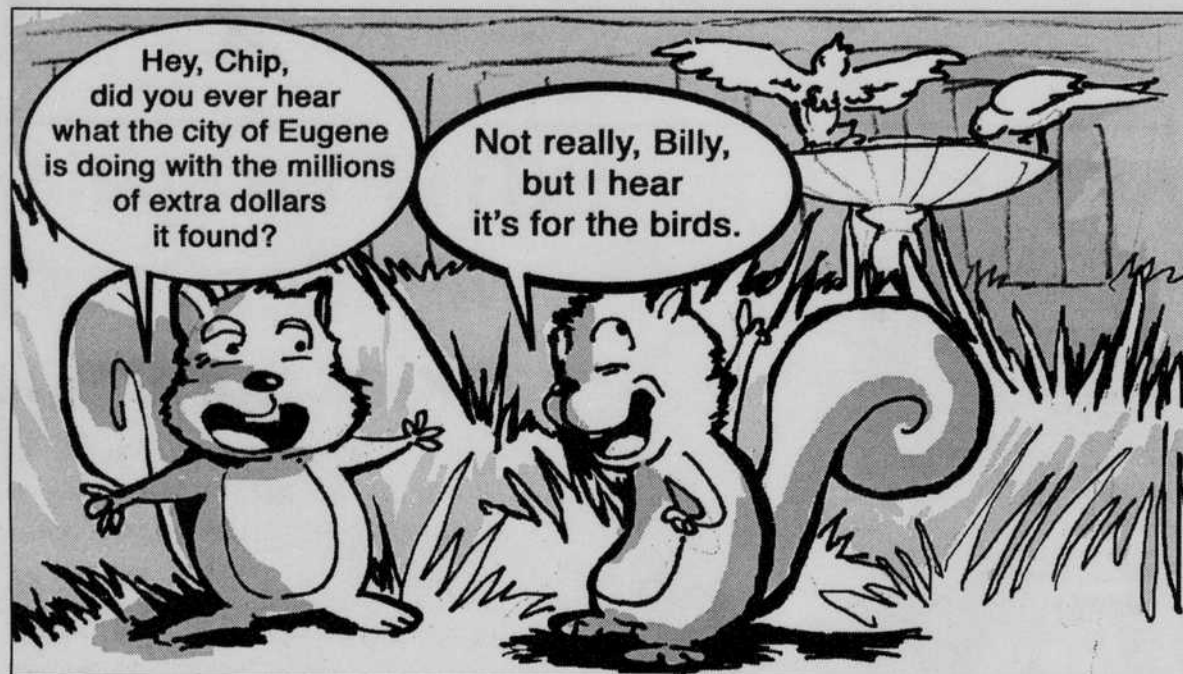


COMMENTARY

Thursday, August 5, 2004



Aaron Sullivan Illustrator

A call to prevention

On the night of April 6, 1994, the day Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana died when unfriendly fire shot his plane down, Hutu fighters began one of history's most efficient genocides. (Most other superlatives fail to distinguish it accurately from other instances of humanity's dirtiest crime.)

Raiding towns across the small, landlocked nation of Rwanda — a country just smaller than Maryland — extremist Hutu militiamen killed some 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus, committing in 100 days the last genocide of its size in the 20th century and what is by one count the 12th-most lethal genocide of recent history.

The memory of hundreds of thousands of Rwandan victims is name-dropped most often now as an example of immeasurably regrettable international neglect, and of foreign ignorance of gross human tragedy. (See Carl Sundberg's April 8 column, "Media's reaction to Rwanda showed distorted priorities," at www.dailymerald.com for a superb discussion of what its headline suggests.)

The present is, also regrettably, the time for such a comparison and thus probably one for action, too. In the Darfur region of western Sudan, some 30,000 black African Muslims have been killed, and another 1 million have scattered to more than 100 refugee camps dotting the region. Arab fighters called *janjaweed* (colloquially, "men on horses with guns," in Arabic) rape women, abduct children



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and dump carcasses in wells. (The last crime is especially heinous in a nation that already suffers from inadequate supplies of potable water.) Livestock are slaughtered, and villages lay plundered or even burned, but the woes of a million people have stirred less sympathy than they should.

(To put this atrocity in context, I offer a brief primer on the conflict's recent history: Two Darfuri groups, the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement and the Justice and Equality Movement, are connected to attacks on government property, and seek compensation for what they see as ethnically motivated long-standing social and political marginalization. In reaction, government forces and allied *janjaweed* have implemented a "scorched earth" campaign, driving black African Muslims from their hometowns. This conflict is essentially separate from the embattled nation's 21-year-old civil war between the Muslim government and Christian and animist rebels.)

Fortunately, the world community has paid at least some attention to the

situation: On July 3, the United Nations reached an agreement with Sudan that included disarming the *janjaweed* (whom the government still insists it does not support), under the implicit threat of sanctions imposed by the U.N. Security Council. Some 200 French troops stationed in neighboring Chad will move into the embattled region with a plane-load of U.N. aid, and the Sudanese government insists that improvements are being made (more recently, the United Nations instituted an earlier deadline). But a million people are still homeless, and the hatred motivating genocide is not likely easily quelled by an accord made half a world away.

In their recent trip report from Darfur, Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., and Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., painted a bleak picture of a massive humanitarian crisis, invoking comparisons to the decade-old Rwandan massacre. Indeed, citing the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the congressmen suggested that the Sudanese circumstances "may very well meet this test."

But if congressmen say a situation looks like genocide, shouldn't that draw more attention? If the United Nations-Sudan agreement fails to curb much of the ethnic infighting (as it almost certainly will), what then? The world should stand more alert this time to prevent another Rwanda.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Commentary misses interest-rate fact

It is valuable to inform students of financial issues, especially ones that involve the cost of education. While I am not personally familiar with the

legislation that was referred to in the commentary "Interesting rates" (ODE, July 6), I noticed a factual error. It was stated in the article that the bill proposed increasing the interest rate cap from 6.8 percent to 8.25 percent. I have been in college for four years and have taken out subsidized student loans through the University and

the rate cap has always been 8.25 percent. This difference means that the effects on students will be less drastic than those stated in the commentary.

Mela Daemion
 senior
 journalism

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kerry's plans envision an educated citizenry

My niece recently entered college. After helping her enroll, I was shocked to see a bill for \$459.00 for six credit hours. Full-time costs will be over \$1,000.00 per term at Lane Community College. The amount of a student loan will be more than she earns in a year.

With the loss of jobs to outsourcing, our children are going to need affordable, quality education. When Thomas Friedman explored outsourcing to India, he found one reason for India's success was its commitment to educating its citizens. To compete, America also must make education a priority.

I have been disappointed in our country's current lack of focus on education, so I looked at John Kerry's Web site. There I found thoughtful policies including a strong commitment to education such as: the College Opportunity Tax Credit, the Service for College Plan, and workable plan to stop rising tuition fees. Our children are going to have to be globally competitive. John Kerry's commitment to education gives us an excellent opportunity to make college universally available. I urge parents and college students to review these plans and help to make them a part of our commitment to our nation's young people.

My niece wants to become a nurse, but today's reality is that she may not be able to afford the education necessary to reach those goals.

Kathy Thomas
 Leaburg, OR

Consumers should effect changes in automobile industry

How is grouching about gas prices every few years with each new run-up in gasoline prices working for you?

When was the last time you, your class, group, or organization asked auto makers to make cleaner-air vehicles? When was the last time you asked others to ask auto makers to make more efficient and cleaner-air vehicles? When was the last time you supported auto-alternative transportation modes for others, if not for yourself?

Tell auto makers (as often as it takes) that you'd like them to phase in existing fuel efficiency technologies that would as much or more than double the gas mileage of most cars, light trucks, and SUVs, and would save consumers in reduced fuel costs as much or more than three times what these technologies would cost to install in new vehicles: (1) continuously variable valve engines, (2) integrated starter-generators, and (3) continuously variable automatic transmissions.

You don't have to wait fifteen to twenty years or longer (if ever) for hydrogen fuel technologies to be developed and deployed to keep fuel costs low, these other technologies exist right now. All you have to do is convince the auto industry to take them down from off the shelf and put them in new vehicles for a more efficient motoring and cleaner-air future.

And, consider practicing one or more of the dozen or more random and planned acts of car-lessness for cheaper gas and cleaner air.

Rand Knox
 San Rafael, Calif.

Testing, grades 'irrelevant' in education process

Jeremy Scheid's letter (ODE, July 20) is a perfect example of what we can expect when business majors are consulted in education matters: a letter replete with references to efficiency, monitoring and control with no mention of actual learning except when it comes to students learning how to "respect and handle authority." Sadly, the extent to which the educational system has been almost completely co-opted by the American business model means that little critique of Scheid's rationale is likely to be found even within the field of education.

Decades of research have shown that testing and grades are entirely irrelevant to the educative process. They are neither necessary for one to learn a given subject nor do they measure real-world competencies. Scheid is worried about students who use deception to artificially inflate their grades but ignores the fact that tests and grades are their own form of artifice and deceit, albeit ones that have the approval of the status quo, like the "boss man" Scheid refers to. Schools should be places where students follow a course of study because it allows them to achieve their intellectual and/or utilitarian goals. To the degree that tests are used at all they should be voluntary. I have researched such schools worldwide and their students do just fine in school and later in their chosen professions. Not only should our regimes of testing and grading be changed, they should be entirely dropped in favor of real learning based on intrinsic motivation.

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