OFFICE OF IMPROBABLE JURISDICTION

EXPERIMENTAL INTELLIGENCE AND AUTONOMOUS PERSONS REVIEW BOARD

NIMH-ERB-004

THE PLAN FOR THORN VALLEY

On Self-Government, Collective Dissent, Legitimate Opposition, and the Right to Establish an Independent Community

An Institutional Inquiry into the Authority of an Autonomous Society to Reform Its Own Conditions of Existence, the Rights of Members Who Reject That Reform, and the Distinction Between Collective Moral Judgment and Compulsory Conformity

Issuing Authority: Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
Reviewing Body: Experimental Intelligence and Autonomous Persons Review Board
Docket: NIMH-ERB-004
Related Proceedings: NIMH-ERB-001; NIMH-ERB-002; NIMH-ERB-003
Reserved Proceedings: NIMH-ERB-005; NIMH-ERB-006
Classification: Autonomous Governance, Collective Decision-Making, Political Dissent, Institutional Reform, Minority Interests, Leadership Accountability, Emergency Powers, and the Ethics of Self-Determination
Date: October 28, 2026
Status: Substantive Findings Entered; Individual Responsibility Reserved for Subsequent Proceedings

Nature of Proceeding: Fictional regulatory satire and literary ethics review.

This proceeding examines events depicted in Robert C. O'Brien's *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (1971) and Don Bluth's *The Secret of NIMH* (1982).

The literary and cinematic narratives constitute separate evidentiary records.

The Office does not allege misconduct by any actual scientific institution.

No real-world legal authority, municipal jurisdiction, or judicial power is claimed.

I. NOTICE OF CONTINUED INVESTIGATION

The Experimental Intelligence and Autonomous Persons Review Board hereby opens a subsidiary investigation concerning the development, adoption, and attempted implementation of the proposal commonly identified as the Plan.

The Plan contemplated the abandonment of the established rosebush settlement and the creation of a more independent community in Thorn Valley.

The proposal arose from circumstances established in the preceding proceedings.

The rats had escaped experimental confinement.

They had acquired knowledge.

They had developed infrastructure.

They had established a functioning community.

Their technological achievements were considerable.

However, the community's prosperity depended in substantial part upon resources obtained from the surrounding human environment without the knowledge or agreement of those providing them.

Certain members of the community came to regard this dependence as inconsistent with the kind of society they wished to establish.

The Plan represented an effort to address that inconsistency.

The Board recognizes the ethical significance of this development.

It further recognizes that the proposal required more than a declaration of principle.

Its implementation would affect housing, access to resources, labor, personal security, established comforts, and the future prospects of the community's members.

It would require the abandonment of a settlement constructed through substantial collective effort.

It would introduce new hazards.

It would alter relationships among the inhabitants.

It would require individuals who had become accustomed to a particular standard of living to accept conditions that might initially be less comfortable.

The Office therefore identifies a distinction between the moral purpose of reform and the legitimacy of the means used to accomplish it.

A proposal may seek a just objective.

Its implementation may nevertheless impose burdens requiring independent justification.

A leader may correctly identify an institutional failing.

That correctness does not automatically establish unlimited authority to determine how every member must respond.

The central question is therefore stated:

When a community determines that its established arrangements are inconsistent with its principles, what authority does it possess to require its members to participate in their reform?

The inquiry shall proceed.

II. QUESTIONS PRESENTED

The Board identifies ten principal questions.

First: What constitutes legitimate collective decision-making within a community whose political institutions have developed without formal recognition by external authorities?

Second: Does the moral desirability of a proposed reform establish the legitimacy of every procedure used to adopt it?

Third: What obligations are owed to members who oppose a proposed transformation of the community?

Fourth: May a community require its members to surrender established material advantages in pursuit of greater collective independence?

Fifth: Under what circumstances may a collective decision authorize the destruction or abandonment of shared infrastructure?

Sixth: Does political dissent become illegitimate merely because the dissenter's preferred arrangements are ethically objectionable?

Seventh: What distinguishes disagreement, refusal, departure, obstruction, and violent interference with collective decisions?

Eighth: What obligations do leaders possess to disclose the costs, risks, and uncertainties of a proposed reform?

Ninth: How should collective authority change when unforeseen danger makes the original timetable impracticable?

Tenth: Can a society genuinely claim to be self-governing if its members are permitted to deliberate only until they disagree with its leadership?

The Board considers the tenth question central.

The mere existence of meetings does not establish meaningful self-government.

Nor does the existence of disagreement establish that self-government has failed.

The Office shall examine the distinction.

III. THE CHARACTER OF THE PLAN

The Office first considers the purpose of the proposed relocation.

Thorn Valley offered the possibility of establishing a community less dependent upon resources obtained from humans.

In the literary record, the rats intended to develop agriculture, construct appropriate facilities, and sustain themselves through organized labor.

This represented a substantial departure from their existing arrangements.

The rosebush settlement had allowed them to employ extraordinary intelligence in the adaptation and use of human infrastructure.

The proposed settlement would require them to direct that intelligence toward producing more of what they consumed.

The Board recognizes the significance of this change.

The Plan was not merely a decision to exchange one residence for another.

It proposed a transformation in the relationship between work, consumption, and collective responsibility.

Under the existing arrangement, the community possessed access to benefits whose production depended substantially upon others.

Under the proposed arrangement, the community would assume greater responsibility for producing its necessities.

The Board does not presume that complete independence from outside resources was possible.

Nor does it regard trade or interdependence as inherently unethical.

However, the Plan sought to reduce reliance upon concealed appropriation.

That objective was morally significant.

The proposal therefore involved two related but distinct ambitions.

The first was **material independence**.

The second was **ethical consistency**.

The rats wished to establish a community whose survival did not require continued participation in practices some of its members regarded as improper.

The Office recognizes that ethical consistency may require material sacrifice.

It further recognizes that the members required to make that sacrifice may disagree about its necessity.

That disagreement does not become meaningless merely because the proposed reform possesses a defensible moral purpose.

The inquiry therefore turns from the Plan's objectives to the authority by which those objectives were pursued.

IV. NICODEMUS AND THE AUTHORITY TO LEAD

The Office considers the position occupied by Nicodemus.

Within the narratives, Nicodemus exercises substantial influence over the rat community.

He possesses knowledge of its history.

He understands the circumstances of its escape.

He participates in the development of its institutions.

He advocates relocation.

His leadership is associated with the effort to establish a more independent and ethically defensible society.

The Board recognizes these contributions.

It does not regard them as insignificant.

Nevertheless, leadership must be distinguished from ownership.

The fact that an individual contributed substantially to the establishment of a community does not automatically confer unrestricted authority over the community's future.

The Office has already rejected the proposition that the laboratory acquired perpetual control over the rats because it created the conditions under which their intelligence emerged.

A related principle applies within the community itself.

A leader's contribution to the creation of an institution does not establish that the institution belongs to the leader.

The Board therefore identifies several matters requiring consideration.

By what means did Nicodemus acquire his leadership position?

What procedures governed collective decisions?

Could members challenge his proposals?

Were disagreements recorded or discussed?

Could a decision be reconsidered?

Were members entitled to propose alternatives?

Could leadership authority be transferred?

The available narratives establish substantial collective discussion but do not supply a complete constitutional framework.

The Office therefore declines to invent one.

No formal electoral result is presumed.

No quorum requirement is established.

No written charter is entered.

The absence of such records does not prove that the community lacked legitimate governance.

It does, however, limit what may be concluded concerning the precise source and scope of Nicodemus's authority.

The Board therefore enters a provisional principle:

The legitimacy of a leader's objective does not independently establish the legitimacy of every power exercised in pursuit of that objective.

The proposition remains applicable even where the leader is unusually wise.

The Office recognizes that Nicodemus possessed considerable wisdom.

It does not recognize wisdom as a complete substitute for accountable government.

V. WHETHER THE PLAN WAS PROPERLY DELIBERATED

The literary record establishes that the relocation proposal was discussed within the community.

Members expressed differing views.

Jenner opposed the proposal.

Others shared at least some of his concerns.

The controversy was sufficiently substantial to produce an enduring division.

The Board considers these circumstances evidence that the Plan was not simply announced without discussion.

However, the existence of discussion does not resolve every question concerning procedural legitimacy.

The Office distinguishes between the following activities:

1. Informing members that a decision has been made.
2. Allowing members to express dissatisfaction.
3. Inviting members to participate in deliberation.
4. Permitting members to propose alternatives.
5. Establishing a procedure through which the community determines its course.
6. Preserving a meaningful opportunity to reconsider the decision when circumstances change.

These activities may occur together.

They are not identical.

A meeting may permit speeches without allowing meaningful participation.

A consultation may occur after the decisive arrangements have already been established.

An opportunity to disagree may be of limited value if disagreement carries an automatic penalty.

The Office does not find that these defects necessarily occurred within the rat community.

The narrative record does not justify such a conclusion.

Nevertheless, the Board considers the distinctions essential to evaluating collective authority.

The rats possessed sufficient intelligence to recognize that their future was contested.

They possessed sufficient communication abilities to articulate competing positions.

They possessed sufficient organizational capacity to undertake complex collective projects.

The Office therefore considers it reasonable to expect that their decision-making arrangements should account for those capacities.

The institution cannot claim the advantages of sophisticated collective intelligence while treating its members as incapable of meaningful political participation.

A community does not demonstrate self-government merely by gathering its members to hear what their leaders have already decided.

The Board recognizes the possibility that the rats' actual deliberations exceeded the procedures visible in the narrative.

It enters no adverse finding upon speculation.

The principle is nevertheless sustained.

VI. THE RIGHT TO DISAGREE

The Office next considers the ethical status of opposition to the Plan.

The proposal sought to reduce the community's dependence upon resources obtained from humans.

This objective was defensible.

Its adoption, however, would require the relinquishment of advantages enjoyed by the community.

Members might reasonably disagree concerning the timetable.

They might question the adequacy of preparations.

They might fear the hazards of Thorn Valley.

They might doubt the community's ability to establish agriculture.

They might object to the abandonment of machinery.

They might propose a different approach to reducing dependence.

Or they might simply prefer the existing settlement.

The Board recognizes that these positions do not possess identical moral force.

Some may rest upon legitimate concerns.

Others may reflect a desire to retain benefits whose acquisition is ethically questionable.

Nevertheless, the existence of a morally deficient argument does not automatically extinguish the speaker's entitlement to participate in deliberation.

A community may reject an argument.

It may criticize the values underlying that argument.

It may determine that the argument should not govern collective action.

But disagreement alone does not establish that the dissenter has forfeited all protection.

The Office therefore distinguishes between the legitimacy of a position and the legitimacy of expressing that position.

A member may possess the right to oppose a proposal without possessing the right to prevent its implementation through coercion.

A member may possess the right to criticize leadership without possessing the right to injure that leadership.

A member may possess the right to leave a community without possessing the right to destroy the community on departure.

These distinctions are especially important because the literary and cinematic records depict materially different conduct by Jenner.

The Board will not collapse those actions into a single category.

For present purposes, it enters the following principle:

The right to dissent does not depend upon the dissenter being correct.

The Office considers this principle indispensable to meaningful self-government.

A community that permits disagreement only when the dissenters eventually agree has not established a right to dissent.

It has established a procedure for delayed conformity.

VII. THE MAJORITY AND THE MINORITY

The Board considers the relationship between collective authority and minority interests.

The available narratives establish disagreement concerning the Plan.

They do not establish every procedure through which that disagreement was resolved.

The Office therefore declines to assert a specific numerical majority unless supported by the relevant narrative record.

Nevertheless, the ethical problem remains.

A collective decision may impose consequences upon members who opposed it.

The fact that a decision has broad support does not necessarily eliminate those consequences.

Nor does the existence of dissent establish that collective action must cease.

The Board rejects both extremes.

A minority cannot possess an unrestricted veto over every collective decision merely because it disagrees.

A majority cannot exercise unlimited authority over minority members merely because its preferred outcome commands greater support.

Responsible self-government requires a means of distinguishing decisions properly made on behalf of the community from matters that should remain subject to individual choice.

The Office identifies several considerations.

Material Impact: How substantially will the decision alter the lives of dissenting members?

Necessity: Is the decision required to address a legitimate collective concern?

Alternatives: Could the objective be accomplished through less burdensome means?

Participation: Were affected members given a meaningful opportunity to express concerns?

Distribution: Are the burdens imposed fairly, or are particular members required to sacrifice disproportionately?

Exit: Can members decline continued participation without suffering unnecessary punishment?

Review: Can the community reconsider its decision if material assumptions prove incorrect?

The Board does not propose these as an existing rat constitution.

They are analytical considerations relevant to judging the fairness of collective action.

The Office further observes that a morally admirable objective does not eliminate the importance of these questions.

Indeed, the difficulty of implementing an admirable objective may make them more important.

A community does not become more just by treating procedural fairness as an obstacle to justice.

The distinction is entered.

VIII. ON THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MACHINES

The Office now considers one of the most consequential decisions associated with the Plan.

In the literary record, the rats contemplated destroying the machinery and infrastructure that had supported their life beneath the rosebush.

This proposal served more than one purpose.

The destruction of equipment would reduce evidence of the extraordinary community's existence.

It would also make return to the comforts of the established settlement less attractive.

The Board recognizes the practical logic.

A difficult reform may fail if those undertaking it retain an easily accessible means of returning to arrangements they have resolved to abandon.

The proposed destruction therefore functioned in part as a mechanism of collective commitment.

The Office considers this decision ethically complicated.

The machines represented substantial accumulated labor.

They had been constructed or adapted through the knowledge and effort of community members.

They served practical purposes.

Their destruction would eliminate resources that might otherwise remain useful.

The Board therefore asks whether collective authority extends to the deliberate removal of alternatives from dissenting members.

The question is not resolved simply by observing that the machines were useful.

Nor is it resolved by observing that their continued availability could undermine the Plan.

The issue concerns the authority to make a decision difficult to reverse.

An institution may seek to protect its reforms against temporary uncertainty.

It may also employ irreversible measures to prevent legitimate future reconsideration.

These activities require careful distinction.

The Office therefore identifies a potential danger.

An institution that destroys every means of returning to an earlier arrangement may strengthen its commitment to reform.

It may also deprive future members of the opportunity to determine whether the reform remains appropriate.

The Board recognizes that the destruction of machinery may have been defensible for reasons of concealment and safety.

It does not presume that every machine possessed a continuing legitimate use.

Nevertheless, the decision illustrates a broader principle.

Collective self-government includes responsibility toward future decision-makers.

The present community may possess legitimate authority to alter its infrastructure.

It should exercise particular care when eliminating the ability of future members to make different choices.

The Office therefore requests clarification concerning the decision-making process, the proposed scope of destruction, and the consideration given to less irreversible alternatives.

No formal finding of improper destruction is entered.

The Board recognizes that the intended destruction was later overtaken by emergency circumstances.

That development shall be examined separately.

IX. THE RIGHT TO LEAVE

The Board turns to the right of members to depart from an autonomous community.

The literary record establishes that Jenner and six followers left the rosebush settlement after rejecting the Plan.

Their departure was associated with disagreement over the community's proposed future and the decision concerning the machines.

The Office recognizes that leaving an established community may involve substantial risks.

Departing members may lose access to shared resources.

They may face uncertainty concerning shelter, food, and safety.

They may lack the equipment necessary to reproduce their former standard of living.

They may be particularly vulnerable where the surrounding environment contains predators or other dangers.

Nevertheless, the risks of departure do not establish that the community possesses unlimited authority to prevent it.

A population that escaped involuntary confinement should be especially attentive to the distinction between membership and custody.

The rats had previously been held by an institution that determined the conditions of their lives.

Their subsequent autonomy would be incomplete if the community they established reproduced the same unrestricted control over its members.

The Board therefore considers the right to leave a significant element of self-government.

This does not mean that departure eliminates every obligation to others.

A departing member may remain responsible for specific harms caused before departure.

A person may not necessarily remove shared property without authorization.

A member entrusted with another's safety may possess duties that cannot be abandoned without reasonable transition.

But these considerations do not create a general entitlement to compel indefinite membership.

The Office therefore enters the following principle:

A community founded upon escape from involuntary control should not presume that its own members have surrendered the right to depart.

The Board recognizes that the literary Jenner exercised this right.

Whether all obligations associated with that departure were fulfilled remains a separate question.

The available record does not establish sufficient information to determine every relevant circumstance.

That inquiry is reserved for NIMH-ERB-005.

X. WHETHER DEPARTURE IS BETRAYAL

The Office has considered the proposition that members who reject a collective reform and depart from the community have betrayed that community.

The proposition is not sustained as a general principle.

A member may disagree with a decision.

A member may regard the community's proposed direction as mistaken.

A member may prefer an alternative form of life.

These circumstances do not independently establish betrayal.

The Board recognizes that departure may produce practical difficulties.

The loss of members may reduce available labor.

It may weaken collective defenses.

It may alter the distribution of resources.

It may disrupt relationships.

Such consequences may be serious.

Nevertheless, the legitimacy of an individual's departure cannot be determined solely by the inconvenience caused to those remaining.

The Office further recognizes that a community may possess legitimate interests in orderly transition.

Those interests may support reasonable procedures for transferring responsibilities or protecting dependent members.

They do not establish an unrestricted right to require ideological agreement as a condition of departure.

The Board therefore distinguishes between two propositions.

Proposition A: A community may disagree with and criticize a departing member's decision.

Proposition B: A community may punish a departing member merely for deciding to leave.

The first may be consistent with legitimate self-government.

The second requires substantial justification and cannot be presumed.

The Office further observes that a society may become so convinced of the righteousness of its direction that it regards every departure as moral failure.

This tendency warrants caution.

A person may reject an admirable project for poor reasons.

The weakness of those reasons does not automatically authorize coercion.

The Office therefore declines to classify the literary Jenner's departure as treason.

No recognized sovereign legal framework establishing such an offense has been presented.

The Office further declines to establish a new offense of insufficient enthusiasm for agricultural independence.

The proposed classification is rejected.

XI. LEADERSHIP AND THE BURDEN OF SACRIFICE

The Board returns to Nicodemus.

The Plan required sacrifice.

Its advocates anticipated hardship.

The community would need to abandon comforts acquired through years of effort.

It would need to establish new systems of production.

It would need to accept uncertainty.

The Board therefore asks what obligations fell upon those advocating the change.

A leader who proposes sacrifice should disclose its foreseeable costs.

A leader should not represent uncertain benefits as guaranteed.

A leader should not conceal material risks merely because their disclosure might weaken support.

A leader should not demand burdens from others while exempting himself without adequate justification.

The Office recognizes that leadership may require difficult decisions.

It further recognizes that perfect foresight is impossible.

Nevertheless, uncertainty should be acknowledged rather than converted into a false promise of success.

The Plan's moral appeal did not eliminate the possibility of failure.

Thorn Valley might present unforeseen hazards.

Agriculture might produce inadequate yields.

Infrastructure might prove difficult to establish.

The community might encounter circumstances it could not control.

The Board therefore identifies a legitimate role for caution.

A member who questioned the adequacy of preparations was not necessarily rejecting the moral argument for independence.

Such a member might instead be asking whether the community possessed a credible means of surviving the transition.

The Office considers that question appropriate.

A leader's willingness to pursue a morally defensible objective does not relieve the leader of responsibility for the foreseeable consequences of pursuing it.

The Board further recognizes that the same principle applies to those opposing reform.

A dissenter who prefers the existing arrangement must also consider the consequences of preserving it.

Opposition does not become responsible merely by identifying the costs of change while ignoring the costs of remaining.

Both positions require examination.

The Office does not recognize selective accounting as a satisfactory method of political deliberation.

XII. THE PROBLEM OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

The Office considers an additional issue.

The community's decisions would affect inhabitants who had not participated in the original escape or the establishment of the rosebush settlement.

The rats had developed family relationships.

They had children.

They possessed interests extending beyond their own immediate survival.

The proposed relocation would therefore influence the lives of younger members whose preferences and capacities might differ from those of the adults making the decision.

The Board considers this significant.

A community may properly make decisions concerning the welfare of children who cannot participate equally in every aspect of governance.

However, the inability of children to direct collective policy does not eliminate their interests.

The Plan's advocates owed consideration to the consequences of relocation for dependent members.

The Plan's opponents owed similar consideration to the consequences of continued resource dependence and possible discovery.

The Board therefore rejects the proposition that either maintaining the existing settlement or relocating to Thorn Valley was automatically justified solely because adults preferred it.

The relevant inquiry concerns the foreseeable welfare of affected members.

The Office also identifies a broader issue of institutional continuity.

The adult rats had experienced experimental confinement.

Their children had not necessarily experienced the same conditions.

The experiences that shaped the founding generation's political priorities might therefore differ from those of later generations.

The Board recognizes the importance of preserving collective memory.

It does not regard that memory as sufficient grounds to deny future members the capacity to reconsider inherited arrangements.

A community may pass its principles to its children.

It cannot assume that inheritance alone establishes permanent consent to every decision made by their predecessors.

The Office considers this distinction fundamental to durable self-government.

XIII. THE LITERARY RECORD: DISAGREEMENT WITHOUT CONSOLIDATED CRIMINALITY

The Office now examines the literary depiction of the conflict.

In Robert C. O'Brien's novel, Jenner opposes the Plan.

He favors retaining the advantages of the existing settlement.

Nicodemus favors greater independence through relocation and self-sustaining labor.

The disagreement concerns more than geography.

It reflects competing assessments of the community's future.

One vision emphasizes the retention and development of established technological comforts.

The other emphasizes the ethical and practical importance of becoming less dependent upon humans.

The literary record depicts substantial discussion before Jenner's departure.

The decision to dismantle or destroy the existing machinery becomes a decisive point of conflict.

Jenner and six followers subsequently leave.

The Office emphasizes that these events must be evaluated according to the literary record.

The novel does not depict Jenner conducting the cinematic conspiracy that results in Nicodemus's death.

No finding of murder is entered against Jenner-A.

The Office further recognizes that a later incident involving seven rats and electrical equipment gives rise to concern that Jenner's group may have died while attempting to obtain machinery.

The identification of those rats is not conclusively established within the narrative.

The Board therefore declines to enter a final determination of their identities or individual conduct.

It would be improper to assign specific acts to missing individuals merely because the circumstances appear consistent with their expected activities.

The Office recognizes the temptation to complete an uncertain narrative.

It declines to do so.

The literary record instead presents a substantial ethical problem.

A community identifies a practice it considers wrong.

It proposes reform.

Some members refuse.

Those members leave.

The community continues toward its chosen future.

The Board considers this sequence relevant to the distinction between collective decision-making and compulsory ideological unity.

The literary Jenner may have been mistaken.

His preferred arrangements may have been ethically deficient.

His departure may have exposed him and his followers to substantial danger.

None of these propositions establishes that disagreement itself was impermissible.

The Office therefore reserves individual findings for NIMH-ERB-005.

The present proceeding concludes only that the literary record supports meaningful inquiry into the rights and responsibilities of dissenting members.

XIV. THE CINEMATIC RECORD: WHEN OPPOSITION BECOMES COERCION

The Office next examines the 1982 film.

The cinematic Jenner opposes the departure from the rosebush settlement.

However, his conduct differs materially from that of his literary counterpart.

The film depicts a deliberate conspiracy intended to prevent the Plan from succeeding.

Jenner identifies Nicodemus as an obstacle.

He seeks to eliminate that obstacle through the sabotage of an operation undertaken to move the Brisby household.

His conduct results in Nicodemus's death.

The Board recognizes that the operation being sabotaged concerned the rescue of Mrs. Brisby's family rather than the physical relocation of the rat colony to Thorn Valley.

This distinction is significant.

The immediate victims of the sabotage were not confined to the political leadership.

Mrs. Brisby and her children were exposed to danger.

The machinery used in the attempted rescue was compromised.

The collective effort to protect a vulnerable family was disrupted.

The Office therefore identifies several distinct categories of conduct.

Political Opposition: Jenner's disagreement with the Plan.

Conspiracy: His preparation of a covert scheme to remove the leader associated with that Plan.

Sabotage: His interference with a dangerous mechanical operation.

Lethal Harm: The resulting death of Nicodemus.

Endangerment: The additional danger imposed upon persons depending upon the successful operation.

Attempted Seizure of Authority: His subsequent effort to direct the community's response and preserve the existing settlement.

These categories must not be treated as interchangeable.

The first concerns an ordinary feature of political life.

The remaining categories raise substantial ethical questions concerning coercion, violence, and the abuse of power.

The Board therefore enters a preliminary distinction:

The right to oppose a political decision does not include an unrestricted right to eliminate the persons responsible for that decision.

The Office recognizes that this proposition may appear self-evident.

It nevertheless considers the distinction necessary in view of the cinematic record.

Jenner-B shall receive separate examination under NIMH-ERB-006.

The present proceeding enters no consolidated finding concerning Jenner-A.

The fact that both characters bear the same name remains insufficient grounds to transfer responsibility between them.

XV. SULLIVAN AND THE PROBLEM OF COERCED PARTICIPATION

The cinematic record introduces an additional participant.

Sullivan becomes involved in Jenner's scheme.

His conduct raises questions concerning pressure, complicity, hesitation, and subsequent resistance.

The film depicts Sullivan expressing reluctance concerning the proposed sabotage.

Jenner employs intimidation.

Sullivan's eventual conduct includes opposition to Jenner during the final confrontation.

The Board recognizes that these circumstances complicate any simple classification.

Participation in wrongdoing may be ethically significant.

The degree of responsibility may nevertheless depend upon the participant's knowledge, freedom of action, exposure to threats, and opportunities to refuse.

The Office therefore rejects two conclusions.

First, that participation in an improper scheme necessarily establishes identical culpability among all participants.

Second, that exposure to pressure automatically eliminates every question concerning responsibility.

These propositions require more careful evaluation.

The cinematic Sullivan is neither interchangeable with Jenner nor irrelevant to Jenner's conduct.

His hesitation matters.

The threats directed toward him matter.

His later conduct matters.

The Board therefore reserves a specific assessment of Sullivan's role for NIMH-ERB-006.

For present purposes, the Office identifies a broader institutional concern.

A community's political procedures provide inadequate protection if opposition must be pursued through personal allegiance to powerful individuals rather than through recognized mechanisms of disagreement.

The existence of a council or assembly does not necessarily prevent private coercion.

Nor does the existence of a legitimate leader guarantee that every influential member will respect collective decisions.

Institutions must therefore consider not merely how decisions are made, but how attempts to undermine those decisions may be addressed without reproducing the same abuses of authority.

The Board recognizes the difficulty.

It nevertheless declines to regard political assassination as an acceptable method of requesting reconsideration.

XVI. THE INTERESTS OF THOSE OUTSIDE THE DISPUTE

The Board now considers the position of Mrs. Frisby and Mrs. Brisby.

The novel and film employ different names for the widowed mouse.

Their circumstances are nevertheless relevant to the present inquiry.

Both narratives involve a mother seeking assistance to protect her children.

Her youngest son, Timothy, faces serious medical vulnerability.

The family's home is threatened by agricultural activity.

Relocation is necessary.

However, ordinary relocation poses additional dangers because of Timothy's illness.

The rats possess technological and organizational capacities that can help resolve the emergency.

The Board recognizes that the community's decision to assist the family reflects an exercise of agency independent of the laboratory's purposes.

The rats choose to use their abilities for protective ends.

The Office also recognizes that the family's safety becomes entangled with the rats' internal disagreements.

This is especially pronounced in the cinematic record.

The sabotage of the house-moving operation transforms a political conspiracy into a danger affecting individuals who are not parties to the dispute.

The Board considers this significant.

Political actors may disagree concerning the future of their institutions.

They may contend for leadership.

They may advocate competing policies.

However, their disagreements do not authorize the instrumental use of vulnerable outsiders.

Mrs. Brisby's family did not request involvement in a struggle over rat governance.

The children did not consent to become exposed to danger as a means of weakening Nicodemus.

Their lives were not appropriate instruments of political competition.

The Board therefore enters the following principle:

A political dispute does not remain exclusively internal when the methods employed impose foreseeable harm upon persons outside the dispute.

The Office further observes that the protection owed to the children does not depend upon their membership in the rat community.

Their needs are relevant because they are vulnerable beings whose safety is affected.

The Board recognizes that they were mice.

It does not recognize that circumstance as grounds for disregarding their interests.

The distinction is entered.

XVII. THE EMERGENCY THAT ALTERED THE PLAN

The Office next considers the effect of unforeseen danger.

Both narratives introduce circumstances that increase the urgency of departure.

In the literary record, information concerning suspicious efforts to exterminate rats on the Fitzgibbon property causes the community to accelerate its preparations.

The identity and institutional affiliation of the persons involved remain uncertain.

The rats suspect a connection to the experimental program.

The Board does not convert that suspicion into an independently established fact.

Nevertheless, the perceived threat creates a genuine problem for collective planning.

In the novel, the rats had intended to destroy equipment and eliminate evidence of their extraordinary settlement.

The emergency required modification of those arrangements.

Rather than complete every originally contemplated measure, the community adopted a different approach to concealing its infrastructure.

The Board considers this adjustment significant.

The Plan had been supported partly by the argument that destroying the machines would protect the community from the temptation to return.

Yet unforeseen circumstances made full implementation of that approach impracticable.

The rats adapted.

The Office recognizes that adaptation is not necessarily evidence of inconsistency.

An institution may preserve its underlying objective while revising the means used to accomplish it.

Indeed, the capacity to distinguish principle from procedure may be essential to responsible governance.

The Board therefore rejects the proposition that a plan becomes illegitimate merely because its implementation must change.

It also rejects the opposite proposition that emergencies authorize every departure from established safeguards.

Emergency authority requires limits.

The Board identifies four considerations.

Necessity: Was the departure from ordinary procedure reasonably related to a serious threat?

Proportionality: Did the response impose burdens reasonably connected to the danger?

Temporariness: Was the extraordinary measure confined to the circumstances requiring it?

Accountability: Could the decision be explained and examined afterward?

The available narrative evidence supports the conclusion that the rats faced circumstances requiring rapid collective action.

The Board does not infer that the community possessed a fully articulated emergency-powers framework.

It nevertheless considers the principle important.

A community capable of revising a plan in response to evidence demonstrates a form of institutional competence.

A community that treats every emergency as permission to abandon accountability demonstrates something else.

The distinction is entered.

XVIII. THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE COST OF COLLECTIVE SURVIVAL

The literary record presents a particularly difficult consequence of the accelerated departure.

To conceal the community's extraordinary character and protect those relocating to Thorn Valley, a group of ten rats remains behind as part of a deceptive protective operation.

The assignment involves substantial danger.

Volunteers come forward.

The operation ultimately results in two deaths.

The Board recognizes that the identities of the dead are not conclusively resolved in the narrative.

No individual identification is entered.

The incident nevertheless raises a serious question.

Under what circumstances may a community expose some of its members to extraordinary danger in order to protect the remainder?

The Office first distinguishes voluntary acceptance of risk from compelled sacrifice.

A member may freely choose to undertake a dangerous assignment.

The ethical significance of that choice depends upon the member's understanding of the danger and the absence of improper coercion.

The existence of volunteers is relevant.

It does not automatically resolve every responsibility of the leaders directing the operation.

A volunteer may knowingly accept risk.

The institution may still owe duties concerning preparation, equipment, planning, communication, and rescue.

The Board therefore rejects the proposition that consent to danger eliminates the obligation to reduce unnecessary danger.

The Office further recognizes that the need for rapid action may limit the available protective measures.

The proper inquiry is not whether every hazard could have been removed.

It is whether the community exercised reasonable care under the circumstances available to it.

The Board considers the deaths significant.

They are not evidence that the Plan was necessarily wrong.

Nor are they evidence that the operation was necessarily conducted properly.

A morally defensible objective may involve tragic losses.

The legitimacy of the objective does not make those losses ethically invisible.

The Office therefore enters the following principle:

Collective survival may require dangerous action.

It does not convert the lives of those undertaking that action into expendable resources.

The distinction is especially important for a community whose members were once treated as experimental subjects.

The rats' development of self-government would be morally incomplete if it simply replaced the laboratory's claim upon their bodies with an unrestricted claim by the community.

The Office recognizes their courage.

It declines to treat courage as a substitute for institutional responsibility.

XIX. THE QUESTION OF SUCCESSION

The cinematic record presents a further difficulty.

Nicodemus's death removes a central figure from the community's leadership.

Jenner subsequently attempts to direct the community's future.

Justin opposes him.

The resulting confrontation occurs during an emergency involving the safety of the rats and the Brisby family.

The Board recognizes that the film depicts Justin assuming a decisive leadership role following the confrontation.

However, the narrative does not provide a complete account of formal succession procedures.

The Office therefore declines to invent an election.

It does not presume that a vote occurred merely because the community accepted a new direction.

Nor does it presume that leadership authority was wholly illegitimate because the narrative does not depict a formal ballot.

The circumstances require attention to the relationship between emergency necessity and continuing political legitimacy.

An emergency may require immediate leadership.

The ability to act decisively may prevent further harm.

Nevertheless, effective action during an emergency does not necessarily establish a permanent entitlement to govern.

A society may recognize temporary authority without surrendering the right to determine its future leadership through appropriate procedures.

The Board therefore asks:

What authority did Justin possess before Nicodemus's death?

What authority became necessary during the emergency?

Did the community subsequently possess an opportunity to establish or confirm its leadership arrangements?

The cinematic record does not answer every question.

The Office enters no definitive constitutional determination.

It does, however, identify a principle.

The successful prevention of a wrongful seizure of power does not automatically resolve every question concerning the legitimacy of the authority that follows.

The Board recognizes that this may appear unduly demanding in the aftermath of a violent confrontation.

It respectfully observes that institutions are often most vulnerable when the legitimacy of their previous leadership has been interrupted.

The appropriate response is not necessarily to delay all action.

It is to distinguish the authority necessary to preserve life from the authority required to govern after the danger has passed.

The distinction is entered.

XX. FINDINGS

Following review of the available literary and cinematic evidence, the Board enters the following findings.

Finding 1 — Autonomous Political Agency

The enhanced rats demonstrated the capacity to deliberate concerning the future organization of their community.

Finding 2 — Ethical Purpose of the Plan

The proposed relocation to Thorn Valley represented an effort to reduce dependence upon resources obtained from humans and establish a more self-sustaining society.

Finding 3 — Collective Burdens

The Plan required substantial sacrifices involving infrastructure, comfort, labor, and security.

Finding 4 — Moral Purpose Distinguished from Procedure

The ethical desirability of a proposed reform does not independently establish the legitimacy of every procedure used to adopt it.

Finding 5 — Leadership Not Equivalent to Ownership

Nicodemus's contributions to the community did not establish unrestricted personal authority over its members.

Finding 6 — Evidence of Deliberation

The literary record establishes substantial discussion and disagreement concerning the Plan.

Finding 7 — Incomplete Constitutional Record

The available narratives do not establish a complete formal framework governing representation, voting, succession, and review.

Finding 8 — Protection of Dissent

The right to express disagreement does not depend upon the correctness of the dissenter's position.

Finding 9 — Limits of Minority Authority

Dissent does not automatically establish an unrestricted minority veto over collective decisions.

Finding 10 — Limits of Majority Authority

Collective support for a proposal does not eliminate the need to consider the legitimate interests of dissenting members.

Finding 11 — Right of Departure

The right to leave an autonomous community is ethically significant, particularly where its members previously experienced involuntary confinement.

Finding 12 — Literary Jenner

The literary Jenner's opposition and departure must not be conflated with the cinematic Jenner's conspiracy and lethal violence.

Finding 13 — Cinematic Jenner

The film depicts conduct extending beyond legitimate political opposition into conspiracy, sabotage, lethal harm, and coercive interference with collective decisions.

Finding 14 — Third-Party Protection

The community's internal political conflicts did not eliminate the legitimate safety interests of Mrs. Frisby or Mrs. Brisby and her children.

Finding 15 — Irreversible Collective Decisions

The proposed destruction of machinery raises legitimate questions concerning the authority to eliminate shared assets and restrict future alternatives.

Finding 16 — Emergency Adaptation

The literary community demonstrated the ability to modify its intended procedures in response to unforeseen danger.

Finding 17 — Emergency Authority

Urgent circumstances may justify departures from ordinary procedure, but they do not establish unlimited authority.

Finding 18 — Voluntary Risk

The acceptance of dangerous assignments by volunteers does not eliminate the community's responsibility to minimize unnecessary risks.

Finding 19 — Leadership Succession

The cinematic record raises questions concerning emergency leadership and the legitimacy of authority following Nicodemus's death.

Finding 20 — Self-Government

A community's capacity for self-government must be evaluated not merely through its ability to reach collective decisions, but through its treatment of members who contest those decisions.

XXI. THE BOARD'S DETERMINATION

The Board returns to the principal question.

What does it mean for an autonomous community to determine its own future?

The rats had escaped a laboratory.

They had established a settlement.

They had developed technological sophistication.

They had learned to organize their collective existence.

These achievements were significant.

However, the development of a community creates questions different from those presented by the escape of its individual members.

An individual may seek freedom from confinement.

A community must determine how freedom is to be exercised among persons who possess different interests.

The rats' disagreement concerning Thorn Valley demonstrates this distinction.

Their members did not share identical preferences.

They did not assign equal value to the existing comforts.

They did not reach identical conclusions concerning the ethical significance of their dependence.

Some regarded departure as necessary.

Others regarded it as unnecessary or undesirable.

These disagreements did not establish that the rats were incapable of self-government.

They established that self-government had become necessary.

The Office therefore rejects the proposition that a legitimate community must possess a single uncontested vision of its future.

Agreement may facilitate action.

It is not the sole measure of political legitimacy.

A community must possess some means of making decisions when agreement cannot be obtained.

It must also recognize that the authority to make collective decisions is not identical to unlimited authority over every member.

The Board considers the Plan especially instructive because its underlying ethical purpose was defensible.

The rats wished to stop relying upon resources they had not obtained through appropriate agreement.

They wished to assume greater responsibility for their own survival.

They wished to create a society whose material arrangements were more consistent with their moral commitments.

These ambitions were admirable.

But their admirability did not eliminate the interests of those who disagreed.

The ethical strength of a proposal cannot be used as a substitute for examining the authority through which it is implemented.

Nor can the existence of dissent be used as sufficient reason to abandon an otherwise justified reform.

The Board therefore identifies two obligations.

The community must remain capable of acting upon its considered judgment.

It must also remain capable of recognizing the independent agency of those who reject that judgment.

These obligations may create tension.

The existence of that tension is not evidence that one of the obligations should be discarded.

It is evidence that government involves more than the selection of morally desirable outcomes.

The Board therefore determines:

Self-government is not merely the capacity of a community to choose its future.

It is the capacity to exercise that choice without treating disagreement as a forfeiture of membership, dignity, or protection.

The rats' proposed relocation was an exercise of autonomous collective agency.

Their disagreement concerning the Plan was another.

The former did not invalidate the latter.

The latter did not automatically defeat the former.

The Board recognizes that different actions followed from this disagreement in the separate narrative records.

Those actions require individual examination.

The distinction is sustained.

XXII. PRELIMINARY DISPOSITION

NIMH-ERB-004 is hereby concluded as to its principal findings concerning collective governance.

The Board finds that the Plan represented a significant exercise of autonomous political and ethical judgment.

The proposal sought to transform the material foundations of the rosebush community.

Its adoption involved competing interests, substantial anticipated sacrifices, and unresolved questions concerning the limits of collective authority.

The Board finds that political disagreement concerning the Plan was not inherently illegitimate.

It further finds that the use of conspiracy, sabotage, or lethal violence to prevent collective action cannot be justified merely by identifying the conduct as opposition.

The Office enters no consolidated finding concerning Jenner.

The literary and cinematic records remain separate.

Further examination is reserved as follows.

NIMH-ERB-005 — THE LITERARY JENNER

On Institutional Dissent, Departure, and the Limits of Collective Authority.

NIMH-ERB-006 — THE CINEMATIC JENNER

On Conspiracy, Sabotage, and the Death of Nicodemus.

The Office recognizes the substantial differences between these inquiries.

The first concerns a dissenter who rejects a community's chosen direction and leaves.

The second concerns a conspirator who attempts to prevent that direction through lethal interference.

The distinction is not merely literary.

It is central to the ethical analysis.

The Board therefore directs that no finding entered against Jenner-B shall be attributed to Jenner-A without independent support in Record A.

The matter is concluded, subject to further review.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM A

Regarding the Contention That the Plan Was Correct and Therefore Required No Further Deliberation

The Office has considered the proposition that the ethical superiority of the Plan eliminated the need for continued discussion.

The proposition is not sustained.

The Board recognizes that a policy may possess substantial moral justification.

It further recognizes that an institution may legitimately reject arguments inconsistent with its ethical obligations.

However, the correctness of a general objective does not automatically resolve every question concerning implementation.

The Plan required decisions concerning timing, resource allocation, infrastructure, labor, and safety.

These decisions were capable of affecting members differently.

Their legitimacy could not be established solely by demonstrating that dependence upon unauthorized human resources was undesirable.

The Office therefore requests that advocates of the Plan distinguish between the following propositions:

The community ought to reduce its dependence upon appropriated resources.

Every proposed method of reducing that dependence is necessarily justified.

The first proposition is supported by substantial ethical reasoning.

The second has not been established.

The Office further observes that a leader who welcomes discussion only until the correct answer has been announced may have misunderstood the purpose of discussion.

The objection is rejected.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM B

Regarding the Proposed Designation of Jenner as a Traitor in Both Narrative Records

The Office of Records has received a proposal to classify Jenner as a traitor without distinguishing between the literary and cinematic accounts.

The designation is rejected.

The literary record depicts Jenner opposing the Plan and departing with six followers.

The cinematic record depicts Jenner participating in a conspiracy involving sabotage and lethal violence.

These are materially different actions.

The Board recognizes that both characters share a name and opposition to relocation.

It does not recognize these similarities as sufficient evidence that their conduct was identical.

Nor does the Office recognize a general principle under which disagreement with Nicodemus constitutes treason.

The exact nature of any enforceable collective obligation remains unestablished within the available record.

The Board further observes that an organization cannot avoid the difficulty of distinguishing legitimate dissent from criminal conduct by assigning the same designation to all persons who disagree with leadership.

The classification is returned for correction.

The Office respectfully requests that future submissions identify the relevant Jenner before assigning culpability.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM C

Regarding the Assertion That the Majority May Destroy the Machines Because the Majority Does Not Intend to Use Them

The Office has considered the proposition that shared infrastructure may be destroyed whenever the community presently favors a policy inconsistent with its continued use.

The proposition requires qualification.

A community may possess legitimate authority to retire or dismantle shared equipment.

Such decisions may be justified by cost, safety, environmental concerns, or the need to redirect resources.

However, the Board recognizes that destruction is not identical to nonuse.

Equipment retained but unused may remain available for future reconsideration.

Equipment destroyed cannot be restored without additional expenditure or labor.

The Office therefore distinguishes the decision to cease relying upon machinery from the decision to eliminate the machinery itself.

The latter may impose greater consequences upon future members.

The Board also recognizes that retaining evidence of an extraordinary rodent civilization within a human agricultural property could create substantial security risks.

Concealment may therefore supply an independent justification for dismantling equipment.

The Board nevertheless declines to conclude that every motor must be destroyed solely because a meeting has expressed disapproval of the previous lifestyle.

The Office further requests clarification concerning the ownership and maintenance of shared equipment.

No existing rat property registry has been produced.

The absence of such a registry does not establish that every machine is available for unilateral disposal by the nearest individual holding a wrench.

The matter remains open.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM D

Regarding the Proposed Requirement That All Departing Members Sign a Statement Endorsing the Plan

The Office has considered a hypothetical proposal requiring members who leave the community to acknowledge the ethical correctness of the Plan before departure.

No evidence establishes that the rat community imposed such a requirement.

The proposal is reviewed solely as a question of institutional principle.

The Board rejects it.

The right to leave a community cannot be made entirely dependent upon agreement with the reason the community has chosen to remain together.

A departing member may disagree.

The member may consider the prevailing policy mistaken.

The member may prefer a different form of life.

These circumstances do not independently establish an entitlement to prevent departure.

The Office recognizes that departing members may possess legitimate duties concerning shared property, confidential information, or the safety of others.

Appropriate arrangements concerning those interests may be considered.

However, compelled affirmation of the community's ideology is a separate matter.

The Board does not regard an expression of agreement obtained as the price of departure as meaningful evidence of sincere agreement.

The proposed requirement is rejected.

The Office further observes that a community whose founding history includes escape from confinement should exercise particular caution before establishing exit procedures resembling captivity.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM E

Regarding the Contention That the Rats Were Too Small to Possess Political Institutions

The Office has reviewed a proposed objection to recognition of the community's political activity.

The objection rests upon the comparatively small physical dimensions of the participants.

The Board acknowledges that rats are smaller than human beings.

The matter is not disputed.

However, the present investigation concerns organized collective decision-making.

The relevant evidence includes the ability to deliberate, formulate objectives, establish leadership, coordinate action, and express disagreement.

The size of the participants does not independently resolve whether these activities occurred.

The Office therefore declines to establish minimum physical dimensions for participation in political life.

The Board further recognizes that the settlement was located beneath a rosebush.

It does not regard the location as dispositive.

The existence of walls, chambers, and electrical infrastructure may be relevant to determining whether a community has developed substantial facilities.

The absence of a conventional capitol building does not establish that no collective decision-making occurred.

The Board also notes that the available narratives do not depict the community registering its political institutions with a human government.

Such registration would have presented considerable practical complications.

The Office does not infer from its absence that the rats were incapable of government.

The objection is not sustained.

FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE NOTICE

On the Difference Between Being Free and Governing Freely

The Office concludes this proceeding by returning to the history of the experimental rats.

They were taken into a laboratory.

They were subjected to intervention.

They acquired extraordinary intelligence.

They escaped.

These events established the circumstances under which they eventually became capable of organizing their own lives.

The rats then constructed a community.

They developed technological systems.

They maintained shelter.

They accumulated resources.

They created arrangements through which members could cooperate.

Their achievements were substantial.

But the creation of a community introduced obligations that had not existed in precisely the same form during their captivity.

The rats were no longer concerned solely with the authority of an external institution.

They were now responsible for the authority exercised within their own society.

The Plan exposed that responsibility.

Nicodemus recognized that the community's prosperity depended upon arrangements whose ethical basis had become difficult to defend.

He proposed change.

Others questioned the wisdom of that change.

Some resisted it.

In the literary record, the disagreement resulted in departure.

In the cinematic record, opposition developed into conspiracy and lethal violence.

The Office recognizes the differences.

It also recognizes the question common to both.

What may a community legitimately do when its members disagree about the conditions under which they ought to live?

The answer cannot be that collective action is always impermissible.

A society unable to make decisions in the presence of disagreement cannot reliably govern itself.

Nor can the answer be that any decision reached by a sufficiently influential leader becomes binding without limitation.

Such an arrangement risks reproducing the unrestricted control from which the rats originally escaped.

The Board therefore identifies a necessary distinction.

Freedom from an external master is one achievement.

The responsible exercise of collective authority is another.

The former does not guarantee the latter.

A community may escape captivity and subsequently become coercive.

It may reject an unjust authority and then establish unjust practices of its own.

It may acquire independence without developing adequate protections for dissent.

It may sincerely pursue a morally admirable objective while employing methods inconsistent with that objective.

These possibilities are not confined to the fictional circumstances under review.

They are familiar problems of institutional life.

The rats' experience is therefore instructive.

Their intelligence enabled them to recognize the limitations of their existing arrangements.

Their political development enabled them to debate alternatives.

Their disagreement demonstrated that members possessed independent judgments.

The legitimacy of their community depended not upon eliminating those judgments, but upon finding ways to govern despite them.

The Office recognizes that Jenner's positions differed between the two records.

It recognizes that Nicodemus's preferred course was defensible.

It recognizes that the Plan required courage.

It recognizes that remaining beneath the rosebush also carried substantial risks.

But it declines to reduce the ethical inquiry to a contest between a correct leader and an incorrect opponent.

The deeper question concerns the principles by which a community authorizes itself to act.

An institution does not become legitimate merely because it has identified an injustice.

It must also consider whether its response to that injustice is consistent with the principles it claims to defend.

The Board regards this distinction as indispensable.

The rats wished to cease benefiting from the unauthorized use of human resources.

That aspiration was significant.

They also had to determine how they would treat members unwilling to accept the sacrifices required.

That question was equally significant.

A civilization capable of asking whether its prosperity is just has achieved an important degree of ethical development.

A civilization capable of asking whether its treatment of dissenters is just has undertaken a further obligation.

The two questions cannot responsibly be separated.

The first concerns the society's relationship with those outside it.

The second concerns the society's relationship with its own members.

Both are necessary to self-government.

The Board therefore enters its final determination:

The Plan for Thorn Valley was not merely a proposal to relocate an intelligent community.

It was an attempt to establish the conditions under which that community could regard its own existence as morally defensible.

The legitimacy of that attempt depended not solely upon the destination selected, but upon the treatment of those required to participate in reaching it.

The Office recognizes that the rats had learned to make machines.

They had learned to obtain electricity.

They had learned to construct elaborate underground facilities.

They had learned to organize their labor.

They had learned to survive.

They had learned to examine their own conduct.

And, in the controversy concerning Thorn Valley, they confronted a problem that cannot be resolved by engineering alone.

How to remain a community when its members do not agree.

The Board considers this a substantial test of political maturity.

It further observes that the absence of agreement does not necessarily constitute failure.

A society that permits disagreement may experience conflict.

A society that forbids disagreement may experience silence.

The Board declines to treat silence as sufficient evidence of consent.

The distinction is entered.

The Office therefore concludes:

The rats' ability to leave the laboratory demonstrated that they could escape control.

Their ability to establish the rosebush settlement demonstrated that they could organize themselves.

Their willingness to reconsider their dependence demonstrated that they could examine their own conduct.

Their treatment of those who disagreed would determine whether they understood the limits of their own authority.

The final question remains under examination.

The literary Jenner shall be considered separately.

The cinematic Jenner shall receive independent review.

No adverse inference shall be transferred between them merely because they possess the same name.

The Office recognizes that both were rats.

It further recognizes that both opposed the Plan.

It does not recognize these circumstances as sufficient grounds to disregard the profound difference between leaving a community and attempting to murder its leader.

The distinction is entered.

The matter shall proceed to NIMH-ERB-005.

So entered.

Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
Experimental Intelligence and Autonomous Persons Review Board
Division of Autonomous Communities, Political Dissent, and Extraordinary Constitutional Arrangements

END OF NIMH-ERB-004

SOURCE RECORD

Record A: Robert C. O'Brien, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (1971). Particularly the accounts of Thorn Valley, the Plan, the disagreement concerning machinery, Jenner's departure, and the emergency relocation of the community.

Record B: Don Bluth, director, *The Secret of NIMH* (1982). Particularly the conflict concerning the Plan, Jenner's conspiracy, the death of Nicodemus, and the emergency circumstances surrounding the departure from the rosebush.

Foundational Proceeding: NIMH-ERB-001 — *Preliminary Investigation into the Rats of NIMH*.

Companion Proceedings:

NIMH-ERB-002 — *The Experimental Subjects*.

NIMH-ERB-003 — *The Rosebush Settlement*.

Reserved Individual Proceedings:

NIMH-ERB-005 — *The Literary Jenner*.

NIMH-ERB-006 — *The Cinematic Jenner*.

Scope of Findings: Fictional institutional and ethical analysis. No actual legal liability, regulatory violation, or historical institutional misconduct is determined.