

Rabbit-Proof Fence (PG, 2002)

Eleven members watched the screening of the 2002 film, based on a true story by the daughter of the main aboriginal protagonist.

In the 1930s, the Australian government had a formal policy to remove half-caste (their term) aborigine children from their mothers, taking them to government run (often by religious orders) centres to train them as servants or maids, so that they could be integrated into white society. A government official was in charge in each of the states, effectively acting as a dictator over the affairs of the aborigines. In Western Australia, this was A O Neville, excellently played by Kenneth Branagh, who was a eugenicist who genuinely believed that his actions were in the best interest of the half-caste children.

He instructs the local police to remove 3 young half-caste girls (Molly 14, her younger sister Daisy 8, and their cousin Gracie 10, all their fathers were workers on the rabbit-proof fence of the title) from their mothers in Jigalong and take them to a training centre some 1500 miles away. Hating the centre, Molly decides to escape and takes her sister and cousin with her, on the arduous trek back to Jigalong, using the rabbit-proof fence as their guide. The film then follows the attempts of the police and a native tracker to catch them, along with the help (and hindrance) that the children get along the way, with ultimately only two of them arriving back in Jigalong.

The film deals very sensitively with the issue of the children being separated from their mothers, and it's matter-of-fact way of portraying A O Neville only heightens the horror of the programme he runs. The analogy to Nazi Germany is plain to see, especially when A O Neville pronounces that "duty, service, responsibility" is the new way for the girls, echoing the ghastly Arbeit Macht Frei of the German concentration camps.

Some of the minor characters are a little one-dimensional, but the police chief and the native tracker are both shown in a sympathetic light as they are somewhat reluctant to capture the children.

Probably the most devastating single element of the film comes right at the end, when some text is shown just before the credits — essentially, it says that the government policy was in place until 1970 and that the children who were removed are referred to as the "Stolen Generations".