

EDITORIAL

Dams, fish and voters

In the cold calculus of politics, salmon, steelhead and orcas might have more electoral value, in some races, than Baker County voters have.

That, at least, is a reasonable conclusion to reach based on Oregon Gov. Kate Brown’s recent endorsement of a proposal to remove four dams on the lower Snake River in Southeastern Washington.

In a letter to Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, Brown wrote that removing those dams would help restore Snake River salmon and steelhead runs, as well as benefit orcas that depend on salmon for food.

Although the dams produce electricity, Brown wrote in her letter to Inslee that it’s possible to remove the dams and “preserve the foundation of the low cost, carbon-free hydropower system that has helped fuel Oregon’s economy for the last century.”

But officials at Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative, which actually supplies electricity to most of Baker County as well as Union and parts of Grant and Harney counties, are not so sanguine. In a press release Wednesday, OTEC said removal of the dams “could have dangerous consequences for our mission to provide ... competitively priced electricity.” Nor do OTEC officials share Brown’s confidence that other renewable sources, such as wind and solar, can readily replace the dams’ clean megawatts.

Although Brown, a Democrat, isn’t eligible to run for re-election in 2022 due to term limits, election results strongly suggest that Democrats needn’t worry about alienating voters in our corner of the state — by endorsing actions that could boost our power bills, for instance.

In the November 2018 election Brown handily beat Republican Knute Buehler despite losing in OTEC’s four counties by wide margins — Baker (Buehler 75%, Brown 20%; several other candidates accounted for the remainder); Union (68%, 25%); Grant (76%, 17%); Harney (77%, 16%).

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Abortion question makes me a single-issue voter

I would like to express my view on the Democrat/Republican, liberal/conservative divide. I have come to be what they call a single-issue voter for the following reason.

In an article posted on the “Psychology Today” website dated Aug. 9, 2015, Gregg Henriques Ph.D. wrote an article entitled “When Does ‘It’ Become a Person?” He wrote: “After being challenged by Cuomo regarding his record on reproductive rights, an exchange ensued between (him and Marco

Letters to the editor

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Rubio) regarding the nature of human life. Rubio repeated an argument that

he often makes, which is human life begins at conception. Cuomo questioned this claim, and said the science was unclear.”

And this is precisely the point. Whether the issue is a scientific or philosophical one, liberals will admit that even they don’t know precisely when a human being actually becomes a “person” (whether in or out of the womb). And yet, their attitude is to kill them anyway. I could never vote for anyone having such a character.

Marc Todd
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Tarantino helps to dim Manson’s mystique

Movie director Quentin Tarantino not only dissolved the mystique that has made Charles Manson such an icon for half a century, but the filmmaker showed the criminal and his murderous acolytes as the blundering cowards they were.

Regardless of how many awards Tarantino adds to his resumé for his latest film, “Once Upon A Time... In Hollywood,” he deserves a specific accolade for reversing the too-common treatment of infamous crimes in all forms of media.

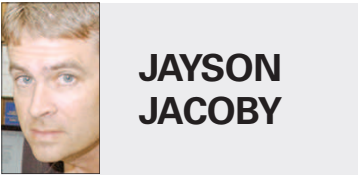
Tarantino focuses his prodigious talents on the victims, and in particular the actress Sharon Tate, murdered by members of Manson’s “Family” in August 1969. Tate, the wife of another famous director, Roman Polanski, was just 26 years old, and a couple of weeks from giving birth to the couple’s first child, when she was stabbed to death in her Bel Air home.

Tarantino’s treatment of the drug-addled creeps who killed Tate and at least seven other people in and around Los Angeles that summer is dramatically different from what I’ve seen in a score and more of films and documentaries.

Manson, who died in November 2017, himself makes the briefest of appearances, on screen for just a minute or so in a film that runs 2 hours and 41 minutes.

Tarantino eschews the tactics that have transformed Manson, a two-bit con man whose most notable attribute was his penchant for being arrested soon after serving his most recent sentence, into essentially a caricature of the evil cult leader.

“Once Upon A Time... In Hollywood” has none of the lingering close-ups of Manson’s loony grin



that dominate most other works that examine the murder spree.

Tarantino declines to give Manson — even a fictionalized version — a forum to expound on his nonsensical ideas about race wars and America’s social structure, among other things.

The story necessarily affords Manson’s followers a more prominent role, and Tarantino doesn’t ignore the undeniably unsettling reality that a band of social dropouts, mostly women in their teens and early 20s, were willing to do anything, including killing strangers, at the behest of their master.

As is my custom, I plod along several months behind the mainstream of pop culture. “Once Upon A Time... In Hollywood” debuted in late July, and although I’ve been fascinated with these crimes since I was a boy and was aware of the basic theme of Tarantino’s film, I didn’t get around to watching it until New Year’s Eve.

This isn’t, to be sure, a “Manson movie.”

(A useful term but one I dislike because it elevates the criminal over the victims — the very reason I found Tarantino’s contrariness so refreshing.)

Of the three main characters, only Tate is based on a real person. The two others are actor Rick Dalton and his stunt double buddy, Cliff Booth, brilliantly and effortlessly portrayed by the fine actors Leonardo DiCaprio (Dalton) and

Brad Pitt (Booth).

Tarantino alternates between following the exploits of Dalton and Booth, and Tate and her friends, first in February 1969 and, toward the end of the film, on Aug. 8, 1969. The connection between these two threads is mainly geographic — Dalton’s home is on the same dead-end road, Cielo Drive, as the one Tate and Polanski are renting.

Tarantino weaves the Manson Family into the film mainly by way of Booth giving a hitchhiking girl a ride to the Spahn Movie Ranch, the decrepit spot north of L.A. where Manson’s group lived. Manson is absent but Booth has an encounter with the group that is occasionally eerie — particularly when the girls congregate to try to stare him down.

But the scene ends with what turns out to be foreshadowing. Booth, as he’s preparing to drive away in Dalton’s Cadillac, finds a knife sticking from the sidewall of a front tire. Booth confronts one of Manson’s few male followers, who admits he pierced the tire. When the man refuses to put on the spare, Booth lands a few punches that leave the Mansonite’s face a bloody mess. The man replaces the tire — after Booth declines to give him a towel to clean his face.

“Poignant” is perhaps the adjective least likely to be applied to Tarantino’s career, but his treatment of Tate absolutely qualifies.

She is here no hapless victim, no beautiful footnote to a terrible tale.

Instead, Tarantino has actress Margot Robbie portray Tate as she truly was, based on the accounts of those who knew and loved her — a young actress who was genuinely enchanted by her good fortune and utterly absorbed in her impending

motherhood. Tarantino’s affection for Tate is as obvious as his contempt for Manson and his automatons.

The concept of the senseless crime is a familiar one. It’s equally common to ponder an alternative history where that crime didn’t happen.

Tarantino explores both themes in “Once Upon A Time... In Hollywood.”

But it’s his approach to this conceit, as much as his filmmaking brilliance, that for me distinguishes this movie. And why it had such a profound effect on me.

Given how long I dallied before watching the film I don’t feel guilty in revealing its climax.

The trio that Manson sends to Cielo Drive breaks in not to Tate’s home but to Dalton’s. And once inside, although they’re brandishing knives and a revolver, they end up not killing but being killed. The scene is typical Tarantino, a hyper-violent tableau involving, among other implements, a can of dog food, a pit bull and a flamethrower.

The film ends with Dalton meeting Tate’s friend, Jay Sebring, at the gate that the killers, in the real rather than the fictionalized world, bypassed in August 1969. Dalton and Sebring walk up the driveway, and just before the closing credits, we see, from above, Dalton hugging an obviously pregnant Tate.

The reality, of course, is quite different.

Tate, Sebring and the others were murdered, and in a manner beyond my ability to conceive even though I’ve read descriptions in all their horrific detail.

But Tarantino, it seems to me, reminds us that although no one

can change history, when we think of terrible crimes we needn’t focus solely on their gruesome nature, something that inherently emphasizes the people who are responsible and puts their victims in a subsidiary and passive role.

Manson is perhaps the ultimate example of this unfortunate tendency.

Tarantino encourages us to deny the fear that the very name Manson has instilled in so many people — to refuse to inflate a common criminal into a mythical figure regardless of how heinous his crimes were.

Tarantino accomplishes this at an elemental level by satisfying our emotional appetite for revenge — by subjecting the murderers to the same pain that they inflicted.

But the director also takes the more unorthodox approach of portraying Manson’s killers as bumbling rather than cunning, as cowardly rather than brave, a tactic that accentuates the essential stupidity of what they did in 1969.

There was, I suppose, an element of risk in this. Some people might bristle at Tarantino’s somewhat comedic treatment of actual events that are in no way amusing.

But I think his approach was as respectful as any more straightforward, sober take on this well-known story could be.

And his visceral style struck me as a more effective way to make the compelling argument that victims, and the lives they should have had, are infinitely more worthy of our thoughts than the cretins whose actions robbed the world of so much love and laughter.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.