

Rabbit-Proof Fence

Australia, 2002 (94 minutes)

Based on "Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence" by Doris Pilkington - a true story

In 1931, in Australia, it is the official policy of the government, as determined by the Chief Protector of the Aborigine Populace, Mr. Neville (Kenneth Branagh), that all "half-caste" Aborigine children (the offspring of a white parent and an Aborigine parent) are to be taken from their families and raised in orphanages where they can be "civilized" with the intention of marrying them to a white person or grooming them to be a domestic servant. To Neville and those like him, this policy – separating a child from his or her family – does not seem cruel or inhuman. Neville believes that "in spite of himself, the native must be helped."?

In the small village of Jigalong, three half-caste children - sisters Molly, 14 years old, and Daisy, who is eight, and their cousin, 10-year old Gracie – are taken from their mothers to live in the orphanage at Moore River, more than 1200 miles away from their home. There, they will learn the path of "duty, service, and responsibility" that every good Christian woman should follow. Except that Molly, Daisy, and Gracie escape. Pursued by an Aborigine tracker, Moodoo (David Gulpilil), and facing a seemingly impossible trek, they nevertheless press on, finding the rabbit-proof fence that stretches north-south across nearly all of the Australian continent and following it as a means to return to Jigalong.

Australian director Phillip Noyce, presents a powerful tale of courage and the indomitable quality of the human spirit. The film is based on the novel "Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence" by Doris Pilkington, which tells the true-life story of her mother, Molly. Although the social injustice that led to Australia's "Stolen Generations" is an important theme of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, we are drawn into the film by the real and immediate plight of the children.

The three young actresses playing the children are all excellent. Everlyn Sampi as Molly is outstanding. We never once see defeat in her eyes – only determination and defiance. Sampi makes us believe that if anyone can do the impossible, it is Molly. David Gulpilil has little dialogue, so he lets his eyes and expressions speak for him. It doesn't take long for us to recognize that, although he is hunting the girls, a part of him rejoices every time they get away. Kenneth Branagh plays the part of the "villain" with a charm and sincerity that is chilling. Mr. Neville is not evil – he is just horribly misguided. This approach makes him even more terrifying.

The music, an adaptation of Aboriginal melodies by Peter Gabriel, is haunting and effective. The camerawork never allows the beauty of the Australian outback to overshadow the human element – impressive, considering how glorious the countryside is. In just 94 minutes, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* tells its heartfelt and stirring story.

In 1996 **Doris Pilkington** released her book 'Follow the Rabbit-proof Fence,' the story of her mother's return to her homelands from the Moore River Native



Settlement using hundreds of kilometres of rabbit-proof fence as a guide.

Doris herself was forcibly removed from her family at a young age and taken to the Moore River Settlement north of Perth.

“We were taught that our culture was evil, that our people and practices were devil worshipers and evil doers ... I had to undo that before I could even learn anything about my own culture, language, cultural history, where my people came from, and who they were. I'm more fortunate than most now that I have an identity, an Aboriginal name. My traditional name, my true name is Nugi and my kinship name is Garimara. That was sort of shelved when I was institutionalised, but my mother called me that as soon as I went home.”

“I'm hoping that through my writings others who have been taken away from their traditional areas, would be encouraged to go back and reconnect with their land, reclaim their language, culture and identity. It took me over 10 years to really sit down and say "I belong to this land, the land belongs to me".

Discussion Questions:

Did you find the accents or language difficult to understand?

Which character did you find most interesting? Why?

Which scene in the film do you find most memorable? Why?

In your view, what is the main "message" of the film?