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Media's reaction to Rwanda showed distorted priorities

This April marks the 10-year anniversary of one of the most famous suicides in contemporary American history — the shot heard around the world, if you will. It also marks the 10-year anniversary of something far more tragic but virtually unknown to most Americans.

Ten years ago today, Americans were at a loss for words as they mourned the death of rock star Kurt Cobain.

The media had their eyes on Seattle. While the camera crews and smug reporters were migrating Northwest to the dreary Emerald City for the story of the year, one of the most horrific and violent crimes against humanity was taking place overseas in a small African country called Rwanda.

Millions of people across the United States were in tears and blaring "Smells Like Teen Spirit" from their stereos, while in Africa screams were blaring from the mouths of innocent men, women and children as they were rapidly decimated with machetes.

It began on April 6, 1994, when Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana was killed after his plane was shot down near Kigali Airport. Hutu extremists were believed to be behind the attack.

Later that night, the Hutus began one of the most efficient genocides the world has ever known; deciding that the Tutsi people, the minority in Rwanda, must be wiped out. While the official count of the dead reached 800,000, many Rwandans say it was far greater. Some say that it was in the millions.

Two days later, back in the United States, Kurt Cobain's body was found in his Seattle home by an electrician. He had perished from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. In his suicide letter, Cobain writes, "The worst crime I can think of would be to rip people off by faking it and pretending to be having 100% fun."

In Rwanda, thousands of people were being herded into churches

and massacred.

On April 10, Cobain's widow, Courtney Love, held hands with horrified fans during a candlelight vigil in Seattle while reading excerpts from her husband's suicide note. Love choked back tears as she and the fans called Cobain an "asshole."

Love responded to Cobain's words by saying, "No Kurt, the worst crime I can think of is for you to just continue being a rock star when you fucking hate it."

Meanwhile, in Rwanda, more than 10,000 Tutsis were gathered at a town hall where police, soldiers, militia-men and villagers surrounded them with guns, grenades and machetes. Only a few Tutsis escaped. The rest were slaughtered.

**Carl Sundberg**

Reasoning with madness

For the next few months back in America, the media were in a Nirvana feeding frenzy. Cobain's face was placed on magazine covers nationwide, journalists everywhere were writing essays about him and MTV became Cobain central, playing nothing but Nirvana videos on constant 24-hour loops.

In Rwanda, maggots and buzzards fed on blood-drenched and headless corpses that were piled up in churches and streets.

By July 1994, Cobain had become a household name, a cultural icon, a hero. Things had started getting back to normal for America. What was once a horrible tragedy is now our

history, a frozen moment in time. Americans had grieved enough. We were ready to move on.

One hundred days after April 6, Rwanda had also started to get back to relative normalcy — if you were not a Tutsi, that is. The Rwandan genocide had come to a halt. Journalist Philip Gourevitch writes the following in his book "We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda": "The dead of Rwanda accumulated at nearly three times the rate of the Jewish dead during the Holocaust. It was the most efficient mass killing since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki."

However, unlike Cobain, they did not choose to die. Unlike Cobain, none of the Rwandan dead became media-honored heroes. None of them are household names. None of them are icons. Their pictures never graced any magazine covers. They were sacrificed for nothing. For nothing.

Just like the Clinton administration did, the American media have all but ignored the Rwandan genocide. Nowadays, the few who even know about this event shake their heads in disbelief. What were we thinking? The most powerful empire on Earth sat idle as millions of people were slaughtered like cattle. At this point, though, it's stupid to play the blame game. What's done is done.

But 10 years later, the buzz about Cobain is back. And Rwanda is still in the background, hidden away from American eyes. Let us not forget those 800,000 innocent victims.

I dedicate this meager column to those families who perished in that genocide. Tonight, I will burn a candle for you all.

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His opinions do not necessarily
represent those of the Emerald.

Gardens grow responsibility

In an effort to move closer to adulthood, I took on the extra responsibility of a garden last week. I've kept my houseplant alive for almost two years now, and looking to take advantage of the spring weather I decided it was time to plant my first garden. Sort of.

I'm still a long way from being dedicated enough to prune my flowering hedges, aerate my lawn or divide my perennials. I also lack a backyard. Instead, I have opted to grow fruits and vegetables in containers on my balcony.

Although container gardening is less rigorous, there are still steps that need to be taken to make the plants survive and prosper. The first obvious step is to decide what to plant. I'm trying several herbs, tomatoes, strawberries and sweet pea flowers. Because this is my first try at gardening, I'm only growing a few items and waiting for a small success before I invest too much time and money.

I picked my plants based on what I like, but others may want to be more technical about their plant selection and base their decision on

factors such as Eugene's hardiness zone. Also, if you're going to grow more than one type of plant in the same container, make sure the plants have similar sun and water needs and grow at similar rates.

**Helen Schumacher**

Notes from the underground

Once you've decided on your plants, the proper containers and soil need to be selected. There should be room for the plant's roots, soil and bottom drainage. Without proper drainage (or with overwatering), roots will rot and salts will build up instead of being washed from the dirt. If you are planting seeds that will turn to vine plants, such as tomatoes or peas, you'll need to provide support, like bamboo rods, for the plants to lean on. Soil should be loose enough that

roots are properly aerated, but should also hold water and nutrients.

This brings up the next maintenance issue — watering. Under or overwatering are common mistakes. Watering once a day, making sure soil is uniformly moist, is a safe routine for most plants. Another good rule of thumb is to keep your containers in a location that will get at least six hours of sunlight a day.

And don't forget to time your planting to avoid frost. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture maps, the last spring frost in Eugene is generally between March 30 and April 30. You can plant before then, as long as containers are moved inside at night.

It's still too early to tell if I'll be a good gardener or not since the seeds have yet to sprout. But I've done some research and followed the advice of more experienced growers, so hopefully, a couple of months from now, I'll be having tomato sandwiches and mojitos with fresh mint.

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