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Daily OPINION

# IT'S OKAY TO FEEL BEHIND

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I can't wait to see all the great things you'll do!"

At the end of senior year as everyone is scrambling to sign yearbooks, this line is guaranteed to be found in more than one message. Closing out our four years of high school, the energy is electrifying. We live life to the fullest in those magic months between May and August, making fond memories before we depart and leave the nest for college. Everyone celebrates as we complete such an accomplishment and enter the next chapter of our lives — a chapter promising new friends, new experiences and excitement that comes with independence. However, this may not turn out to be the experience for some. For many people, they're just met with disappointment.

Going into college, we may have this idealized image of college life in our head — one that is glorified and brimming with vibrant parties, lively friend groups and a romanticized life full of fun adventures and side quests. But things don't always turn out as we had hoped. After completing the first half of the semester, life might just feel mediocre.

When I came into college, I had my heart set on joining an a cappella group. In high school, performing was my passion and I was fortunate enough to have had some amazing opportunities to pursue it. My school had a wonderful theatre program through which I acted in many productions and met my closest friends. I also sang in a rock band and had the opportunity to perform at events with large audiences. At the beginning of the school year, I attended the fall a cappella rush concert. It blew me away, leaving me wanting it even more.

However, the audition experience didn't turn out how I wanted it to. Of the five groups I auditioned for, I only received a callback from one. After a few days, I received a phone call breaking the news and encouraging me to reaudition next semester. This experience, among other rejections, left me feeling hopeless and helpless.

But, if we consider our circumstances, it is only normal to feel this way. In the spring, my class finished out high school with four years of growth, accomplishments and worthwhile experiences under our belt. However, entering college, some of us are rebuilding our lives from absolutely nothing. While some people come to UConn knowing familiar faces from high school, some of us come not knowing a single soul. As an out-of-state student from New York, I felt utterly out of place in the beginning, and still feel this way from time to time.

A large source of these feelings can also be attributed to comparing ourselves with the versions of other people that we see. Especially with social media facilitating public connectivity, we are constantly flooded with snapshots into other people's lives. Swiping through people's stories, it's easy to feel a pang of jealousy seeing the fun nights out or the impressive achievements of our peers at this point in our lives. Seeing how accomplished or happy somebody seems in real life can feel discouraging — as if you are behind. But even if it seems that everyone else has their life together, there will always be people experiencing the same struggles. Behind the version of themselves that a person presents to the world, we truly have no idea what they are experiencing on the inside.

Some things simply take time. Think back to high school. You probably didn't meet your best friends or make the varsity volleyball team during your freshmen year. In life, we are constantly enduring different seasons that come with their own unexpected storylines and new characters. Though the present seems like forever sometimes, we should remind ourselves that nothing is permanent and that we can't predict what the world will throw at us next. It can feel like certain outcomes are our own fault, but we must keep in mind that this is not a reflection of our worth or ability.

Caught in this whirlwind called college, it is easy to forget what it's like to feel like yourself. Even if life isn't going as planned, we can practice small routines that bring us joy and give us a moment to slow down. This could be exercising, writing in a journal or reaching out to friends and family from back home. For me, it's playing guitar. Singing along, strumming the chords and listening to my guitar resonating brings me a familiar peace and comforting nostalgia. It's also important to appreciate the small wins and moments, no matter how ordinary or seemingly mundane. In these times, the small happinesses are worth more than we'd think.

As we navigate college, we must remember that everyone is on their own timeline. All we can do is keep our head up, our spirits hopeful and our gaze pointed toward the future.

# FRENCH PROTESTERS AREN'T VIOLENT, THE POLICE ARE

by Harry Cohen
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"Rioting erupted in cities across France on Saturday as demonstrations against rising living costs and declining public services spiraled out of control in some of the worst violence the country has witnessed for decades," Reuters reported. "Police have detained more than 2,000 people, France's Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said, adding that more than 600 police officers were injured," a CNN article pointed out.

Throughout English language media there has been a push to center images of violence within the French protest movement, depicting a stark violence, implied to have been perpetrated by the majority of protestors. This could not be farther from the truth. Despite attempts to portray French protestors as chaotic and violent, they have actually been peaceful, and most images of violence are created either directly or indirectly by the police.

The protests didn't begin on October 17. This movement has been building since September when high school students blocked their schools to protest worsening conditions; 105-degree classrooms in the summer, a chronic lack of teachers, ballooning class sizes and long school days. Despite peacefully demanding the right to not pass out of heat stroke during lectures, they were met with immediate police violence. On October fifth, a fifteen-year-old student had his hand blown off by a grenade shot by French police. He never had a chance to be peaceful; violence was done to him. And so, the protests seem violent.

On October 13, I was at a march in Toulouse joining the students, indignant teachers, angry union workers and furious parents. By that time, the protests were about more than classroom conditions; they were about police violence and state repression. And still we marched peacefully. Suddenly, our chants were interrupted by the pop and hiss of the tear gas grenades being launched at us. Despite no fires or looting taking place, we were running through the streets as the gas tore at our eyes and lungs, trying to put distance between ourselves and the advancing police with their swinging clubs. This was a violent protest, but it was not the protestors who were violent.

One image from that day stuck with me; an apartment flooding with tear gas when police shot a grenade directly into it. In 2018 an 80-year-old woman in Marsaille was killed when the same thing happened.

So let's be clear about something. You are seeing images of chaos and violence, but they are caused by the police, not protestors. Since the beginning, there has been a consistent effort to portray the protestors as violent in order to discredit the movement and shift the conversation towards their actions instead. Never once has Macron or the French government been made to answer for the extreme violence they have perpetrated against the French people and French children over the past month.

On October 17, the world stood appalled at images of the 150-year-old Limoges town hall burning down in the midst of the latest wave of protests. Politicians around the world have bemoaned the loss of this historic building which survived two world wars (despite never being near combat or at risk), but no thought has been spared for the children who have lost their hands and eyes, no thought for the people whose arms and legs have been broken by CRS clubs, no thought for the for the children choking as French police flood crowded downtown centers with tear gas. Buildings can be repaired. The trauma, injuries and deaths caused by the French government cannot.

If the French government actually cared about maintaining order or preventing damages like they claim they do, they would take active protective measures instead of creating the very circumstances that make looting and arson possible. Instead, groups like Marine Le Penn's National Rally party have been using these images to promote their racist agenda in the upcoming elections, all while protecting actual violent fascists. No, the fact of the matter is the French police have no interest in protecting the public or stopping violence. Instead, they have been systematically using the images of chaos and violence they themselves helped create as a rhetorical weapon to complement their clubs.

The protests show no sign of stopping. As of writing this, many major cities in France have been placed under curfew, and more protests and strikes are being planned. It is likely that more images will come across your feeds of cities engulfed in flames, broken windows and emptied stores. But as you watch, as you hear people decrying the violence, do not forget where it comes from. It is not coming from protestors calling for a better future, but from the French government which denies them one.




**Toulouse, France, October 13th 2026. Tear gas pouring from an apartment after grenade is launched into it.**

PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR