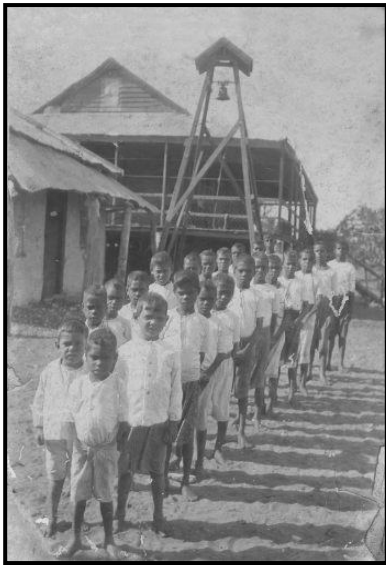


THE STOLEN GENERATIONS

One of the darkest chapters of Australian history was the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families. Children as young as babies were stolen from their families to be placed in girls and boys homes, foster families or missions. At the age of 18 they were 'released' into white society, often scarred for life by their experiences. Towards the end of the 19th century authorities started to take children away without a legal framework. A framework was established in 1909 which was known as the *Aborigines Protection Act* and it is impossible to identify how many children were stolen over time because of a lack of records. During the 1960s the process of child removal had slowed down but continued well into the 1970s. Some of the schools and missions who held the Stolen Generations did not close until the early 1980s. A national inquiry was set up in 1995 and the 1997 report "Bringing them home" contained disturbing evidence of what had happened.



The Stolen Generations, also known as the Stolen Children, is a term that is used to describe those children of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander race who were removed from their families by the Australian State government and church missions, under acts of their respective parliaments.

These Aboriginal people are collectively known as the 'Stolen Generations' because several generations were affected. In fact, many Aboriginal people are still searching for their fathers, mothers and siblings.

The cruel remove of children and babies of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander from their families started in 1900. Many of the Aboriginals children came into state or church custody, in nursing homes and families or they were placed for adoption. They lost their culture, family security, their country and their identity. Their names were changed. They were denied any contact with their family and relatives. Brothers and sisters were separated. They were only placed in "white" families in the foster care or adoption. Whether in homes, in care families or in adoptive families almost all of the Aboriginal children were abused mentally, physically and sexually.

Why were the Aboriginal Children Stolen?

The main motive was to 'assimilate' Aboriginal children into European society over one or two generations by denying and destroying their Aboriginality. In that time the government believed that the Aboriginal people shouldn't have a chance to survive. Authorities targeted mainly children of mixed descent. At the time these Aboriginal children were referred to as 'half-caste' Aboriginals. The lighter the skin, the greater was the risk of being robbed from the family. They thought that these Aboriginal children could be assimilated more easily into white society. Many children during this time were never told that they were Aboriginal





and discovered this much later in their lives. It was believed that these people were able to supply the labor market with cheap labor. Another reason for children being taken away was that authorities thought Aboriginal parents would neglect them. There is evidence, however, that malnutrition and starving kids were caused by Aboriginal people not receiving the full wages they were owed.

In removing the children white people stole Aboriginal people's future. Language, tradition, knowledge, dances and spirituality could only live if passed on to their

children. In breaking this circle of life white people hoped to end Aboriginal culture within a short time and get rid of 'the Aboriginal problem'. In the early 20th century white Australians thought Aboriginal people would die out. In three generations, they thought, Aboriginal genes would have been 'bred out' when Aboriginal people had children with white people. Adult Aboriginal people resisted efforts to be driven out of towns in simply coming back, but children, once taken away, could be controlled much easier.

What happened to the stolen children?

Many non-Indigenous people today believe that Aboriginal children were taken from their families because they couldn't look after them. This is one of the myths about the Stolen Generations. The stolen children were, in fact, mistreated and abused, if not by their supervisors then by the other children who had to harden to survive.

The stolen children were raised on missions or by foster parents. They were totally cut off from their Aboriginality. They were severely punished when caught talking their Aboriginal language. Some children never learned anything traditional and received little or no education. Instead the girls were trained to be domestic servants, the boys to be stockmen. Many of the stolen girls and boys were physically and sexually abused. Many babies born to girls raped by white men were in turn taken away from them, sometimes as soon as they were born. Boys and girls were brought into separate institutions which they (and some experts) would later compare with German concentration camps and the holocaust. Many tried to run away but with limited success. Many never saw their parents again or were told they were orphans. Roy Stewart was removed from his family when he was just three years old. Until he died aged 77 he was haunted by the memories of what he witnessed at the Kinchela Boys' Home in NSW. He was made to bury other boys who had been bashed to death by drunken supervisors.

When the stolen children reached the age of 15 or 16 they were sent into white farms and households. Girls had to work as domestic servants while boys worked with cattle or crops. These children were exploited. They had to work from as early as 6am to 10pm, seven days a week. As many as 20% were abused, physically and mentally, during these years.



"Kahlin Half-caste" Home, Darwin, 1928.
Photo from the National Archives of Australia.

Example of abuse.

Valerie Linow was a domestic servant for a white grazier family. When she was 17 she spilt a bucket of milk and never expected what would happen to her. "He yelled out to me, 'Get inside!' And the next minute, he just belted me. He yelled and had this fence wire and just belted me across my legs and I doubled up. Today, I still wear marks here on the top of my legs 'cause I was doubling up trying to protect myself." "And the elder...elder girl, she was about 10, and I could hear the girl calling, 'Give it to her, Daddy! Give it to the nigger!" "And the next minute, he yells out to me, he said, 'Valerie, get in here.' He said, 'You didn't do the girls' room properly.' And that's... I went into the girls' room and then that's when he raped me. He just threw me on the bed and just raped me." Valerie had the guts to report the incident to police. The grazier was not charged.

This is not an isolated story. The abuse many children of the Stolen Generations suffered is passed on in one way or another to their own children. Their personal trauma becomes a transgenerational trauma.

One in 11 girls became pregnant while apprenticed, one in 12 died, and one in seven ran away. —Aboriginal Protection Board's ward registers, 1916 to 1928.



A photo that makes you cry. Published in a Darwin newspaper in the 1930s this picture signifies the suffering caused by the inherent racism of the Australian government's Aboriginal assimilation policies. The presents the children are holding were most likely only provided for the sake of the photograph.

The caption reads: A group of tiny half-caste and quadroon children at the Darwin half-caste home. The Minister for the Interior (Mr Perkins) recently appealed to charitable organisations in Melbourne and Sydney to find homes for the children and rescue them from becoming outcasts.

The hand-written note reads: I like the little girl in centre of group, but if taken by anyone else, any of the others would do, as long as they are strong.

Growing up with ghosts.

Children of parents who lost loved ones often 'grow up with ghosts', meaning that missing family members are psychologically present but physically absent. While the parents know exactly whom they lost, their children know very little of this part of their family history. Parents worsen this problem by hiding their traumatic memories, names or photographs. When they die they leave unfillable gaps in the family's history.

'Not stolen, but rescued'

A significant number of Australians disagreed with the apology delivered in February 2008 to the Stolen Generations by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. Here are their main arguments:

- **The Stolen Generations don't exist.** Some people simply and flatly deny that children were stolen. They want to see 'proof' and claim no-one could 'find' them.

- **Aboriginal children were 'rescued'**. Supporters claim that Aboriginal children were not stolen but 'rescued' from a family and community environment that was "rife with rape, incest, drug and/or alcohol abuse and insanitary living conditions". The Aboriginal children were 'given a chance'. I've asked my granny if she thought she was rescued. She replied, "I didn't need rescuing from my mother's love."—Che Cockatoo-Collins
- **'We did not do it'**. People who refuse to apologise to the Stolen Generations feel that they or their ancestors had no part in what happened, hence shared no responsibility for the pain caused.
- **An apology leads to compensation claims.** Many people fear that after the apology "a flood of compensation claims will be forthcoming" running to "millions of dollars" [16].



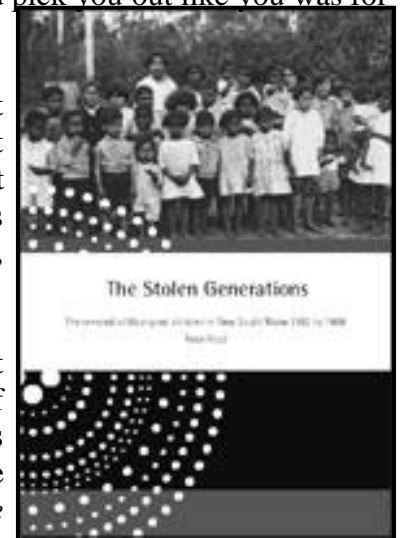
Bringing Them Home

In the 1990s the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission started a national inquiry into the practice of removing children. The *Bringing Them Home Report* on the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was tabled in Parliament on 26 May 1997. The report outlined the devastating impact the child removal policies had on children and their families. It found that many of the institutions and homes in which the children were placed were very cruel, and sexual and physical abuse of the children was common. It found that many of the people who managed the removals, including both the government and churches, abused their power and breached their supposed obligations as protectors and ‘carers’.

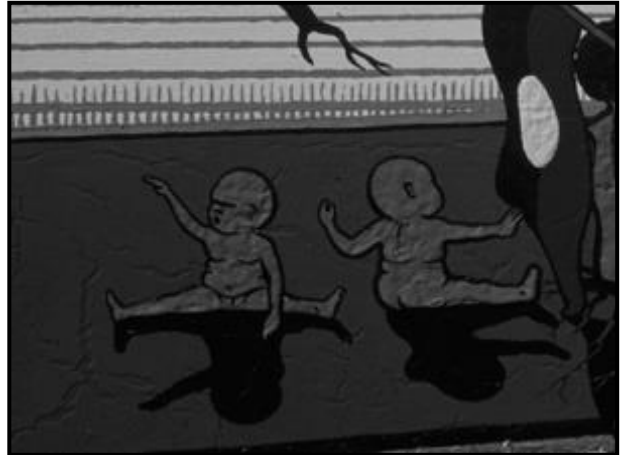
The report told a story of welfare boards, of segregation, of so-called ‘assimilation’ policies which did not work. The report also told stories of mothers fleeing into the bush with their babies, of the virtual slavery of the young girls who were sent out to rural properties to work as maids and of nannies of the children being treated like cattle. One woman reported: “We was bought like a market. We was all lined up in white dresses and they would come round and pick you out like you was for sale”.

The report found that the practice of forced removal was highly traumatic not only for the children but also for their families. The policy broke important cultural, spiritual and family ties which crippled not only individuals, but whole families and even whole communities. The report found that members of the Stolen Generations suffered higher rates of sexual abuse, maltreatment, dislocation of family life, poverty and hardship than other Aboriginal people.

The report also found that the policy of forced removal was based on racist assumptions about the benefits that would flow from such policies. The aim of the policy was to ‘breed out’ the Aboriginal race. In international law practices designed to destroy an entire race of people are known as genocide, and are forbidden under the 1948 *Convention of Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*.



While many records have been lost, it has been estimated are 10% of Aboriginal children. It is estimated 100,000 Indigenous people have been affected by the policy of removal.



National Apology

While many Aboriginal groups feel they can never be adequately compensated for the loss of their families, since the *Bringing Them Home Report* was released there has been a strong campaign for an official apology by the Australian Government. One of the key recommendations of *Bringing Them Home Report* was an official apology from the government, as well as financial compensation for the suffered caused by the government.

In 1997 the then Prime Minister John Howard refused to make an official apology. He argued that the current generation should not be responsible for the mistakes of the past. Critics pointed out that the Prime Minister had been a Member of Parliament in the 1960s – when forced removal was still government policy. Aboriginal rights activists also argued that it was important to recognise the truth of Australia’s history if we are to deal with it and move forward in reconciliation. Instead of an apology the Prime Minister passed a ‘Statement of Regret and Motion of Reconciliation’ in Parliament.

At the state level governments responded more positively to the *Bringing Them Home Report*. NSW Premier Bob Carr was the first State leader to make a formal apology to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the NSW Government and the Australian people. In the following years all state and territory leaders also apologised. Many church leaders have also apologised, and have started programs to raise awareness amongst their members about the Stolen Generations.

As part of the grassroots campaign calling for a national apology, the 26 May 1998 became the first national Sorry Day. Sorry Day was marked by ceremonies, rallies and meetings. Across the country millions of people signed Sorry Books. Ten years later Sorry Day continues to be recognised each year on 26 May. More recently Sorry Day has become known to some as Journey of Healing Day.

In 2007 a new Labor Government was elected, and promised to finally make an official apology to the Stolen Generations. At the first session of the new Federal Parliament, on 13 February 2008, the new Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issued an official apology to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the Government.



Members of the Stolen Generation were invited onto the floor of Parliament and to watch the apology from the gallery. The apology was welcomed by the majority of the Australians and celebrations were held across the country. For a copy of what the Prime Minister said visit the Parliament website at www.aph.gov.au and look up ‘Hansard’ (Hansard is the recording of all the things said in Parliament).

Some sections of the community and the media still strongly opposed the apology, arguing that the people who took the children thought they were doing the 'right thing', that children were taken for their own good, that the government should not be responsible for the past, and that the apology would lead to a flood of compensation claims. After the Prime Minister's apology the Opposition Leader Brendan Nelson also officially apologised, but his reference to some of the arguments during his talk caused upset amongst many of the people who watched the apology.



Resources

<http://cruciality.wordpress.com/category/memory/>

<http://warincontext.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/stolen-generation.jpg>

<http://rabbit-proof-fence.wikidot.com/research3>

[http://www.google.com.au/imgres?imgurl=http://www.greenleft.org.au/1999/353/353p3-](http://www.google.com.au/imgres?imgurl=http://www.greenleft.org.au/1999/353/353p3-2.gif&imgrefurl=http://picsdigger.com/keyword/the%2520stolen%2520generation/&h=315&w=452&sz=60&tbnid=fZEiDT7D_wefWM:&tbnh=89&tbnw=127&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dthe%2Bstolen%2Bgeneration&hl=en&usg=__mwuFLxirRT6V4_Oz_FI7TCH5A2M=&sa=X&ei=asNXTMWuBYLfdan1PMI&ved=0CDUQ9QEwBw)

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<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations.html>

<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations-timeline.html>

http://www.janesoceania.com/australia_aborigines_children/index1.htm

<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AboriginalLB/1990/50.html>



Information compiled by Mrs. Mullan.