



Directed by Phillip Noyce

Writing Credits Christine Olsen wrote the screenplay, adapted from Doris Pilkington's nonfiction book.

Music by Peter Gabriel

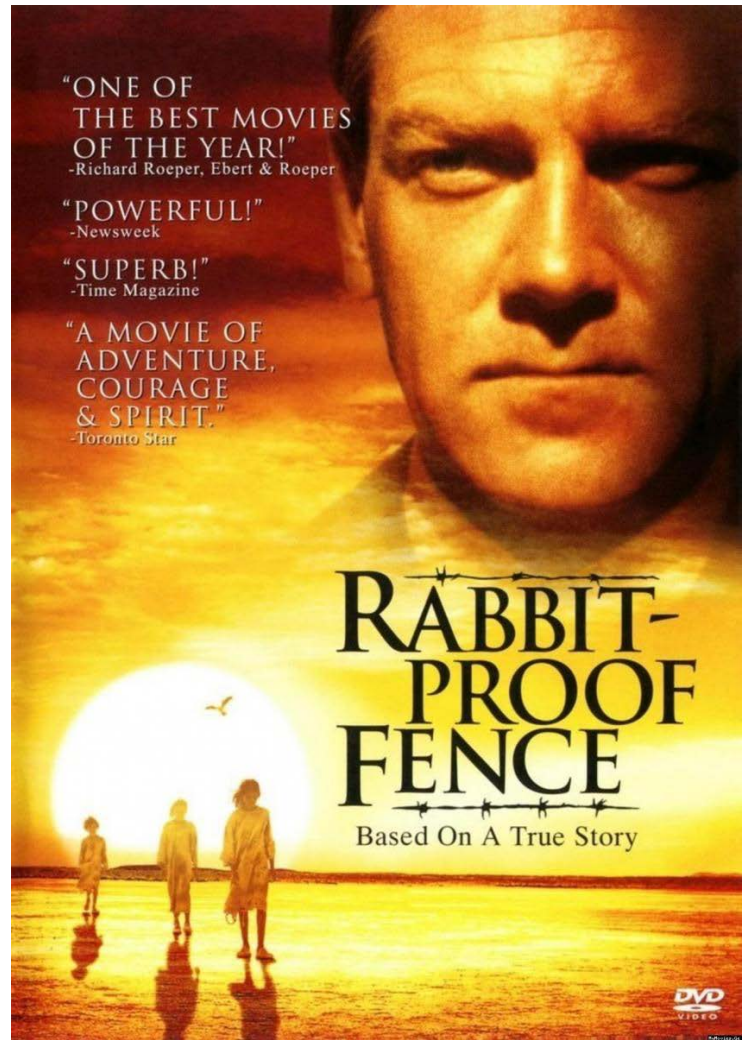
Cinematography by Christopher Doyle

Cast

Everlyn Sampi...Molly Craig
Tianna Sansbury...Daisy Craig Kadibil
Laura Monaghan...Gracie Fields
David Gulpilil...Moodoo the Tracker
Jason Clarke...Constable Riggs
Kenneth Branagh...A. O. Neville
Ningali Lawford...Maude, Molly's mother
Myarn Lawford...Molly's grandmother
Deborah Mailman...Mavis
Garry McDonald...Mr. Neal
Roberta Lynch...The Teacher
Roy Billing...Police Inspector
Natasha Wanganeen...Nina, Dormitory Boss

Phillip Noyce (b. April 29, 1950 in Griffith, New South Wales, Australia) is an Australian director, producer, and screenwriter of film and television. Since 1977, he has directed over 19 feature films in various genres, including historical drama (1978's *Newsfront*, 2002's *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, 2002's *The Quiet American*), thrillers (1989's *Dead Calm*, 1993's *Sliver*, 1999's *The Bone Collector*), and action films (1989's *Blind Fury*, 1997's *The Saint*, 2010's *Salt*). He has also directed the Jack Ryan adaptations *Patriot Games* (1992) and *Clear and Present Danger* (1994) and the 2014 adaptation of Lois Lowry's *The Giver*.

Christopher Doyle (b. May 2, 1952 in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia) is nothing if not outspoken. For



a lensman with such a lyrical approach to his craft, his interviews are extremely direct. Growing up in Australia, he left and sailed around the world for three years before finally touching down in Taiwan. In addition to Mandarin and French, he speaks Cantonese fluently, and has taken lessons in Spanish, Japanese and Thai. His Chinese is at a higher level than his English. He has said: "I left Australia when I was 18 and I've been a foreigner for 36 years. I think that's very important to the way I work because as a foreigner you see things differently. But I started making Chinese-language films so I regard myself as a Chinese filmmaker. I just happen to be white. Or pink, actually." Doyle didn't start making films until he was 34, citing that life experience was more important than film school. "Wasted youth was probably the most valuable asset for what I'm doing now. You see the world, you end up in jail three or four times, you accumulate experience. And it gives you something to say. If you don't have anything to say then you shouldn't be making

films. It's nothing to do with what lens you're using.... And then we made this film *That Day on the Beach* (1983) that won all these awards and I didn't know what I was doing. I fluked it." He often employs extremely bright, vivid colors experimenting with slow motion, motion blur, as well as rhythmic and arbitrary camera movement. His from-the-hip approach is perhaps most evident in Gus Van Sant's remake *Psycho* (1998) which he apparently shot without ever having seen the original. He has worked on over fifty Chinese-language films, being best known for his collaborations with Wong Kar-Wai in *Chungking Express* (1994), *Happy Together* (1997), *In the Mood for Love* (2000) and *2046* (2004). He has worked with the equally outspoken Chilean director Alejandro Jodorowsky on *Endless Poetry* in 2016. He has collaborated with other Chinese filmmakers on projects including *Temptress Moon* (1996), *Hero* (2002) and *Dumplings* (2004). He has also made more than 20 films in various other languages, working on *Liberty Heights* (1999), *Last Life in the Universe* (2003), *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002), *Paranoid Park* (2007), and *The Limits of Control* (2009), among others.



Peter Gabriel (b. 13 February 1950, Chobham, England) is an English musician, singer, songwriter, record producer and activist. He rose to fame as the original lead singer of the progressive rock band Genesis. In 1983, Gabriel developed the soundtrack for Alan Parker's film *Birdy* (1984). In 1988, Gabriel became involved as composer for Martin Scorsese's film *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988). Scorsese had contacted Gabriel about the project since 1983 and wished, according to Gabriel, to present "the struggle between the humanity and divinity of Christ in a powerful and original way". In 1997, Gabriel was invited to participate in the direction and soundtrack of the *Millennium Dome Show*, a live multimedia performance staged in the Millennium Dome in London throughout 2000. In 1998, Gabriel appeared on the soundtrack of *Babe: Pig in the City* as the singer of the song "That'll Do", written by Randy Newman. The song was nominated for an Academy Award, and Gabriel and

Newman performed it at the following year's Oscar telecast. He stuck with soundtrack work for his next project, scoring for the Australian film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002), work that was recognized with a Golden Globe nomination. He made another soundtrack appearance for the 2004 film *Shall We Dance?*, singing a cover version of "The Book of Love" by the Magnetic Fields. Gabriel contributed to the *WALL-E* soundtrack in 2008 with Thomas Newman, including the film's closing song, "Down to Earth", for which they received the Grammy Award for Best Song Written for a Motion Picture, Television or Other

Visual Media. His "In Your Eyes," famously, appears in an iconic boombox serenade scene in Cameron Crowe's *Say Anything...* (1989).

Everlyn Sampi (b. October 6, 1988 in Derby, Western Australia, Australia) is an Australian actress of Bardi Australian Aboriginal and Scottish descent. Sampi starred in the 2002 film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, as child of the stolen generation Molly Craig. Sampi also appeared in the 2007 Australian drama *The Circuit*. Sampi now lives in Broome (Australia).

David Gulpilil (b. July 1, 1953 in Maningrida, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia
Died: November 29, 2021 (age 68) in Murray Bridge, South Australia, Australia) was an Indigenous Australian actor and dancer, known for the films *Walkabout* (1971), *Storm Boy* (1976), *Crocodile Dundee* (1986), *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002) and *The Tracker* (2002). He initiated and narrated the film *Ten Canoes* which won a Special Jury Prize at the 2006 Cannes Festival. He also had memorable appearances on the television series *The Leftovers* (2014-2017).

Kenneth Branagh (December 10, 1960 in Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK) is a British actor and filmmaker. Branagh trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and has served as its president since 2015. He has won an Academy Award and four BAFTAs. Branagh has both directed and starred in several film adaptations of William Shakespeare's plays, including

Henry V (1989), *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993), *Othello* (1995), *Hamlet* (1996), *Love's Labour's Lost* (2000), and *As You Like It* (2006). He was nominated for Academy Awards for Best Actor and Best Director for *Henry V* and for Best Adapted Screenplay for *Hamlet*. He has starred in the television series *Fortunes of War* (1987), *Shackleton* (2002), and *Wallander* (2008–2016) and in the films *Celebrity* (1998), *Wild Wild West* (1999), *The Road to El Dorado* (2000), *Conspiracy* (2001), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002), *Warm Springs* (2005), *Valkyrie* (2008), *The Boat That Rocked* (2009), as Sir Laurence Olivier in *My Week with Marilyn* (2011), *Dunkirk* (2017), and *Tenet* (2020). Branagh directed and starred in the romantic thriller *Dead Again* (1991), the horror film *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), and the action thriller *Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit* (2014). He directed and starred as Hercule Poirot in the mystery drama adaptations of Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (2017) and *Death on the Nile* (2022). He also directed such films as *Swan Song* (1992), which earned an Academy Award nomination for Best Live Action Short Film, *The Magic Flute* (2006), *Sleuth* (2007), the Marvel superhero film *Thor* (2011), the live-action adaptation of Disney's *Cinderella* (2015) and *Artemis Fowl* (2020). For his semi-autobiographical comedy-drama *Belfast* (2021), Branagh was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture, Best Director and won Best Original Screenplay, making him the first person to be nominated in seven different Academy Awards categories, surpassing Walt Disney, Alfonso Cuarón and George Clooney with six. Branagh has narrated numerous documentary series, including *Cold War* (1998), *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999), *The Ballad of Big Al* (2001), *Walking with Beasts* (2001), *Walking with Monsters* (2005), and *World War I in Colour* (2005).

Roger Ebert: "Rabbit-Proof Fence"

The most astonishing words in "Rabbit-Proof Fence" come right at the end, printed on the screen as a historical footnote. The policies depicted in the movie

were enforced by the Australian government, we are told, until 1970. Aboriginal children of mixed race were taken by force from their mothers and raised in training schools that would prepare them for lives as factory workers or domestic servants. More than a century after slavery was abolished in the Western world, a Western democracy was still practicing racism of the most cruel description.

The children's fathers were long gone--white construction workers or government employees who enjoyed sex with local aboriginal women and then moved on. But why could the mixed-race children not stay where they were? The offered explanations are equally vile. One is that a half-white child must be rescued from a black society. Another was that too many



"white genes" would by their presumed superiority increase the power and ability of the aborigines to cause trouble by insisting on their rights. A third is that, by requiring the lighter-skinned children to marry each other, blackness could eventually be bred out of them. Of course it went without saying that the "schools" they were held in prepared them only for

menial labor.

The children affected are known today in Australia as the Stolen Generations. The current Australian government of Prime Minister [John Howard](#) actually still refuses to apologize for these policies. Trent Lott by comparison is enlightened.

Phillip Noyce's film is fiction based on fact. The screenplay by [Christine Olsen](#) is based on a book by [Doris Pilkington](#), telling the story of the experiences of her mother, Molly, her aunt Daisy and their cousin Gracie. Torn from their families by government officials, they were transported some 1,500 miles to a training school, where they huddled together in fear and grief, separated from everyone and everything they had ever known. When they tried to use their own language, they were told to stop "jabbering." At the time of the adventures in the movie, Molly ([Everlyn Sampi](#)) is 14, Daisy ([Tianna Sansbury](#)) is 8 and Gracie ([Laura Monaghan](#)) is 10. The school where they are held is not a Dickensian workhouse; by the standards of the time, it

is not unkind (that it inflicts the unimaginable pain of separation from family and home does not figure into the thinking of the white educators). The girls cannot abide this strange and lonely place. They run away, are captured, are placed in solitary confinement. They escape again and start walking toward their homes. It will be a journey of 1,500 miles. They have within their heads an instinctive map of the way and are aided by a fence that stretches for hundreds of miles across the outback, to protect farmlands from a pestilence of rabbits.

The principal white character in the movie is A.O. Neville ([Kenneth Branagh](#)), who in 1931 was the administrator of the relocation policies and something of an amateur eugenicist, with theories of race and breeding that would have won him a ready audience in Nazi Germany. That Australians could have accepted thinking such as his, and indeed based government policy on it, indicates the sorry fact that many of them thought aborigines were a step or two down the evolutionary ladders from modern Europeans. That the aboriginal societies of Australian and New Zealand were remarkably sophisticated was hard for the whites to admit—especially because, the more one credited these native races, the more obvious it was that the land had been stolen from their possession.

As the three girls flee across the vast landscape, they are pursued by white authorities and an aboriginal tracker named Moodoo ([David Gulpilil](#)), who seems not especially eager to find them. Along the way, they are helped by the kindness of strangers, even a white woman named Mavis ([Deborah Mailman](#)). This journey, which evokes some of the same mystery of the outback evoked in many other Australian films (notably "[Walkabout](#)"), is beautiful, harrowing and sometimes heartbreaking.

The three young stars are all aborigines, untrained actors, and Noyce is skilled at the way he evokes their thoughts and feelings. Narration helps fill gaps and supplies details that cannot be explained onscreen. The end of the journey is not the same for all three girls, and there is more heartbreak ahead, which would be wrong for me to reveal. But I must say this. The final scene of the film contains an appearance and a revelation of astonishing emotional power; not since the last shots of "[Schindler's List](#)" have I been so overcome with the realization that real people, in recent historical times, had to undergo such inhumanity.



Brian Pendragh: "Leaping The Fence Of Australia's Past" (IOFilm, 2003)

It was a hot summer night in July 1999. Phillip Noyce was asleep at home in Los Angeles, where he had established himself as one of Hollywood's top directors since emigrating from Australia years earlier. He had worked with Harrison Ford and was preparing for the premiere of *The Bone Collector*, a \$50 million (50m dollars) thriller with Denzel Washington.

Suddenly Noyce's sleep was shattered by the ringing of the telephone. The clock showed 3am. With that sick feeling that comes with the sense that something is terribly wrong, the lumbering, bearded Australian put the receiver to his ear. The voice on the other end was that of a woman with an antipodean accent. Noyce braced himself.

The caller announced herself as Christine Olsen and said she was a writer and producer. She had co-written a TV series on Indonesia, she had produced "an Islamic road movie", and now she had the "perfect script", and Noyce was the only man who could do it justice.

Relief gave way to outrage. "In Hollywood you spend a lot of time erecting a fence to keep people out," he says, "because if you let your guard down every buggah who is a waiter or a car parker is going to want you to do something." Noyce's fence had been breached and he was not happy.

Producers sent scripts to his office every day. A-List stars phoned him - in the office. Unknown writers did not phone him, at home, in the middle of the night. He paid people to read scripts, and if they were good enough, he might read them too. But he would not be reading this one.

"I just thought, 'Oh my God, she's never going to leave me alone,'" he booms, a jovial, easy conversationalist, when not suffering from sleep

deprivation. "Play Misty for Me, I kept thinking," he adds, with a chuckle, alluding to the Clint Eastwood thriller in which a DJ's devoted fan turns into a deranged stalker. So it was - don't call us, and we definitely won't call you. Good night.

Stolen generations

So how come Noyce wound up in the Outback with this crazy woman, sleeping on an old aborigine woman's floor? What was the true story that moved him to tears and took him back to Australia for his first film there in more than a decade?

Rabbit-Proof Fence tells the story of "half-caste" children who were brought up in camps and homes, in an attempt to "advance" them into white society - as domestic servants and farm labourers. What made a misguided policy into a heart-breaking one was the element of compulsion. Thousands were forcibly removed from aboriginal mothers between 1900 and 1971.

The "stolen generations" had become the subject of fierce debate in Australia, but the expat director knew nothing of the controversy. The politics interested him, but what really fired his imagination was the story of three children who run away from a camp and attempt to walk home over 1,000 miles of inhospitable country - The Great Escape, with three cute little girls up against everything the state and nature can throw at them.

Fantastic journey

Rabbit-Proof Fence is the true story of Molly Craig, who, in 1931, at 14, was taken from her mother in Jigalong, a depot on one of the fences that were being constructed across the continent in an attempt to keep marauding rabbits from destroying the western farmlands. Along with her half-sister Daisy, 8, and cousin Gracie Fields, she was taken to the Moore River Native Settlement in Western Australia.

"I would not hesitate to separate any half-caste from its aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic momentary grief might be at the time," wrote one "protector". "They soon forget their offspring," He maintained it was just like removing a pup from a bitch. The film would show the terrified children sprinting across stony wasteland in a futile attempt to escape the

police, distraught mothers wailing in the dust, and an aged granny battering her head with a stone in impotent frustration. It would show the girls in a cage as they are transported by train to their new home and a culture of flogging and solitary confinement for those who failed to appreciate what the white man was doing for them.



One day, when the coming rainstorm would hide their tracks, Molly, Daisy and Gracie set off for home, traipsing across the desert, scavenging from farmers and aborigine hunters, cooking what little meat they could obtain over an open fire, close to collapse with hunger, heat and exhaustion. For long parts of the journey the girls followed the rabbit-proof fence.

After walking for nine weeks, Molly and Daisy were reunited with their mother (though Gracie was recaptured). They disappeared into the desert, just the sort of uplifting ending the film needed. They are still living in the Jigalong area, 600 miles north-east of Perth - two days on a bus, followed by a couple of hours in a truck.

Their story was retold in the book *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, written by Molly's daughter, Doris Pilkington, and published by the University of Queensland Press in 1996. It might never have attracted anything more than local attention had it not been for Christine Olsen, who forced herself on Pilkington, with much the same persistence she would later apply to Noyce.

Why Noyce?

Noyce was part of the new wave of Australian film-making talent of the 1970s, before moving to LA and directing such slick, empty, high-budget entertainments as *Sliver* and *Clear and Present Danger*. "I no longer knew what it was like to feel Australian," he tells me, "but then along came this story."

He grew up in the Fifties in the country town of Griffith, in New South Wales, where his neighbours included 300 aborigines. There was no race problem - they had their own settlement, beyond the town limit, "behind a barbed wire fence". He says: "We hardly saw them in the town and nobody asked any questions."

Rabbit-Proof Fence got him thinking about those 300 dark, nameless faces, thinking of an alternative history of Australia from the black man's perspective. It was a history of loss - loss of land, loss of culture, loss of pride, loss even of their own children. It was the history of a people who were told they should be ashamed of the colour of their skin and should keep to their side of the fence. Like the rabbits.

He travelled with Olsen to Jigalong, where his meeting with Molly Craig shaped his vision of the film. "The first trip just provided the basis for the whole movie, because I realised this was a movie about the indomitable human spirit," he says. "Molly was just so determined that she wasn't going to accept the fate that had been decreed to her and no institution was going to defeat her."

Everlyn "is Molly"

The role of Molly went to Everlyn Sampi, a poor kid from the remote community of Djarindjin in Western Australia. She had mixed aborigine and Scottish ancestry. Her grandad stowed away on a ship in Glasgow Docks, wound up in Australia, married an aborigine and had eight children, including Everlyn's mother Glenys, who was herself taken into care by the white authorities.

Everlyn did not adapt readily to the demands of film-making, trying to run away and driving Noyce to despair. "We tried desperately to recast," he says, "but we just couldn't find anyone who was nearly as charismatic and talented as her... The more she rejected us the more convinced I was that she was another version of the real Molly, her disdain for authority, her scepticism that she had to do what the white man told her because it was good for her... She is Molly."

The real Molly and Daisy appear briefly at the end of the film, old women now, along with a voice-over that will reduce many to tears. Molly married and had two daughters. All three were taken to Moore River. Molly escaped and walked back to Jigalong again, carrying the infant Annabelle, but the authorities caught

her and took Annabelle away. Molly never saw her again.

The untold story

What the film does not tell you is that Annabelle was told she was an orphan... and that she was white. She was sent to another institution, because her skin was lighter. "These children grew up without any contact with aborigine people," says her sister Doris Pilkington, now a grandmother, a small, articulate woman with brown skin and silver hair.

Doris was transferred to a Christian mission where she was "conditioned to believe that my people were devil-worshippers - their culture was evil." She was so ashamed to have an aborigine father that she pretended he was white. She was 25 before she saw her parents again, in 1962. Her voice breaks as she adds: "If I had chosen my parents myself I couldn't have done any better than the ones I had."

The words prick the heart, because for so many

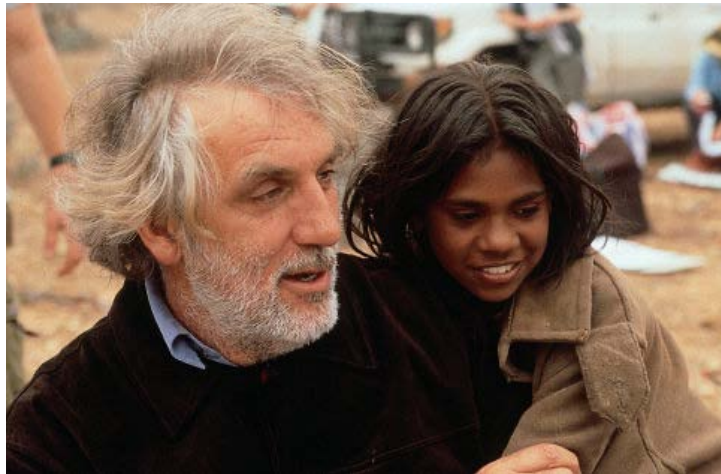
years she did not have them. She was robbed of their love and affection and company by Christian missionaries who insisted it was all for her own good.

At least Doris was reunited with her mother. Annabelle refuses to acknowledge her mother, sister and aborigine heritage. Doris met her once, by chance, years ago, when they were nursing aides at the

same hospital in Perth, but Annabelle refused to believe Doris was her sister. Doris could not be her sister, because she was black.

Doris went on to study journalism and more recently tracked her sister down in South Australia. She sent copies of her books and offered to pay her fare for a reunion. "She sent the package back... I just threw it away... I was so hurt and offended." Only months later did Doris read the letter that accompanied the returned package. "She said, 'I told you 20 years ago I didn't want to know anything about my history and I don't want it now today.'"

Every time Doris visited her mother, Molly would greet her and then ask "Any news?", meaning, any news of Annabelle. "I said, 'Mum, she doesn't want



to even know us.' So her words were, 'She's dead then. Let her be dead.' But then after I was getting ready to go back to Perth again, she came and she said, 'Try one more time.'"

Next generation offers hope

Annabelle seems to symbolise a nation in denial and Doris says she feels nothing but sympathy for her. For so long, most white Australians, like the young Noyce, knew virtually nothing about the aborigines beyond the fence or wandering on mysterious walkabouts. Many still refuse to believe the reports of abduction and abuse, dismissing them as exaggeration, false memories and lies.

Although Annabelle remains a stranger to Doris and Molly, there is hope. Annabelle's children have contacted Doris and want to meet their grandmother. "I told them when they rang me, 'I would be very happy and delighted to take you up, but you must tell your mother about what you are doing. You're not doing this behind her back.'"

"We were deceived all our lives," she says firmly. "We're not having our children do that to their mothers. So that's the situation right now..." Her voice trails away, leaving an empty silence. The film may be complete. But the story is far from over.



Stephen Holden: "Aborigine Girls Run Away from a Racist Program" (NY Times, 2002)

Casting a measured gaze on a shameful chapter of Australian history, "Rabbit-Proof Fence" makes no bones about who is right and wrong in its devastating portrayal of that country's disgraceful treatment of its Aboriginal population for much of the last century. Although the movie, adapted from a book by Doris

Pilkington Garimara, pushes emotional buttons and simplifies its true story to give it the clean narrative sweep of an extended folk ballad, it never goes dramatically overboard.

On the side of right are the Australian Aborigines whose families were torn apart by a government policy of forcibly removing children of mixed race from their Outback communities and transporting them to settlement camps hundreds of miles away. Once in the camps, they were forbidden to speak their native language and were indoctrinated into the religion and customs of the dominant white culture. Eventually they were integrated into the general population as domestic servants and farm laborers.

On the side of wrong is the Australian government, which, for more than half a century (from 1905 to 1971) carried out this appalling program of legalized kidnapping. "Rabbit-Proof Fence" is set in 1931, when the executor of that policy was A. O. Neville (Kenneth Branagh), a man so intransigently certain of its ultimate benefit to everyone involved that he makes Rudyard Kipling seem benign.

The chief protector of Aborigines in Western Australia in 1931 when malignant racial theories were in ascendancy throughout the world, Neville is the legal guardian of all Aboriginal people in that state. Convinced that the Aborigines are dying out, he is committed to hastening their disappearance by enforcing a law that forbids children of mixed marriages to marry full-blooded Aborigines. In one scene, Neville smugly pulls out a chart that supposedly proves how, in three generations after an interracial marriage, all Aboriginal characteristics have disappeared in the offspring.

Christine Olsen's subtle but biting screenplay and Mr. Branagh's understated performance refrain from portraying Neville as an overtly fiendish monster. As he executes decisions that are all taken in a spirit of benign paternalism, he comes across as the apotheosis of the kind of blind racism that takes for granted the superiority of white Western culture.

This sturdy, touching movie, directed by Phillip Noyce, who also oversaw "The Quiet American," personalizes this historical outrage by telling the story of three young girls who escape from a settlement and set out to make the 1,200-mile trek back home on foot. The events are based on the experiences of Ms. Garimara's mother, Molly (Everlyn Sampi), who is 14 at the time of the movie; her 8-year-old sister Daisy (Tianna Sansbury), and their 10-year-old cousin Gracie (Laura

Monaghan). All three are mixed-race children fathered by itinerant white fence workers.

The story begins in the tiny depot of Jigalog in northwestern Australia on the edge of the Gibson Desert. Coursing through this Aboriginal community is a rabbit-proof fence. Built to keep the country's rabbits on one side and its pasture land on the other, it spans the entire length of Australia from north to south.

Hearing that the three girls are running wild in Jigalog, Neville authorizes their removal to the Moore River Native Settlement 1,200 miles away. But when his deputy, Constable Riggs (Jason Clarke), drives to Jigalog to pick them up, he must overcome the resistance of the girls' mothers from whose arms they are forcibly wrested. The Moore Settlement resembles a spartan rural orphanage with dormitory housing and strict regimentation. When children try to escape, they are retrieved by Moodoo (David Gulpilil), an experienced black tracker, and punished with solitary confinement.

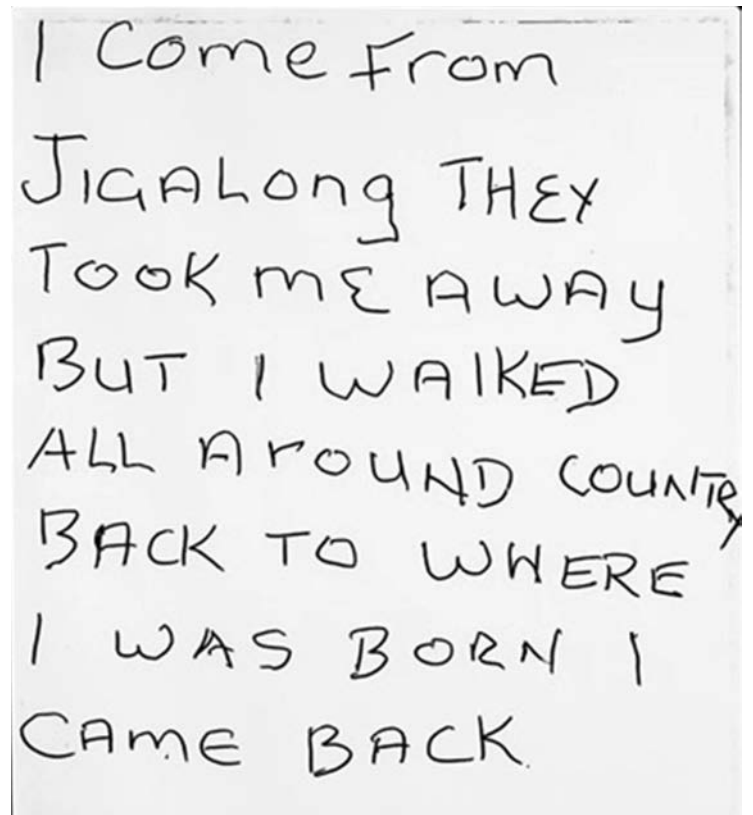
For Molly, who bristles at the daily humiliation, the final straw comes when the girls are told they have no mothers. One day while the other children are in church, she coaxes Daisy and Gracie to flee with her into the woods. The bulk of the movie follows them on a three-month trek through forest, field and desert, during much of which they use the rabbit-proof fence to guide them home. As the news of their remarkable elusiveness reaches Jigalog, Molly and Daisy's mother, Maude (Ningali Lawford), and their grandmother, Frinda (Myarn Lawford), hold a vigil in which they chant and send signals by tapping on the fence.

If "Rabbit-Proof Fence," which opens today in Manhattan and Los Angeles, has the upbeat tone and deliberate pace of a ballad, Molly is its radiant folk heroine. Profoundly intuitive, indomitably courageous, endowed with superhuman resilience, she is the stuff of legend. And as played by Ms. Sampi, she emits a steady glow even in moments of desperation.

The story could easily have been treated as a brutally suspenseful manhunt in which the girls survive any number of narrow escapes from their pursuers. But in Mr. Noyce's hands their journey is touched with enchantment, and the movie becomes a paean to the beauty of the Australian countryside and the decency of most of the common people who aid the fugitives. Under Molly's resourceful guidance, the girls are able to find enough food and water to keep them going. If their continued well-being seems unreal, that's part of the

movie's myth-making strategy. As the story jumps back and forth between their journey and the frustrated attempts to capture them, at moments it almost feels like a jaunty game of hide and seek.

But the spic-and-span wholesomeness of "Rabbit-Proof Fence" ultimately makes its sting all the sharper. Its portrait of people who see themselves as decent, self-righteously trying to eradicate another culture, has the impact of a swift, hard slap in the face.



I Come From
Jigalong THEY
TOOK ME AWAY
BUT I WALKED
ALL AROUND COUNTRY
BACK TO WHERE
I WAS BORN I
CAME BACK.

Columbia Law School Faculty Film Series: Rabbit-Proof Fence" (2016)

"The Stolen Generations" is a term used to describe Indigenous Australian children taken from their families by Australian governments, churches and welfare organizations between the early 1900s and the 1970s. Between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970.^[1] Stated motivations for the abductions ranged from child welfare concerns to expressly genocidal hopes to eradicate Indigenous people. The history of the Stolen Generations remains highly politically contentious in Australia.

The policy of assimilation led governments to remove children from their Indigenous parents and send

them to live in institutions under white supervision. Cecil Cook, the “Chief Protector of Aborigines” in the Northern Territory in the 1930s, described efforts to “breed him white” and ensure “the complete disappearance of the black race”.^[ii] A.O. Neville, Cook’s counterpart in Western Australia, took the same approach, hoping to “merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there were ever any Aborigines in Australia”.^[iii] Children were classified as “half castes”, “full bloods” and “octroons” in the pseudo-scientific language of eugenics. A 1937 conference of state and federal governments stated that the destiny of Aboriginal Australians “lies in their ultimate absorption”.



Conservative historians tend to attribute generally benevolent attitudes to those that developed and implemented the forced removals, and argue that relatively few individuals were actually removed. Part of the difficulty in determining how many children were removed relates to the deliberate failure of governments to keep accurate records. Article 127 of the Australian Constitution read from 1901, “*In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted.*” This section was removed in 1967 with over 90% of Australians voting to amend the Constitution. Many children, especially twins or triplets, were taken immediately at birth, without every being documented at all.

Children were often removed while police restrained their parents. They were taken, occasionally to foster families and generally to church run institutions. The conditions in the institutions were harsh. Children were taught to reject their Aboriginality, and punished for speaking their native languages. Many faced sexual and physical abuse.^[iv] Some children were placed in work by the authorities, but never received wages. Children were denied opportunities to communicate with their families. Many were told falsely that they had been rejected by their parents, or that their parents were dead. By the late 1980s Indigenous Australian activists and historians had managed to raise awareness of the Stolen

Generations. However, the extent of the forced removals was not revealed until the 700-page *Bringing Them Home* report. The report was the product of an extensive national inquiry that took place from 1995 through 1997. The Inquiry conducted hearings across Australia, and concluded, “the Australian practice of Indigenous child removal involved both systematic racial discrimination and genocide as defined by international law”.^[v] The inquiry made 54 recommendations, including that reparations be paid, and that Australian

parliaments offer formal apologies. Then Prime Minister John Howard refused to issue an apology, arguing that Australia had been “too apologetic”^[vi] and that “the balance

sheet of our history is one of heroic achievement”.^[vii] Howard was ousted in the 2007 federal election.

The first order of business for the new parliament was Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s apology on behalf of the federal government to the Stolen Generations. The Prime Minister said, “*For the pain, suffering, and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.*”^[viii]

The apology was welcomed by many Indigenous people and members of the Stolen Generations. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, said that the Parliament had “paid respect to the Stolen Generations. For their suffering and their loss. For their resilience. And ultimately, for their dignity.”^[ix]

The federal government has to date refused to provide reparations to members of the Stolen Generations, although Bruce Trevorow, a South Australian man stolen from his mother at the age of 13 months, launched a successful court action for compensation against the state government.^[x] Following calls from Indigenous

activists for reparations, two states, Tasmania and South Australia, have instituted schemes whereby members of the Stolen Generations may access compensation without litigation.

While recognizing the power of the apology and efforts at reparations, it is important to note that Indigenous communities still suffer systemic disadvantage disproportionately to non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians account for around 3% of the Australian population, but about 27% of Australia's prison population.^[xi] Indigenous unemployment is approximately three times that of the nation overall.^[xii] The life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is at least ten years.^[xiii] Particularly worryingly, Indigenous children are still over-represented in their contact with Australian welfare departments and are far more likely to be placed in "out of home care" than their non-Indigenous counterparts.^[xiv]

The effects of the forcible removal of children over most of the 20th century are hard to quantify. The *Bringing Them Home* report estimated that there was not an Indigenous family in Australia untouched in some way by the practice. Although the federal government has offered an apology, and some governments have introduced reparations, the trauma inflicted by the genocidal policies of Australian governments is still felt by Indigenous people across Australia today.



"Rabbit-proof fence" (Wikipedia)

The State Barrier Fence of Western Australia,^[1] formerly known as the Rabbit Proof Fence, the State Vermin Fence, and the Emu Fence, is a [pest-exclusion fence](#) constructed between 1901 and 1907 to keep [rabbits](#) and other agricultural pests, from the east, out of [Western Australian](#) pastoral areas.^[2]

There are three fences in Western Australia: the original No. 1 Fence crosses the state from north to south, No. 2 Fence is smaller and further west, and No. 3 Fence is smaller still and runs east–west. The fences took six years to build. When completed in 1950, the rabbit-proof fence (including all three fences) stretched 2,023 miles (3,256 km). The cost to build each kilometre of fence at the time was about \$250 (equivalent to \$18,906 in 2018).^[3]

When it was completed in 1950, the 1,139-mile (1,833 km) No. 1 Fence was the longest unbroken fence in the world.^[4]



THE SPRING 2022 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS #44:

All films in the series but two (*Notorious* and *The Power of the Dog*) are available from Criterion or Netflix: **c** after a title indicates it is available on Criterion, **p**=Amazon Prime, **p\$**=Amazon Prime with an extra \$4 fee. *The Power of the Dog* is available, for now, only on Netflix. *Notorious* is available on FlixFilm (low-resolution versions are free on YouTube and Tubi.). All four subscription services let you cancel at any time, so you should have access to all 24 films for well under \$100. *The Gunfighter* is on Amazon Prime and, in low rez, free on Tubi. Nine of the films—all with “UB” after the title—are available free to anyone with a UB email account via the UB Library’s Swank and Kanopy portals. Five films are available only on non-UB streaming services: *Le Corbeau*, *The Gunfighter*, *Naked*, *Salesman* and *The Power of the Dog*. (The Swank titles will be available at UB’s Library for a year; the Kanopy titles for 3 years.)

- Feb 1: 1921 Victor Sjöström, *The Phantom Carriage* c UB-Kanopy
 Feb 8: 1934 Frank Capra *It Happened One Night* c p\$ UB-Swank
 Feb 15: 1941 John Huston *The Maltese Falcon* p\$ UB-Swank
 Feb 22: 1943 Henri-Georges Clouzot *Le Corbeau* c
 Mar 1: 1946 Alfred Hitchcock *Notorious* FlixFilm, YouTube, UB-Swank, Tubi (free)
 Mar 8: 1950 Henry King, *The Gunfighter* p\$, Tubi (free), [YouTube](#) (free)
 Mar 15: 1958 Orson Welles *Touch of Evil* p\$ UB-Swank
 Mar 29: 1962 Yasujiro Ozu *An Autumn Afternoon* c p\$b UB Kanopy
 Apr 5: 1973 Federico Fellini *Amarcord* c p\$ UB Kanopy
 Apr 12: 1993 Mike Leigh *Naked* c
 Apr 19: 2002 Phillip Noyce *Rabbit-Proof Fence* p\$ UB-Swank
 Apr 26: 2016 Asghar Farhadi *Salesman* p
 May 3: 2021: Jane Campion *The Power of the Dog* NETFLIX
 May 10: 2011 Martin Scorsese *Hugo* p\$ UB-Kanopy

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The Buffalo Film Seminars are presented by the State University of New York at Buffalo

