



KEY TERMS:

irrational
evil

WWW.PRAGERU.COM

DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- At the beginning of the video, Mr. Prager points out that, "...most of the best-educated people in the world have been absolutely certain that reason alone will lead us to goodness and a good world... We don't need religion. All we need is reason. Evil... doesn't make sense. It's irrational." Why do you think that so many thinkers automatically equate reason with goodness? What is the major flaw in this premise?
- Mr. Prager goes on to further point out that, "...you'll often hear murderous dictators referred to as "madmen" and their evil regimes described as products of "madmen;" in other words, the very opposite of rational men." What is evil? Where do you think it comes from? If evil is not the product of irrational thought, what is it a product of?
- Later in the video, Mr. Prager explains that, "Reason leads to good only when you want it to. Just as it leads to bad when you want it to. Reason is just a tool. It is no more intrinsically moral than a knife. A knife can be used to murder or to torture people. But in the hands of a surgeon, it can be used to save lives." What do you think motivates a person to use the tool of reason for good or for bad acts? If reason, as a tool, is not intrinsically moral, do you think that people (who decide to utilize reason to justify good or bad behavior) can be intrinsically moral? Why or why not?
- Towards the end of the video, Mr. Prager shares with us his, "...belief that all human beings are created in God's image and are therefore infinitely precious. But the preciousness of all human life is a belief, not an assertion of reason." What is the difference between belief and reason? Should one or the other be weighted more heavily when judging acts to be morally good or not? Why or why not? How much do you think beliefs and values influence a person's actions versus how much reason guides a person's actions? How much do you think beliefs and values should influence a person's actions versus how much reason guides a person's actions?
- At the very end of the video, Mr. Prager admonishes us to, the next time we, "...read of some terrible crime or some terrible regime, please don't dismiss it as irrational or mad. Call it for what it is. Evil." Why do you think that this call to action is so important to Mr. Prager? How do you think people changing their mindset to divorce the notion of good or evil being associated with reason or lack of reason help make the world better?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: A.O. Neville

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “An expose of Australia’s racism,” then answer the questions that follow.

- Who was A.O. Neville, and what did he do? Why was he called ‘Mr. Devil?’
- Was Chief Protector Neville evil? Do you think that the actions he took, especially concerning aboriginal children, were rational? Why or why not? Would you consider the girl’s escape and attempt to return home rational? Why or why not?
- What values and beliefs were reflected in how the Australian government viewed and treated aboriginal people? What values and beliefs were reflected in what Molly, Daisy, and Gracie did? Do you think that values and beliefs can be evil, or are values and beliefs just the extensions of good or evil people?



QUIZ

IS EVIL RATIONAL?

1. Many people associate “Madmen” and their evil regimes with being:
 - a. Rational.
 - b. Irrational.
 - c. Hypatrians.
 - d. Calvinists.

2. Reason leads to good instead of evil:
 - a. 66% of the time.
 - b. Never.
 - c. 55% of the time.
 - d. Only if you want it to.

3. It is never reasonable to cheat on a test.
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. According to Dennis Prager, it was _____ for families to put their family in danger to save Jews in Nazi Germany, because _____.
 - a. Foolish | It never saved any lives.
 - b. Reasonable | There was never any risk.
 - c. Irrational | They acted against self-preservation.
 - d. Reasonable | Every human life is subjectively valuable.

5. A professor of Philosophy at Princeton University advocated:
 - a. Partial-birth abortions for full-time working women.
 - b. A ban on teaching students Dialectical Materialism.
 - c. Killing a disabled baby in the interests of the infant’s family.
 - d. Reason as a proof that God was not the force behind the Big Bang.



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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An expose of Australia's racism

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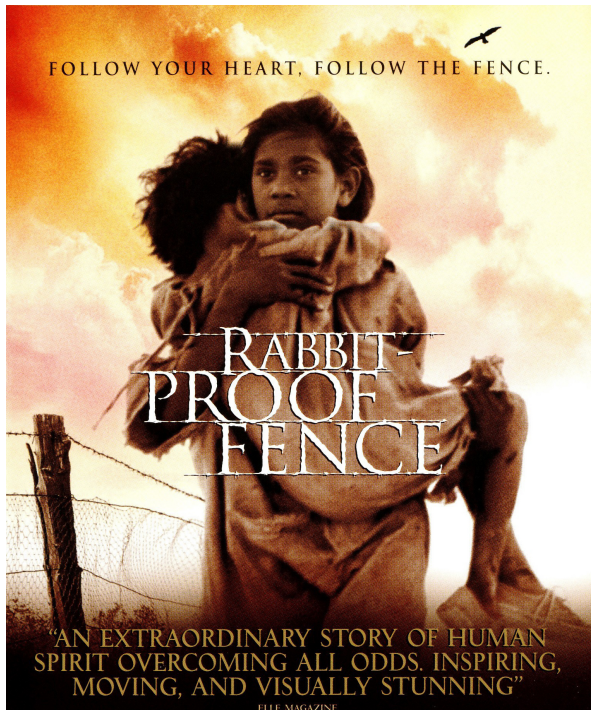
Rabbit Proof Fence

Directed by Phillip Noyce

Introducing Evelyn Sampi, Tianna Sansbury and Laura Monaghan

With Ningali Lawford, David Gulpilil, Deborah Mailman and Kenneth Branagh

Screening at Dendy Newtown and cinemas across Australia



REVIEW BY KIM BULLIMORE

In 1931, on the orders of the "devil", three young "half-caste" Aboriginal girls were spirited away from their home at Jigalong in north-west Western Australia to the Moore River Native Settlement camp just north of Perth. *Rabbit Proof Fence* is the story of their incredible 2400-kilometre trek home.

Phillip Noyce's film, which is based on the book *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence* by Doris Pilkington Garimara, the daughter of the eldest runaway, Molly, is a beautifully crafted look at one of the darkest episodes in Australia's black-white relations and is set to reignite the debate surrounding the stolen generations.

The forced removal of sisters Molly, Gracie and Daisy were just one case in thousands which took place under the auspices of the Western Australia's Aborigines Act of 1905. WA, like most states between 1869 and 1911, had introduced a variety of laws establishing a Board for the Protection of Aborigines and which regulated and controlled every aspect of Aboriginal life. Each

state appointed a "Chief Protector" and a number of other "protectors" to oversee the administration of these laws.

In most states the "protector" was able to designate where an Aboriginal person could or couldn't live; could make local regulations governing their conduct; controlled their assets; had the power to decide who Aborigines could or couldn't marry and who could and couldn't work and where. In addition, the Chief Protector was designated the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children and had the power to decide which children would be removed from their parents, where they were sent, as well as being able to authorise their adoption.

Probably the best known of the chief protectors was A.O. Neville, who retained the position in Western Australia for 25 years. Neville was known to the Aboriginal communities as "Mr Devil". In the eyes of many, he has come to symbolise the callousness of Australia's forced assimilation policies.

Up until the day he died, Neville remained a firm believer in forced assimilation and that it was his and other whites' duty to "save the natives from themselves".

Kenneth Branagh's portrayal of Neville in *Rabbit Proof Fence* conveys Neville's contradictory nature, swinging between paternalism and admiration for his charges. We are left in no doubt, however, about his authority and ability to decide their lives.

Throughout the film, Noyce juxtaposes Neville's officiousness and obsessiveness in directing the lives of his "protectees", with the determination of Molly to return to her family and to live a "free" life.

Neville's (and other white officials') justification for the removal of "mixed blood" children rested on the Eurocentric belief that the Indigenous people of the colonised countries were "dying races" and that aboriginality should be "bred out" through forced assimilation into the racially superior white community.

These officials believed that assimilation could be achieved through a period of "identity reorientation" which ensured that children only spoke English, had little contact with "full bloods" (including members of their own family) and Aboriginal customs, and were schooled in European beliefs and customs such as Christianity, and domestic and labouring duties.

Between 1940 and 1969 an estimated 5600 children were removed in NSW alone, while in Queensland the figure has been estimated between 30% and 40% of Aboriginal children. In return for becoming "just like white people", Aborigines were expected to be grateful and obedient.

In the case of Molly, Gracie and Daisy, they are transported to the notorious Moore River Native Settlement for schooling to become "domestics". While Moore River was portrayed by government authorities as a "model" settlement, at least one staff member did not agree, stating "there should be a sign over the entrance: 'Abandon Hope, All Ye Who Enter Here'".

The settlement was little more than a prison camp. It had bars over windows, locked doors and punishment for disobedience and escape attempts. Food was abysmal, often consisting of bread, fat and black tea, occasionally supplemented by porridge and soup. There was no fresh fruit, vegetables, eggs or milk.

In 1934, when it was suggested that native settlements receive the same rations as prisons, Neville bristled at the suggestion saying that while more food was required, "if we fed them on such a diet as is supplied to Broome Goal, I feel that we should have a community of idle natives".

While most staff at Moore River were not necessarily cruel (although some were), they were indifferent to the plight of the children. As Susan Maushart points out in her 1993 book on Moore River (*Sort of a place like home*), "most of the evil committed at Moore River was committed in the name of ... bureaucratic expedience".

Children and single women were locked in dormitories for 12 hours a day, having to remain in silence with nothing to do or read, as this saved the white administrators labour and money. Compared to the boys, girls suffered the worst as they were given more responsibilities and duties, greater restrictions on their movement and fewer gratifications. As a result, girls ran away more often than boys.

Punitive discipline took the form of floggings and solitary confinement in the "boob" — a structure the size of an outside toilet with just enough room to sit down in. Made of galvanised iron, it was a virtual oven during summer. Captured runaways, in particular, were subject to confinement in the boob, often having their heads shaved and receiving only bread and water during the three or four days they were imprisoned.

Molly, Gracie and Daisy's escape from Moore River is a daring one. In the film they are pursued by Aboriginal trackers and police as they attempt to find the rabbit proof fence that will lead them home. In real life, Neville also dispatched aeroplanes to search for them.

Noyce beautifully depicts the girls' epic journey through sweeping panoramic views of the vast wilderness they must traverse. This is reinforced by the limited dialogue throughout the film from the girls, reflecting their immersion in a completely alien world. Instead, Noyce allows the girls to emotively express themselves through their expressions and tenacity. The main thing which the audience is struck with throughout the film is Molly's unshakeable belief that not only is the fence their only way home, but also her confidence that they will get home.

Rabbit Proof Fence is an exceedingly timely film for a number of reasons. Firstly, because of the current attacks on the rights of Indigenous Australians. Not only has the racist right increased its attempts to discredit the very existence of the stolen generations, the Howard government has pushed Indigenous rights off the national agenda. This is despite the fact that Aboriginal men and women — many just teenagers — are still being locked up and are dying under mandatory sentencing regimes in WA and the Northern Territory, where it has not been fully repealed.

Secondly, it won't be hard for audiences to draw the parallels between the Australian government's treatment of Aborigines last century and with the government's treatment of refugees today. Today, the Australian government is again locking up children and separating families, only this time it's asylum seekers who are being subjected to this racist policy.

As with Aborigines in the early 20th century, refugees are being isolated from the rest of the Australian population (supposedly for both their own good and ours) and every aspect of their existence regulated. The faces and names of the bureaucrats may have changed, but their manner has not. The White Australia policy has returned and Philip Ruddock is simply Australia's A.O. Neville of the 21st century.

The vivid portrayal of the regimented and fearful lives suffered by the stolen generations and their families under the direction of forced assimilation policies — whether they are living in traditional camps, in the government-run settlements or as domestics in the white community — reveals the inhumanity of racist practices and conveys not only what was, but what is.

The poignancy of the film serves to challenge not only the "white blindfold" view of history that John Howard so keenly adopts, but also challenges those such as Padraic McGuinness and others on the right who seek to deny the existence of the stolen generations and their suffering. As Phillip Noyce points out, "black Australia doesn't need to come to terms with its past, white Australia does". Hopefully, *Rabbit Proof Fence* will help in this process.

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