This past June was the hottest June on record, ever. This July was the hottest month ever recorded.

Earlier this summer, temperatures were so high in France that exams were cancelled. You might not realize how significant this is, so let me put it in perspective by telling a story of one of the most important lessons that I learned in school, even though it had nothing to do with the subject of the class, mathematics.

During the spring of 1972 I was a freshman at University of California, Berkeley. That spring, demonstrations broke out about Peoples Park—by then the university had fenced off the park. Most freshman lived in the dorms closeby. I lived in an apartment just up the street from the park.

The demonstrations turned ugly and the police got more aggressive, using tear gas to disperse the crowds. Of course, everyone in the area including freshmen in the dorms were also gassed.

Many of my classmates asked our calculus professor to cancel or postpone our midterm. They complained: “We couldn’t study, we were choked by the tear gas and there was all this commotion.” Our professor, one of the best educators I had in my years of college, looked at us amusedly. In his thick French accent, he told us privileged UC students part of his story.

When he was a math student in Paris, he and his fellow students asked their professors to cancel exams when the Nazis invaded their city. NON, was the answer. My lesson for life was whatever problems I am facing, to keep them in perspective. Tear gas, fencing off a park, these were nothing compared to losing their country to fascism, and even then, the exams went on as scheduled.

So when France cancelled exams due to the extreme heat, it was a very big deal.

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