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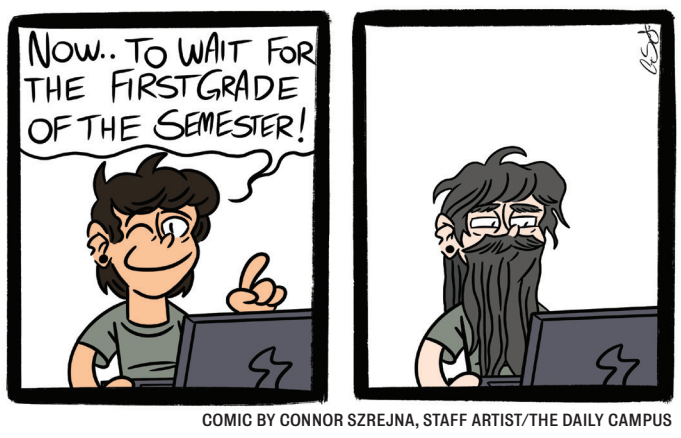
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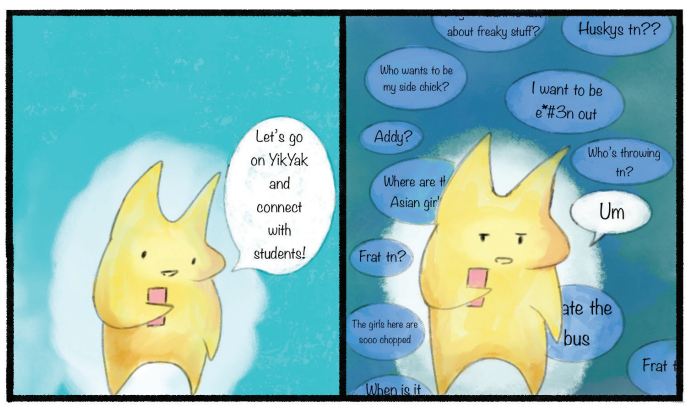
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Daily OPINION

DUNKING ON THE SOUTH DOESN'T MAKE YOU PROGRESSIVE — IT JUST MAKES YOU IGNORANT

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Texas residents carry groceries through historic cold weather. A historic winter storm left millions in the state without power in February 2021.
PHOTO COURTESY OF GETTY IMAGES

It's November 2024, just after the presidential election during the fall semester of my freshman year. My roommate's grandparents have come to visit her. By just happening to be in my room, I have volunteered myself for an interrogation. When I mention that I'm from Texas, her grandmother gives me a look of pity.

"You must be so glad you made it out, right? What, with all those awful people there."

Rewind to February 2021. I am 14 years old and the idea of voting has barely crossed my mind. Due to a failure of the state of Texas power grid, millions are left without power in one of the most intense winter storms the state has ever seen. While our house was fortunate enough to keep power, many homes in my neighborhood were not. When I checked social media, expecting to see an outpouring of support and empathy, much of what I saw amounted to this:

"It's Texas. They deserve it. Isn't this what they voted for?"

It's all too easy for New Englanders or West Coast elites to write off the South as a region of Bible-thumping, Mountain-Dew-drinking, uneducated, bigoted white Republicans that just can't let go of the good old days of the Civil War. In doing so, they ignore another South — a South forgotten about by the politicians of the region and held together by tight-knit communities of underrepresented groups. They ignore the South that I, and many others, know and love.

You cannot discuss the political underrepresentation of the South without first addressing the big, ugly word: gerrymandering. Southern states have appeared frequently in recent news cycles for their redistricting battles — from Texas's redrawing of district lines to add five additional Republican seats in 2025, to 2026 Supreme Court Decision Louisiana v. Callais focusing on the racially driven aspects of gerrymandering in the South. The Princeton Redistricting Report Card rates many Southern states "poor" for their heavily biased drawing of district lines ahead of the 2026 midterms.

The gerrymandering of the South has led to a famously Republican-dominated voting bloc, causing many politicians and voters alike to write the area off as "a lost cause." But in many Southern states, this is changing. Polls for Texan Democratic nominee for Senate, James Talarico, show him narrowly ahead of Republican Ken Paxton. North Carolina's popular former governor (now Senate candidate), Democrat Roy Cooper, is polling with a double-digit lead over opponent Michael Whatley. And Georgia, a deep-South state surrounded by firmly Republican neighbors, has been established as a swing state after voting for President Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election with 16 key electoral votes.

These three examples show that, when able, the South can and will rally around Democratic candidates. This challenges the efforts of the Republican party to dilute likely Democratic voters across awkwardly drawn gerrymandered districts, limiting the voting power of the South's many minority communities.

Communities of underprivileged groups exist all over the South. Just under half of all Black Americans live in the South; many cities with a Black majority are in the South, from mid-sized cities like Jackson, Miss. and Birmingham, Ala., to larger cities such as Memphis. Metropolitan areas such as the Atlanta metro do not have a Black majority but have some of the largest Black communities — the Atlanta metro alone has 2.1 to 2.3 million Black residents. Other large minority communities in the South include San Antonio, home to over one million Hispanic or Latino residents (about 64.6% of the population) and Village de L'Est in New Orleans, one of the densest Vietnamese enclaves in America.

Additionally, about 35% of all LGBTQ+ adults in America call the South home. Atlanta is well-known for its established queer community and weekend-long Pride celebrations across the city (one of the nation's oldest Pride traditions!). In Austin, 5.6% of the metro population identifies as LGBTQ — that's a higher percentage of queer adults than Northeastern cities such as New York, Philadelphia and Boston or West Coast cities such as Seattle and Los Angeles.

Ultimately, someone's political affiliations or minority status should not make them a person "worth saving." But writing off the cultural traditions and political efforts of the American South does the entire region a disservice and divides our country even more by alienating an entire region of Americans. Choosing to ignore and look down on the South does more to divide America, not fix it. Northeasterners and West Coast elites: retire your antiquated thinking on the South and embrace Southerners as allies in working toward a brighter future.

GIRL, UNINTERRUPTED: YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE GOOD

by Gianna Cassino
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The concept made sense, of course: when your brain gets too chaotic, focus on a singular phrase and let everything else fall away. In my humble opinion, it's all about finding the right words. My friends like to repeat Bible verses or film quotes or things their parents used to say to them when they were sad. Some people have prayers; I have poetry.

In particular, I have the opening lines of Mary Oliver's "Wild Geese:" "You do not have to be good. / You do not have to walk on your knees / For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting. / You only have to let the soft animal of your body / love what it loves."

Poems like Oliver's leave room for a number of readings. My interpretation? Realizing you do not have to be good unlocks your fullest potential.

So many of us equate external success with moral goodness and personal fulfillment. My theatre friends have told me that coming out of an audition in which they've done poorly feels like a moral failing. The label of "performer" is close to their heart; when they don't perform up to their own standards, their self-perception shatters.

If you've spent years believing you're meant to make an impact on the world through the thing you're best at, failure takes on an incomprehensible weight. Rather than a momentary setback to learn from, individual disappointments can open the door for deeper ruminations on who you are and what you're meant for. Yes, it can be disappointing to fail at something that's integral to your identity. The good news is that you aren't tied to being good at anything. There is no preconceived quota for success in your life, and there's no one waiting to strike you down if you stray from your five-year plan.

It's all too easy to get wrapped up in wanting to be perfect. But you don't have to be perfect. You don't even have to be good.

College students experience incredibly high levels of burnout. Between classes, clubs, internships, jobs and social lives, we're pulled in a million different directions. To make matters worse, achievements from GPAs to follower counts are constantly quantified and available for comparison. Holding perfection in such high regard makes it easy to forget that we're all animals. Ending the semester with a 4.0 GPA won't affect whether we live or die. Still, I'm sure we've all had moments of sacrificing food, sleep and our general mental wellbeing to get there. In no world should this be so common. Slow self-destruction in the name of productivity is inhumane.



Mary Jane Oliver, Pulitzer prize winning poet and author of "Wild Geese." Mantras are short quotes and phrases people use to focus on a singular thing.
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NEW YORK TIMES

My solution to culling obsessive productivity? Training myself to be OK with failure. Think of everything you've held yourself back from doing because you've felt like you won't be good enough. Trying things even if you think you'll be horrible at them kills two birds with one stone — you're simultaneously expanding your life and training your brain to accept imperfection. Let your body love what it loves.

Lose at chess, sing off-key, take a poetry class, fall off a skateboard. The path to goodness starts from wherever you are in the moment. Oftentimes, you're starting at a place that's less than perfect. That's perfectly alright.

I recite "Wild Geese" before meetings, exams, auditions and phone calls. Any time I'm anxious, I return to a constant refrain of "you do not have to be good." I'd encourage you to remember the same. If you're looking for a mantra, feel free to borrow mine.



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