

Rabbit Proof Fence

Australia : 2002 : dir. Philip Noyce : : ? min
 prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

 Kenneth Branagh

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	⌘	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5858	0.5	0	0	438	-	-	-	-	-	No	<i>unseen</i>

Premiering at the Edinburgh Festival 2002, this is the story of three aboriginal girls of white paternity who are forcibly separated from their mother under Australia's programme of ethnic apartheid (never called by that name, naturally) which was enforced from 1910-1970. The children are placed in a resettlement home in Western Australia run by "Mr Devil" (Branagh), who earnestly pursues his duty, reintegrating such children of mixed race parentage into white society. The three girls run away and face a long trek across barren wilderness, pursued by an aborigine tracker, back to their mother's home. The rabbit-proof fence of the title was a demarcation line across Western Australia which would guide the children home. The film is based on Dorothy Pilkington's written account of "the lost generations". The girls seem to be aged between 6 and 14. Based on actual personalities, two of the surviving girls – now women in their eighties – are seen briefly at the end of the film.

Discussed on "**Newsnight Review**" (August 23), the panel – three out of four of them women – lavished praise on the film and its choice of theme (as "the emotional journey of three women"), and particularly noted its absence of villains, Hollywood-style sensationalising or polemicism. The governmental policy itself is the villain of the piece, not Branagh or the other public servants doggedly executing its programme. The three aboriginal girls cast were all novices from a rural background, selected out of a pool of children who "workshopped" the story first. One of the "**Newsnight**" critics (not the man) dissented from the general applause, feeling that however laudable the theme, and despite good performances from Branagh and the girls, it was badly scripted, flatly photographed and punctuated by longuers when there is nothing to look at but the forbidding landscape. It played, she thought, like the work of a debut director who had over-reached himself, and not an experienced film-maker like Noyce. No-one drew parallels with Nicolas Roeg's "**WALKABOUT**", although the comparison seems obvious, nor with titles like "**THE CHANT OF JIMMY BLACKSMITH**". The main point of interest for them was Australia beginning to face up to its racist traditions. The film went on general release in the UK in November 2002. Further details pending.

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