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Protesters should not target entrepreneurs like Steve Jobs

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Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple who died last week at age 56, left the world a better place than he found it — and not just because of the treasure trove of gadgets he shepherded into creation.

Mr. Jobs' life is a testament to what economists have long been telling us — that wealth and plunder are not the same thing. Plunder is what you get when you take from others. Wealth is what you get when you give to others.

Due to his commercial success, Mr. Jobs accumulated \$8 billion of wealth over his life. But you won't see Occupy Wall Street protesters coming after Jobs or Apple because it is so obvious that we freely gave our money to him in exchange for his products. We don't view Jobs' wealth as plunder, but as one-half of a transaction. We gave him \$8 billion and he gave us the world that science fiction authors promised.

The best way we can honor this man is to take to heart the lesson of his life by recognizing that many of the so-called wealthiest 1 percent are people just like Mr. Jobs — they are people who have created wealth by providing value to others. The entrepreneur who develops a new way to manufacture machined parts, the analyst who develops a new algorithm for predicting electricity demand, and the financier who creates a new type of derivative all create value for us in the same way Steve Jobs did — even if we can't carry their innovations in our hip pocket.

We can see the value that Jobs created because it touches our lives directly. It is harder to see the values that most entrepreneurs create because those values touch our lives indirectly — through better and cheaper refrigerators made possible by better-machined parts, by lower electricity prices and reduced pollution made possible by a better understanding of how people use electricity, and by new jobs and companies made possible by new financing opportunities.

The young protesters currently occupying Wall Street should be careful where they direct their ire. People like Steve Jobs who gained their wealth by providing value to others — including the protesters using iPhones to call their friends — shouldn't be the subject of protest. The protesters should focus their ire on those who use the political process to gain plunder by forcing the rest of us to subsidize their losing business models.

Some of these pirates can be found on Wall Street. They benefited when the government forced

taxpayers to underwrite Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac's largesse, and they benefited when the government forced taxpayers to bail out the companies that bet on that largesse.

But they're not just in New York City.

Pirates can be found on Main Street, where businessmen ask the government to create an unfair licensing system that will hamstring their competitors. They can be found in the public sector, where public unions ask the government to maintain a system that forces us to use the U.S. Postal Service to send first-class mail. Some can even be found on the farm, when they fight to maintain government requirements to put ethanol in our gas tanks and pay huge tariffs on imported sugar.

Here's my point. Pirates can be found in all cities, and in all sectors, but their power to plunder has its source in one city: Washington, D.C. The federal government and the businesses that use political ties to force their products on consumers aren't creating value — they're enriching themselves at our expense. If protesters want to stop the plunder, then they are protesting in the wrong place.

In the coming weeks, people across the country will wander into Apple stores to reflect on a man who radically transformed how we live our lives and who created wealth for himself in the process without relying on government's coercive power. He may have been part of the wealthiest 1 percent, but he helped better the lives of the remaining 99.

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