without them telling you that while they don’t think there’s anything wrong with TV, if they had one, they would watch it literally all the time, so it’s better to just not keep one in the house.

But I’ve met some of the top 1%, and on average, they’re interesting, generous and charming. You know who is in the top 1%? Tom Hanks. You know who is in the bottom 99%? Not Tom Hanks.
It’s not just that we admire the 1%. We need them. The 1% started Time Inc., creating my job. They founded Stanford, where I went to college. They funded Facebook and my mortgage. They created the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, bankrolled most great art, paid for medical research and created genius grants. No one has ever woken up early to gather around a TV to watch a wedding of two 99 percenters.

Part of the reason I’m defending the 1% is that while all the other journalists waste their time with the Occupy Wall Street losers, the 1% are available for some serious networking. But when I started talking to them, I learned that for all their supposed power, they are now too afraid to stand up for themselves. When I asked Kathy Griffin\(^1\) to explain why she and her fellow 1 percenters are a boon to society, she said, “I wouldn’t touch that topic with a 10-foot pole made out of $100 bills I made from Suddenly Susan Season 2.” Mark Cuban,\(^2\) the billionaire owner of the Dallas Mavericks who isn’t even afraid of NBA refs, said, “I think there are financial engineers that add no value and fit the Occupy Wall Street stereotypes. They are the 1% of the 1% that mess it up for everyone.” In other words, Cuban is going with the rallying cry, “We are the 99.99%.”

\(^1\) Kathy Griffin: a popular comedienne who appeared on the TV show Suddenly Susan.
\(^2\) Mark Cuban: American businessman and investor. As owner of the Dallas Mavericks, Cuban has been fined numerous times by the National Basketball Association (NBA) for critical statements about the league and its referees.
So I guess it’s up to me to point out that all this anger about income inequality is misplaced because, unlike any other time in history, these days the 1% don’t live that differently than the middle class does. Never before has $10 wine tasted so much like $1,000 bottles—and the $10 bottles come with pictures of cute animals! A $15,000 car breaks down as rarely as one that costs $250,000 and has far more cup holders. The middle class and the rich watch the same stuff on TV and in movie theaters, have equal access to Wikipedia and pay the same college graduates to do nothing but make us complicated coffee drinks. It is so difficult for the 1% to live differently that they have to collect art. Collecting art is so boring, there aren’t any reality shows about it.

I get that we need someone to blame. Everyone loves the banker when they’re borrowing and hates him when they have to pay him back. They also hate him when he claims to have mixed up the orange $500s with the light peach $100s and suddenly has a lot of cash even though he owns only Vermont and Oriental Avenues. I don’t know a lot about banking. But I do not believe that the worldwide recession was caused by financial derivatives created by the 1% who tricked the innocent 99%. I believe it was created by the great wide middle class who took out loans to live out the techno-bling dream we deified in rap songs and reality TV. Credit-card debt went up 75% from 1997 to 2007. We’re now a nation of really poor people with a lot of frequent-flier miles.

The Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street are both right: We need government to get smaller and bigger. I’d argue for slashing middle-class entitlements but also adding services for migrant workers and that new poverty-stricken

4. **Reread and Discuss** Reread lines 12–29. With a small group, discuss the author’s use of examples from popular culture to advance his point of view. How do these examples add to the satire?

5. **Read** As you read lines 30–63, continue to cite textual evidence. Underline examples the author gives of the supposed similarities between the 1% and the middle class. In the margin, explain who he blames for income inequality.
Muppet, Lily, who has to live on the same street as a monster who shoves cookies into his mouth just to let them fall right out.

But even I, who scored only in the 95th percentile on my math SAT, know that we are not going to dig out of our nation’s debt just by jacking up taxes on the 1%. Raising their tax rate won’t change the overall debt that much. We are all going to have to pay more and take less. Except for Lily. That poor girl can have whatever she wants.

Until people calm down and realize that, we should do something nice for the besieged 1 percenters. Invite Mark Zuckerberg to join you on FarmVille. Let Rupert Murdoch listen to your voice mail. Watch that silly Oprah network. At least until they get through this hard time.

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6. REREAD Reread lines 55–63. In the margin, explain who the author is making fun of, and why.

SHORT RESPONSE

Cite Text Evidence What do you think is the author’s real point of view on the economic crisis? What is he really satirizing? Review your reading notes, and evaluate the author’s style. Cite evidence from the text in your response.

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