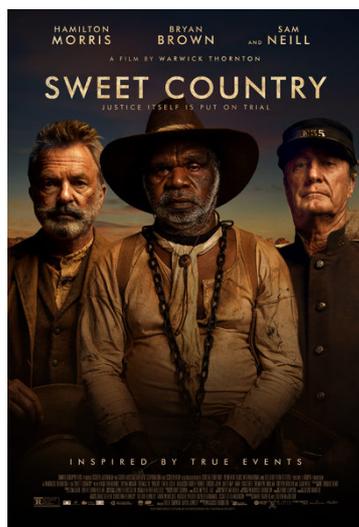


Movie discussion resource

Engage with culture without disengaging your faith.

Sweet Country



Genre: Drama

Rating: MA15+ (adult themes, violent images, sexual content, language)

Length: 113 minutes

Starring: Hamilton Morris, Sam Neill, Bryan Brown

Director and Cinematography: Warwick Thornton

Script: Steven McGregor, David Tranter

Brief synopsis

Set in cattle country on the frontier in the Northern Territory after the First World War, Sam Kelly (Hamilton Morris), an Aboriginal station hand works for a Christian station owner, Fred Smith (Sam Neill), who treats his Aboriginal workers with respect and care. A new station owner, Harry March (Ewen Leslie), a returned soldier, arrives in an adjacent property and asks Fred for help fixing his cattle yards. Fred, against his better judgement, sends Sam and his wife, Lizzie (Natassia Gorey-Furber), to help Harry. Harry abuses Sam, rapes his wife and sends them packing without food. Later, Harry pursues Philomac, a runaway Aboriginal boy, who escaped after he had been chained up. Mad and drunk, Harry approaches Fred's house, thinking Philomac is hiding there. Fred is away but Sam and his wife are minding the house. Harry fires his gun several times into the house and then breaks the door down. Sam shoots him in self defence. Sam goes on the run, with Lizzie, knowing he has killed a "white fella". Fletcher (Bryan Brown), the local police sergeant, leads a posse in pursuit.

Questions for discussion

Some general questions might provide enough framework to get started:

- ❖ What stood out as the main points/highlights in the movie?
- ❖ What themes are explored?
- ❖ What assumptions were embedded in the story?
- ❖ What challenged you? What questions did it raise for you?
- ❖ Are there aspects of the story that resonated with your own experience or with the experience of others in a similar situation?
- ❖ Are there biblical or theological themes or characters that come to mind?

Coming to terms with our history: the Pastoralists

White settlers had just arrived and carved out station properties from the land occupied by Aboriginal people. Many Aboriginal people chose to travel further away or stayed and provided labour for the station owners. They became skilled stockmen, drovers and station hands. Without their labour these stations could not exist. Harry and fellow station owner Mick display the attitudes common at the time. Aboriginal people were a resource to be exploited and used. *How is this depicted in the film? What happened later when Aboriginal people were given citizenship rights? Find out what has happened to wages held in trust for Aboriginal people. What do you know about the Wave Hill walkoff in 1966? Google and report back to the group.*

Coming to terms with our history: the Missionaries

Mission Stations were established to promote the gospel but also provided a sanctuary for Aboriginal people. The Ernabella Mission in the north of South Australia was established primarily for the latter reason by Dr Charles Duguid, a Presbyterian. Unlike many other missions there was no compulsion to embrace Christianity and local language and customs were encouraged. People were taught trades in all types of farm work. A school teaching literacy in Pitjantjatjara and a clinic were established. *Find out more about this and other missions, such as Poonindie, Point McLeay and Point Pearce. See the case study....*

Owen Karpany: a Case Study

Born to a stockman father and midwife mother at Wallaroo Hospital, Mr Karpany said the indignity of having to ask the mission superintendents for permission to come and go or take part in cultural activities was replaced by abandonment and the government of the day selling off the rich farmland then later leasing it back to the Aboriginal people.

The 65-year-old recalls when Point Pearce was a bustling community where work was plentiful and young people had career options. He spent time working as a gardener, carpenter, stockman and considered a career as a jockey before he got too heavy.

"We had a mechanic shop, people were working on home maintenance, carpenters, painters, gardeners and there was a dairy that provided milk," he recalls. "There was a butcher shop, a piggery, cattle, horses, trucks tractors and tractors and stuff like that." The dairy lasted for a while but now Point Pearce has little to offer its young residents and does not even receive internet access. "When I was young we had choices, now the kids here have got nothing," Mr Karpany says.

Source: AndrewDowell, Sunday Mail, 20 Jan 2018. [AdelaideNow](#)

What do you think went wrong? How can we fix this?

Coming to terms with our history: the Government

The authority figures in this film are the police and Judge Taylor (Matt Day). Police relied on Aboriginal trackers to pursue felons. If the felons were Aboriginal the police had little chance of finding them. On encountering a group of Aboriginal warriors while in pursuit of Sam, Archie the tracker (Gibson John) retreats but Sergeant Fletcher (Bryan Brown) takes no notice until too late. He calls to retreat but his constable panics and fires his gun killing one of the Aboriginals, whereupon he is killed in turn. These sort of incidents were not uncommon and have been termed the Frontier Wars. The existence of massacres has often disappeared from local histories only to be rediscovered later.

Why do you think these events were forgotten by Europeans?

Early governments tried to treat Indigenous people as equal citizens under British Law but this did not always work. Why? Can you find or know of recent examples?

Philomac

Philomac (played by twins: Tremayne & Trevan Doolan) is an Aboriginal boy. His father is likely to be Mick Kennedy (Thomas M Wright), the owner of the station. Philomac is poorly treated but knows how to survive. He helps himself to anything going and tells people what they want to hear. Archie tells him how he, Archie, was taken from his parents and that this is not his country. He warns Philomac against the whitefella things that will get him into trouble.

What do you know about the stolen generations. What future do you see for Philomac? What is he up against? Is it any different today?

Standing up against racism

After some derogatory remarks regarding the Aboriginals, Fred Smith replies, "We're all equal here. We're all equal in the eyes of the Lord."

What other examples did you notice of racism in the film. How did people respond?

The judge arrived in town to try the case against Sam.

What obstacles did he meet and how did he respond? Have you seen similar examples in our community today? How should we respond?

These people haven't got a hope. Our country hasn't got a hope.

Fred wanders off into the bush in despair speaking these words.

What would be your response? What indicators of hope were there? Discuss?