

The Stolen Generations

The practice of removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities – what we now refer to as ‘The Stolen Generations’ – is one of the most horrific, destructive and inhumane chapters of Australian history. Across Australia, many thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were removed from their families as a result of numerous different state based laws and practices.

In Victoria one of the key early pieces of legislation that enabled these separations was the *Aboriginal Protection Act (1869)*. This made Victoria the first colonial government to enact a comprehensive scheme to govern and control Aboriginal people and communities.¹ The Act gave statutory authority to the Board for the Protection of Aborigines and resulted in extraordinary levels of control over Aboriginal people’s lives. For Aboriginal people, “regulations under this Act gave the Board far-reaching powers over such matters as domicile, contracts, money, and child custody.”² It controlled things such as who they could marry, what kind of work they could do, whom they could associate with and where they could live.

This Act was extended and expanded with the 1886 *Act to Provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria*, commonly known as the ‘Half-Caste Act’. It was known as this as it “was the first statute to legislate for the differential treatment of people of full and mixed descent.”³ As historian Richard Broome explains, this Act was an attempt to “push half-castes off the reserves” and only “‘full-bloods’ and ‘half-castes’ over 34 years of age were entitled to reside on the stations.”⁴ For Aboriginal people, these forced removals separated families and communities. For instance, at places like Coranderrk, young people were forced to leave and were no longer allowed to stay at the reserve. In order to visit their families once they had left they needed official permission. Aboriginal people fought these laws and protested their continual mistreatment and lack of rights. For instance, in 1886 William Barak and other sent a petition on behalf of the people of Coranderrk to the Victorian Government.⁵

During the 20th century Victorian Aboriginal people were subject to more legislation that was aimed at control and segregation. As the Federal Government was unable to legislate for Aboriginal people living in Australia, each state had different legislation for Aboriginal people living in its jurisdiction. *The Aborigines Act (Vic) 1910* extended Board powers to cover all

¹ “Documenting a Democracy – Aboriginal Protection Act (Vic) 1869,” Museum of Australian Democracy, available from <http://foundingdocs.gov.au/item-sdid-22.html>

² D. J. Mulvaney, *Encounters in Place: Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians, 1606-1985* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989), p.148.

³ Giordano Nanni and Andrea James, *Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2013), p.184.

⁴ Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: Black Responses to White Dominance 1788-1994* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1994), p. 82.

⁵ “Coranderrk Petition,” Museum Victoria, available from <http://museumvictoria.com.au/melbournemuseum/whatson/current-exhibitions/melbournestory/favourite-objects/coranderrk-petition/>

'half-castes'. In 1917 the Board decided to concentrate all Aboriginal people on Lake Tyers in Gippsland and stated that anyone living elsewhere would not qualify for government assistance.⁶ In 1923 this became the only staffed station in Victoria. The *Aborigines Act (1957)* extended the Board's powers to include anyone of Aboriginal descent and aimed to assimilate all Aboriginal people into the white community.

In other areas of Australia, similar legislation was put in place to separate and remove Aboriginal children from their families. In Western Australia, for instance, being subject to the *Aborigines Act (1905)* "meant removal from their families could occur at any time without parental knowledge, consent or consultation".⁷ This type of legislation was repeated across Australia.

From Protection to Assimilation

Many of the Government policies related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were informed by the ideas related to Social Darwinism. In the language of Social Darwinism, there was a belief that 'full-blooded' Aboriginal people were inevitably doomed due to the process of 'survival of the fittest'. Social Darwinism "incorporated the concept of race itself, the idea of a racial hierarchy and the commonly accepted grading of the world's people."⁸ Ernst Haeckel argued in his *The History of Creation*, 1892, that "the lowest stage... of all human species is occupied by the Australian or Austral negro."⁹ Historian Henry Reynolds writes, "the conviction that that extinction was inevitable, backed by the most prominent scientists of the age, dogged all discussion about the Aborigines until the 1940s."¹⁰ With the 'full-blooded' Aboriginal people eventually expected to die out, much of the government legislation was aimed at the 'half-caste' and attempts at their assimilation.

Social Darwinist ideas can be found in many documents, conferences and correspondence about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout the late 19th and early-mid 20th century. A key example of this is the first Commonwealth and State conference into Aboriginal Welfare, held from 21-23 April 1937 and attended by Chief Protectors from across Australia. The minutes of the conference illustrate the vast powers that Chief Protectors had over Aboriginal peoples' lives. One of the main voices at the conference was the Chief Protector of Western Australia, A. O. Neville. The minutes of the conference show him boasting that he "had the power to take any native from one part of the state to any other part."¹¹ He also spoke of how he could remove any Aboriginal child from their families and how lighter-skinned "children, two or three times removed from full blood have blue eyes, fair hair

⁶ Public Records Office, *Finding Your Story: A Resource Manual to the Records of The Stolen Generations in Victoria* (North Melbourne: Public Records Office, 2005), p. 86.

⁷ Sally Morgan, (ed.), *Echoes of the Past – Sister Kate's Home Revisited* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia, 2002), p. 6.

⁸ Henry Reynolds, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987), p. 116.

⁹ Ernst Haeckel quoted in Henry Reynolds, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987), pp. 116-117.

¹⁰ Henry Reynolds, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987), p. 122.

¹¹ Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities – 1937*, Commonwealth Government Printer, 1937.

and other features, which, if they were mixing with white people, would make it difficult to distinguish them from people of full white blood.”¹² A.O. Neville asked the conference attendees: “Are we going to have a population of 1,000,000 blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into our community and eventually forget that there were any Aborigines in Australia?”¹³

One of the resolutions of the conference was: “that this conference believes that the destiny of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth, and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed to that end.”¹⁴ This resolution leaves no doubt that the aim of the Government was for Aboriginal people not of ‘full blood’ to be ultimately absorbed into the wider population.

It can be seen that these assimilation policies aimed to destroy Aboriginal identity and culture, and were used to justify both the dispossession of Aboriginal people from their lands and the removal of their children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were forced to live under these conditions and at the whim of the Chief Protectors and the government. When Neville talked of moving one person anywhere he wanted, this is evidence of the systematic dispossession of people from their traditional lands and the denial of their access to their community and cultural practices. Neville made it clear that he envisaged an Australia where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people no longer existed.



Figure 1: Glover, *The Bulletin*, 1927¹⁵

¹² Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities – 1937*, Commonwealth Government Printer, 1937.

¹³ Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities – 1937*, Commonwealth Government Printer, 1937.

¹⁴ Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities – 1937*, Commonwealth Government Printer, 1937.

¹⁵ David Swain, *200 in the Shade* (Sydney: Collins Publishers, 1988), p.13.

The two types of assimilation envisaged were biological and social assimilation. A. O. Neville was an avid supporter of the biological program. His aim was to 'breed out the colour', an aim illustrated when he wrote that it was necessary to "eliminate the full blood", and allow interracial breeding so that "eventually the race will become white".¹⁶ At the 1937 conference Neville boasted

our policy is to send them out into the white community, and if the girl comes back pregnant our rule is to keep her for two years. The child is then taken away from the mother and sometimes never sees her again. Thus these children grow up as whites, knowing nothing of their own environment. At the expiration of the period of two years the mother goes back to service. So that it really doesn't matter if she has half a dozen children.¹⁷



THREE GENERATIONS
(Reading from Right to Left)

1. Half-blood—(Irish-Australian father; full-blood Aboriginal mother).
2. Quadroon Daughter—(Father Australian born of Scottish parents; Mother No. 1).
3. Octaroon Grandson—(Father Australian of Irish descent; Mother No. 2).

Figure 2 This figure shows Neville's ideas of 'breeding out the colour'. From A. O. Neville, *Australia's Coloured Minority: Its Place in the Community* (Sydney: Currawong Publishing, 1947), p. 73.

¹⁶ Patricia Jacobs, *Mister Neville* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1990), p. 193.

¹⁷ Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), p. 420.

Homes Are Sought For These Children



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.

I like the little girl in Centre of group, but if taken by anyone else, any of the others I would do, as long as they are 'bloods'

Courtesy 'Between Two Worlds' Australian Archives.

Figure 3 An advertisement appearing in a Darwin newspaper in the 1930s
https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/social_justice/bth_report/report/images/4_ch6.JPG

These policies created a climate of fear amongst the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Margaret Tucker, recalled in the late 1930s:

The people at Cummeragunja [a nearby reserve] lived in constant fear of their children being sent away from them by the Board, and being placed in homes. Wholesale kidnapping (it was nothing less) occurred on the Mission only a few years ago [1919]. The Manager sent the aboriginal men away on a rabbiting expedition. No sooner had they left the situation than carloads of police (who had been waiting) dashed in and seized all the children they could get their hands on. These children were bundled into the cars and taken away for the Board to dispose of. Many of them never saw their parents again.¹⁸

¹⁸ Half-caste Aborigine [Margaret Tucker] "Conditions at Cumeroogunga," *Workers Voice*, 1 March 1939, reproduced in Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: A Documentary History*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1999), pp. 160-161.

Another Aboriginal person tells of her understanding of why she was removed from her family. They said: “My mother was Aboriginal. The policy was to separate children, especially fair-skinned children, from their mothers as soon as possible. On my Certificate of Removal it said ‘Take the child from the association of Aborigines as she’s a fair-skinned child.’ I think the rationale behind that was to raise me as white.”¹⁹ Peter Read, one of the first historians to attempt to document the history of forcible removal concurs, writing that “missionaries, teachers, government officials, have believed that the best way to make black people behave like white was to get hold of the children who had not yet learned Aboriginal lifeways.”²⁰

The following is from Margaret Tucker’s autobiography, *If Everyone Cared*. It recalls her experience as a child (her name was Margaret Clements then) being removed in 1917 whilst she was at school in Moonahcullah:

Between morning school and the lunch break, we heard the unmistakable sound of a motor car. Out where we were motor cars were very rare at that time, and although we were seething with curiosity we did not dare move from our desks [...]

I cannot remember everything that went on, but the next thing I do remember was that the policeman and Mr Hill came into the school. Mrs Hill seemed to be in a heated argument with her husband. She was very distressed.

The children were all standing (we always stood up when visitors came and the police were no exception). My sister May and another little girl, an orphan, started to cry. Then others. They may have heard the conversation. I was puzzled to know what they were crying for, until Mr Hill told all the children to leave the school, except myself and May and Myrtle Taylor, who was the same age as May (eleven years). Myrtle was an orphan reared by Mrs Maggie Briggs. She was very fair-skinned and pretty.

I had forgotten about Brungle and the gang of men representing the Aborigines Protection Board who had visited when we were staying there. But then it came to me in a rush! But I didn’t believe for a moment that my mother would let us go. She would put a stop to it! All the children who had been dismissed must have run home and told their parents what was happening at school. When I looked out that schoolroom door, every Moonahcullah Aboriginal mother — some with babies in arms — and a sprinkling of elderly men were standing in groups. Most of the younger men were away working on homesteads and sheep stations or farms. Then I started to cry [...]

¹⁹ Ros Bowden (compiler) Coral Edwards, Lola, Joy, Robyn, Cherie and Kevin, “Being Aboriginal: Raised to Think White”, in *Images of Australia*, ed. Gillian Whitlock and David Carter (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992), p. 94.

²⁰ Peter Read, *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales 1883-1969* (New South Wales: Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 1981), p. 2.

Mrs Hill, the tears running down her cheeks, made a valiant attempt to prolong our stay. I did not realize she had sent our two radicals Eric and Osley to race the mile and a half to get our mother. I will never forget her for that. She stood her ground, against her husband, the police, the driver of the car. 'Well, they can't go without something to eat, and it is lunch time,' she said, in a determined way.

'No thank you Teacher, we are not hungry,' we said.

'All the same, you children are not going that long journey (first to Deniliquin, then many more miles to Finley, where we would catch the train to Cootamundra) without food,' she insisted.

She went out to her house at the side of the school, taking as long as she dared to prepare something to eat. Her husband, his face going purple, was looking at his watch every few minutes. At last she came in with a tray with glasses of milk and the kind of food we only got at Christmastime. We said we couldn't eat it – we were not hungry – but she coaxed us to drink the milk and eat something. Mr Hill couldn't stand it any longer and said a lot of time was being wasted, and that the police and the driver wanted to leave.

We started to cry again and most of our school mates and the mothers too, when our mother, like an angel, came through the schoolroom door. Little Myrtle's auntie rushed in too.

I thought: 'Everything will be right now. Mum won't let us go.' Myrtle was grabbed up by her auntie. We had our arms round our mother, and refused to let go. She still had her apron on, and must have run the whole one and a half miles. She arrived just in time, due to the kindness of Mrs Hill. As we hung onto our mother she said fiercely, 'They are my children and they are not going away with you.'

The policeman, who no doubt was doing his duty, patted his hand-cuffs, which were in a leather case on his belt, and which May and I thought was a revolver.

'Mrs Clements,' he said, 'I'll have to use this if you do not let us take these children now.'

Thinking that policeman would shoot Mother, because she was trying to stop him, we screamed, 'We'll go with him Mum, we'll go.' I cannot forget any detail of that moment, it stands out as though it was yesterday. I cannot ever see kittens taken from their mother cat without remembering that scene. It is just on sixty years ago.

However, the policeman must have had a heart, because he allowed my mother to come in the car with us as far as Deniliquin. She had no money, and took nothing with her, only the clothes she had on. Then the policeman sprang another shock. He said he had to go to the hospital to pick up Geraldine, who was to be taken as well. The horror on my mother's face and her heartbroken cry! I tried to reason why all this was happening to us, and tried not to think.

All my mother could say was, 'Oh, no, not my Baby, please let me have her. I will look after her.'

As that policeman walked up the hospital path to get my little sister, May and Myrtle and I sobbed quietly. Mother got out of the car and stood waiting with a hopeless look. Her tears had run dry I guess. I thought to myself, I will gladly go, if only they will leave Geraldine with Mother.

'Mrs Clements, you can have your little girl. She left the hospital this morning,' said the policeman.

Mother simply took that policeman's hand and kissed it and said, 'Thank you, thank you.'

Then we were taken to the police station, where the policeman no doubt had to report. Mother followed him, thinking she could beg once more for us, only to rush out when she heard the car start up. My last memory of her for many years was her waving pathetically, as we waved back and called out goodbye to her, but we were too far away for her to hear us. I heard years later how after watching us go out of her life, she wandered away from the police station along the road leading out of the town to Moonahcullah. She was worn out, with no food or money, her apron still on. She wandered off the road to rest in the long grass under a tree. That is where old Uncle and Aunt found her the next day [...]

They found our mother still moaning and crying. They heard the sounds and thought it was an animal in pain.²¹

Bringing them Home Report

In 1995 Sir Ronald Wilson, former High Court Judge and President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, led an inquiry with Mick Dodson, Australia's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner appointed to the Human Rights Commission. The two-year Australia-wide inquiry took oral and written evidence from 535 Aboriginal witnesses who had experiences with separation from their families as a result of government policies. The 700 page report was presented to Federal Parliament on May 26th 1997 and was called *Bringing them home – the Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*.²²

The key findings were:

- Nationally, between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970.

²¹ Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared* (Sydney: URE Smith, 1977), pp. 90-4.

²² Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (Sydney: Sterling Press, 1997).

- Indigenous children were placed in institutions, church missions, adopted or fostered and were at risk of physical and sexual abuse. Many never received wages for their labour.
- Welfare officials failed in their duty to protect Indigenous wards from abuse.
- Under international law, the policies of forcible removal amount to genocide; and the existence of distinct laws for Indigenous children was racially discriminatory.
- The removal of Indigenous children continues today. Indigenous children are six times more likely to be removed for child welfare reasons and 21 times more likely to be removed for juvenile detention reasons than non-Indigenous children.²³

The mental harm and psychological damage that child removal has brought upon Indigenous communities has had devastating effects – including ongoing issues such as inter-generational trauma. Many testimonies referred to the physical, sexual and emotional abuse that the children were subjected to, either in state institutions or foster homes. Aboriginal academic Judy Atkinson suggests that trauma trails of the Stolen Generations “run across country and generations from original locations of violence as people moved away from the places of pain. These trauma trails carried fragmented, fractured people and families.”²⁴

The *Bringing Them Home* Inquiry and Report was the vehicle for the sharing of life histories and stories by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that detailed the past practices of child removal. Indeed, “one of the great virtues of *Bringing Them Home* was that it gave the victims of child removal a public voice and allowed non-indigenous Australians to listen to stories of cruelties they had never before understood.”²⁵ This opened a door for public awareness and dialogue about the Stolen Generations and the injustices and cruelty that Aboriginal people in Australia faced. The report concludes that forcible removal of children was an act of genocide, an act contrary to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, ratified by Australia in 1949.²⁶

The following are two confidential submissions from the *Bringing Them Home Report*.

²³ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (Sydney: Sterling Press, 1997), p. 37.

²⁴ Judy Atkinson, *Trauma Trails: Recreating Song Lines* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2002), p. 88.

²⁵ Robert Manne, ‘In Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Right’, *The Australian Quarterly Essay*, Issue 1, (Melbourne: Schwartz Publishing, 2001), p. 29.

²⁶ “United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide 1948”, United Nations, available from <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%2078/volume-78-I-1021-English.pdf>

Paul's Story

For 18 years the State of Victoria referred to me as State Ward No 54321. I was born in May 1964. My Mother and I lived together within an inner suburb of Melbourne. At the age of five and a half months, both my Mother and I became ill. My Mother took me to the Royal Children's Hospital, where I was admitted.

Upon my recovery, the Social Welfare Department of the Royal Children's Hospital persuaded my Mother to board me into St Gabriel's Babies' Home in Balwyn ... just until Mum regained her health. If only Mum could've known the secret, deceitful agenda of the State welfare system that was about to be put into motion - 18 years of forced separation between a loving mother and her son.

Early in 1965, I was made a ward of the State. The reason given by the State was that, 'Mother is unable to provide adequate care for her son'. In February 1967, the County Court of Victoria dispensed with my Mother's consent to adoption. This decision, made under section 67(d) of the Child Welfare Act 1958, was purportedly based on an 'inability to locate mother'. Only paltry attempts had been made to locate her. For example, no attempt was made to find her address through the Aboriginal Welfare Board. I was immediately transferred to Blackburn South Cottages to be assessed for 'suitable adoptive placement'. When my Mother came for one of her visits, she found an empty cot. With the stroke of a pen, my Mother's Heart and Spirit had been shattered. Later, she was to describe this to me as one of the 'darkest days of her life'.

Repeated requests about my whereabouts were rejected. All her cries for help fell on deaf ears by a Government who had stolen her son, and who had decided 'they' knew what was best for this so-called part-Aboriginal boy. In October 1967 I was placed with a family for adoption. This placement was a dismal failure, lasting only 7 months. This family rejected me, and requested my removal, claiming in their words that I was unresponsive, dull, and that my so-called deficiencies were unacceptable. In the Medical Officer's report on my file there is a comment that Mrs A 'compared him unfavourably with her friends' children and finds his deficiencies an embarrassment, eg at coffee parties'.

Upon removal, I was placed at the Gables Orphanage in Kew, where I was institutionalised for a further two years. Within this two years, I can clearly remember being withdrawn and frightened, and remember not talking to anyone for days on end.

I clearly remember being put in line-ups every fortnight, where prospective foster parents would view all the children. I was always left behind. I remember people coming to the Gables, and taking me to their homes on weekends, but I would always be brought back. Apparently I wasn't quite the child they were looking for.

My dark complexion was a problem.

The Gables knew my dark complexion was a problem, constantly trying to reassure prospective foster parents that I could be taken as Southern European in origin.

In January 1970, I was again placed with a foster family, where I remained until I was 17. This family had four natural sons of their own. I was the only fostered child.

During this placement, I was acutely aware of my colour, and I knew I was different from the other members of their family. At no stage was I ever told of my Aboriginality, or my natural mother or father. When I'd say to my foster family, 'why am I a different colour?', they would laugh at me, and would tell me to drink plenty of milk, 'and then you will look more like us'. The other sons would call me names such as 'their little Abo', and tease me. At the time, I didn't know what this meant, but it did really hurt, and I'd run into the bedroom crying. They would threaten to hurt me if I told anyone they said these things. My foster family made me attend the same primary and secondary school that their other children had all previously attended. Because of this, I was ridiculed and made fun of, by students and teachers. Everyone knew that I was different from the other family members, and that I couldn't be their real brother, even though I'd been given the same surname as them. Often I would run out of class crying, and would hide in the school grounds.

The foster family would punish me severely for the slightest thing they regarded as unacceptable or unchristian-like behaviour, even if I didn't eat my dinner or tea. Sometimes I would be locked in my room for hours. Countless times the foster father would rain blows upon me with his favourite leather strap. He would continue until I wept uncontrollably, pleading for him to stop. My Mother never gave up trying to locate me.

Throughout all these years - from 5 and a half months old to 18 years of age, my Mother never gave up trying to locate me.

She wrote many letters to the State Welfare Authorities, pleading with them to give her son back. Birthday and Christmas cards were sent care of the Welfare Department. All these letters were shelved. The State Welfare Department treated my Mother like dirt, and with utter contempt, as if she never existed. The Department rejected and scoffed at all my Mother's cries and pleas for help. They inflicted a terrible pain of Separation, Anguish and Grief upon a mother who only ever wanted her son back.

In May 1982, I was requested to attend at the Sunshine Welfare Offices, where they formerly discharged me from State wardship. It took the Senior Welfare Officer a mere twenty minutes to come clean, and tell me everything that my heart had always wanted to know. He conveyed to me in a matter-of-fact way that I was of 'Aboriginal descent', that I had a Natural mother, father, three brothers and a sister, who were alive.

He explained that his Department's position was only to protect me and, 'that is why you were not told these things before'. He placed in front of me 368 pages of my file, together with letters, photos and birthday cards. He informed me that my surname would change back to my Mother's maiden name of Angus.

The welfare officer scribbled on a piece of paper my Mother's current address in case, in his words, I'd 'ever want to meet her'. I cried tears of Relief, Guilt and Anger. The official conclusion, on the very last page of my file, reads: 'Paul is a very intelligent, likeable boy, who has made remarkable progress, given the unfortunate treatment of his Mother by the department during his childhood.'

Confidential submission 133, Victoria. When Paul located his mother at the age of 18 she was working in a hostel for Aboriginal children with 20 children under her care. She died six years later at the age of 45. Paul's story appears on page 68 of *Bringing them home*.

Millicent's Story

At the age of four, I was taken away from my family and placed in Sister Kate's Home - Western Australia where I was kept as a ward of the state until I was eighteen years old. I was forbidden to see any of my family or know of their whereabouts. Five of us "D" (surname label) children were all taken and placed in different institutions in WA. The Protector of Aborigines and the Child Welfare Department in their 'Almighty Wisdom' said we would have a better life and future brought up as whitefellas away from our parents in a good religious environment. All they contributed to our upbringing and future was an unrepairable scar of loneliness, mistrust, hatred and bitterness. Fears that have been with me all of life. The empty dark and lonely existence was so full of many hurtful and unforgivable events, that I cannot escape from no matter how hard I try. Being deprived of the most cherished and valuable thing in life as an Aboriginal Child - love and family bonds. I would like to tell my story of my life in Sister Kate's home - WA.

My name is Millicent D. I was born at Wonthella WA in 1945. My parents were CD and MP, both 'half-caste' Aborigines. I was one of seven children, our family lived in the sandhills at the back of the Geraldton Hospital. There was a lot of families living there happy and harmonious. It was like we were all part of one big happy family.

In 1949 the Protector of Aborigines with the Native Welfare Department visited the sandhill camps. All the families living there were to be moved to other campsites or to the Moore River Aboriginal Settlement. Because my parents were fair in complexion, the authorities decided us kids could pass as whitefellas. I was four years old and that was the last time I was to see my parents again. Because my sisters were older than me they were taken to the Government receiving home at Mount Lawley. My brother Kevin was taken to the boys home in Kenwick. Colin and I were taken to the Sister Kate's Home.

We were put in separate accommodation and hardly ever saw each other. I was so afraid and unhappy and didn't understand what was happening. We were told Sundays was visiting day when parents and relatives came and spent the day. For Colin and I that was a patch of lies because our family were not allowed to visit. We spent each Sunday crying and comforting each other as we waited for our family. Each time it was the same - no one came. That night we would cry ourselves to sleep and wonder why. We were too young to understand we were not allowed family visits.

A couple of years passed and I started primary school. It had been such a long time since I had seen my brother Colin. I was so helpless and alone. My brother had been taken away to the boys' home in Kenwick and now I was by myself. I became more withdrawn and shy and lived in a little world of my own hoping one day Mum would come and take me out of that dreadful place. As the years passed I realised that I would never see my family again.

They told me that my family didn't care or want me and I had to forget them. They said it was very degrading to belong to an Aboriginal family and that I should be ashamed of myself, I was inferior to whitefellas. They tried to make us act like white kids but at the same time we had to give up our seat for a whitefella because an Aboriginal never sits down when a white person is present.

Then the religion began. We had church three times a day, before breakfast, lunchtime and after school. If we were naughty or got home from school late we had to kneel at the altar for hours and polish all the floors and brass in the church. We had religion rammed down our throats from hypocrites who didn't know the meaning of the word. We used to get whipped with a wet ironing cord and sometimes had to hold other children (naked) while they were whipped, and if we didn't hold them we got another whipping. To wake us up in the morning we were sprayed up the backside with an old fashioned pump fly spray. If we complained we got more. Hurt and humiliation was a part of our every day life and we had to learn to live with it. Several more years passed and I still had no contact with my family, I didn't know what they looked like or how I could ever find them. By this time I was old enough to go to High School. This meant I didn't have to look after several of the younger kids as I had previously done, bathing, feeding and putting them on the potty and then off to bed, chopping wood before school and housework which all of us kids done and the housemothers sat back and collected wages - for doing nothing. My life was miserable, and I felt I was a nobody and things couldn't get any worse. But I was wrong. The worst was yet to come.

While I was in first year high school I was sent out to work on a farm as a domestic. I thought it would be great to get away from the home for a while. At first it was. I was made welcome and treated with kindness. The four shillings I was paid went to the home. I wasn't allowed to keep it, I didn't care. I was never paid for the work I did at Sister Kate's so you don't miss what you didn't get, pocket money etc.

The first time I was sent to the farm for only a few weeks and then back to school. In the next holidays I had to go back. This time it was a terrifying experience, the man of the house used to come into my room at night and force me to have sex. I tried to fight him off but he was too strong.

When I returned to the home I was feeling so used and unwanted. I went to the Matron and told her what happened. She washed my mouth out with soap and boxed my ears and told me that awful things would happen to me if I told any of the other kids. I was so scared and wanted to die. When the next school holidays came I begged not to be sent to that farm again. But they would not listen and said I had to.

I ran away from the home, I was going to try to find my family. It was impossible, I didn't even know where to go. The only thing was to go back. I got a good belting and had to kneel at the altar everyday after school for two weeks. Then I had to go back to that farm to work. The anguish and humiliation of being sent back was bad enough but the worse was yet to come.

This time I was raped, bashed and slashed with a razor blade on both of my arms and legs because I would not stop struggling and screaming. The farmer and one of his workers raped me several times. I wanted to die, I wanted my mother to take me home where I would be safe and wanted. Because I was bruised and in a state of shock I didn't have to do any work but wasn't allowed to leave the property.

When they returned me to the home I once again went to the Matron. I got a belting with a wet ironing cord, my mouth washed out with soap and put in a cottage by myself away from everyone so I couldn't talk to the other girls. They constantly told me that I was bad and a disgrace and if anyone knew it would bring shame to Sister Kate's Home. They showed me no comfort which I desperately needed. I became more and more distant from everyone and tried to block everything out of my mind but couldn't. I ate rat poison to try and kill myself but became very sick and vomited. This meant another belting. After several weeks of being kept away from everyone I was examined by a doctor who told the Matron I was pregnant. Another belting, they blamed me for everything that had happened. I didn't care what happened to me anymore and kept to myself. All I wanted now was to have my baby and get away as far as I could and try and find my family.

My daughter was born [in 1962] at King Edward Memorial Hospital. I was so happy, I had a beautiful baby girl of my own who I could love and cherish and have with me always. But my dreams were soon crushed: the bastards took her from me and said she would be fostered out until I was old enough to look after her. They said when I left Sister Kate's I could have my baby back. I couldn't believe what was happening. My baby was taken away from me just as I was from my mother.

Once again I approached the Matron asking for the address of my family and address of the foster family who had my daughter. She said that it was

Government Policy not to give information about family and she could not help me. I then asked again about my baby girl and was told she did not know her whereabouts. In desperation I rang the King Edward Memorial Hospital. They said there was no record of me ever giving birth or of my daughter Toni. Then I wrote to the Native Welfare Department only to be told the same thing and that there were no records of the D. family because all records were destroyed by fire.

I now had no other options but to find a job and somewhere to live. After working for a while I left Western Australia and moved to Adelaide to try and get my life together and put the past behind me. I was very alone, shy and not many friends and would break down over the simplest thing. Every time I saw a baby I used to wonder, could that be my little girl. I loved her and so desperately wanted her back. So in 1972 I returned to Western Australia and again searched for my family and child. I returned to see the Matron from Sister Kate's. This time she told me that my daughter was dead and it would be in my best interest to go back to South Australia and forget about my past and my family. I so wanted to find them, heartbroken I wandered the streets hoping for the impossible. I soon realized that I could come face to face with a family member and wouldn't even know.

Defeated I finally returned to Adelaide. In my heart I believed that one day everything would be alright and I would be reunited with my family. My baby was dead. (That's what I was told). I didn't even get to hold her, kiss her and had no photographs, but her image would always be with me, and I would always love her. They couldn't take that away from me.

Confidential submission 640, South Australia: WA woman removed in 1949. In January 1996, Millicent received an enquiry from the South Australian welfare authorities. A woman born in 1962 was searching for her birth mother. This was Toni, Millicent's daughter. The two have since been reunited. Millicent's story appears on page 115 of *Bringing them home*.

The Apology

On February 13 2008 the Federal Government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, made a formal apology to Australia's Stolen Generations. It was watched across Australia in many public spaces, where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people came together to witness this watershed moment of Australian history.

This was for many a culmination of years of protest and public pressure by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people for an official Federal Government apology to the Stolen Generations. The previous Howard government had sparked national outrage by refusing to say 'Sorry' – John Howard instead offered 'deep and sincere regret over the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents' in a motion that was passed in Federal Parliament in 1999. This led to public demonstrations, culminating in May 28th 2000 People's Walk for Reconciliation in state and territory capitals throughout Australia.

Since 1998, 26 May has been a day of remembrance for the Stolen Generations. It is called 'Sorry Day' and it coincides with the day the *Bringing Them Home Report* was presented in Federal Parliament. For many Aboriginal people "a remembrance of the child removals is an important aspect of Aboriginal history, as it commemorates the lives of many children who were lost to their communities."²⁷



Figure 4: People gather at Melbourne's Federation Square to witness Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations²⁸

Aboriginal People Today

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities differ from each other and have a diverse range of customs and cultural practices. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples include upwards of 500 distinct and different cultural groups. Each group has a different language and set of cultural beliefs. For instance, Victorian Aboriginal communities have different cultural beliefs and practices to Northern Territory communities.

²⁷ Tony Birch, "'Black Armbands and White Veils': John Howard's Moral Amnesia," *Melbourne Historical Journal* 25 (1997): p. 15.

²⁸ http://www.theage.com.au/ffximage/2008/02/13/sorry3_gallery__554x400.jpg

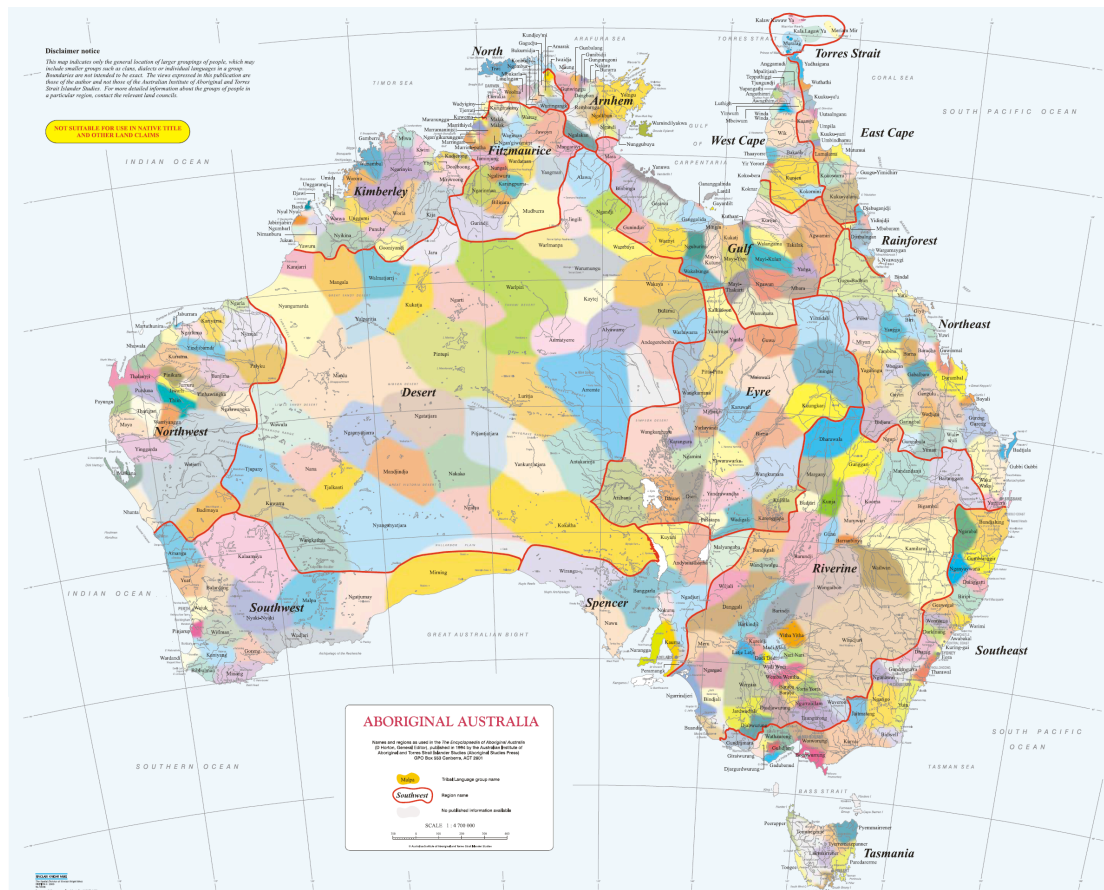


Figure 5: Map of Australian Indigenous Communities²⁹

In a discussion of urban identities, Aboriginal academic Bronwyn Fredericks states that there is no single Aboriginal experience or identity and “Aboriginal culture has needed to adapt, adjust and modify itself in order to survive within the contemporary world. This does not mean that our cultures are not, and that we are not, Aboriginal. You might have to look and listen more closely, but culture is always there in some form, always was and always will be.”³⁰ The diversity of ways of being Aboriginal means that one cannot rely upon stereotypes of what an Aboriginal person or community is and that, like many other aspects of identity, it is up to Aboriginal people and communities to define what it is to be Aboriginal, rather than having these identities imposed upon them.

Aboriginal author Anita Heiss challenges stereotypes of what it is to be Aboriginal in a powerful statement about her identity as an Aboriginal woman. She writes:

I am an urban, beachside Blackfella, a concrete Koori with Westfield Dreaming, and I apologise to no-one. This is *my* story: it is a story about *not* being from the desert, *not* speaking my traditional language and *not* wearing ochre. I’m not very good at playing clapsticks either, and I *loathe*

²⁹ http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/images/indigi_map.png

³⁰ Bronwyn Fredericks, “Urban Identity,” *Eureka Street* 14(10) December 2004: p. 30.

sleeping outdoors. But my story is of the journey of being a proud Wiradjuri woman, just not necessarily being the Blackfella – the so-called ‘real Aborigine’ – some people, perhaps even *you*, expect me to be.³¹

A central aspect of colonisation and its assimilation policies in Australia has been the attempt to disrupt and erase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities. Assimilation policies have sought to strip Indigenous people of their land, identity, language and culture. One example of this is the Stolen Generations and the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from the communities. Despite these attempts, Indigenous communities continue to have strong cultures and identities as evidenced in urban centres, like Melbourne and Sydney, and in regional towns throughout Australia. Lots of Aboriginal communities have local cultural centres and cultural revitalisation programs where traditional languages, dance and song, along with other cultural practices, are being taught to a new generation of young people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resistance has always been vital to this story of survival, and has taken various forms throughout the shared history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. The unifying feature of these forms of resistance has been the continual determination of Aboriginal people to withstand oppression and discrimination and resist attempts to erase their culture and identity. The resistance efforts have included direct actions and protest, such as the 1886 petition to the government by the Coranderrk residents or the 1972 Tent Embassy. These resistance practices have also taken on other creative forms, such as life stories and song.

Through creative expressions much can be read about Aboriginal histories, cultures, identities and life experiences. Artistic and creative work is often influenced by events, and the social and political climate in which they are created. For example, songs about child removal sung by people such as Archie Roach and Bobby Randall document their personal experiences and by listening to their song, the audience is given a chance to uncover aspects of Australian history. Another way the creative arts has been used by Aboriginal people to document and share their experiences is through poetry.

For instance, in 1964 Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) became the first Aboriginal Australian to publish a book of verse *We Are Going*.³² Much of the content offers the reader insight into what it was like for Aboriginal people in the 1950s and 1960s. It also offers ideas about Aboriginal identity and culture and political desires for the future. Margaret Tucker’s *If Everyone Cared* tells her life story and her understanding of many key events in Victorian history.³³

³¹ Anita Heiss, *Am I Black Enough For You?* (Sydney: Random House, 2012), pp. 1-2.

³² Kath Walker, *We Are Going: Poems* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1964).

³³ Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared*, (Sydney: URE Smith, 1977).

Suggested Learning Activities

Government Statements relating to Aboriginal People

- Compare Rudd's speech, Howard's speech in 1997 in Melbourne and Keating's Redfern address.
- What issues was each speech addressing?
- What were some of the common themes within the speeches?
- What are some of the key points of difference?
- What was the historical context of each speech – what was happening in Australian society that motivated each Prime Ministers speech?
- Research what the audience reactions were – what are some of the reasons you think there was such a difference in the reception of these speeches amongst the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community?
- Which speech did you like the best? Why?

Paul Keating - Redfern Speech (Year for the World's Indigenous People) –
Delivered in Redfern Park by Prime Minister Paul Keating, 10 December 1992

Transcript:

https://antar.org.au/sites/default/files/paul_keating_speech_transcript.pdf

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1S4F1euzTw>

John Howard – Opening Address to the Australian Reconciliation Conciliation
Convention, Melbourne, 26 May 1997

Transcript:

<https://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/release/transcript-10361>

Video (a highly critical analysis of parts of Howard's speech):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ffnf-eYPKU>

Kevin Rudd – Apology to Australia's Indigenous People, 13 February 2008

Transcript:

<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XtUJTbQaN0>

Stolen Generations and Genocide

Read the United Nation *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide 1948* (* note: or at least Articles I to IX on the first 4 pages).

Available at

<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%2078/volume-78-I-1021-English.pdf>

- Using this document, think about what you have learnt about the Stolen Generations.
- Outline arguments for and against the case for genocide in the Australian context of the Stolen Generations.
- Divide the class in two groups and have a debate.

Stolen Generations Stories

Read the three stories of people's accounts of their experience with child removal in this document – starting on pages 7, 11 and 13.

- How did these stories make you feel?
- What reasons were the children told by authorities to try and justify their removal?
- To what types of places were they sent?
- How were they treated there?

Stolen Generations in song

Listen to Bob Randal's song *Brown Skin Baby*, which tells of his story of removal. Described as an anthem for the 'Stolen Generations', this song was recorded in 1971 and is credited with being a catalyst for bringing the issue of forced removal of Aboriginal children to light.

Bob Randall: "Brown Skin Baby (They Took Me Away)"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3ytJioxKzI>

Watch Archie Roach's song *Took The Children Away*, which tells of his story of being removed.

Archie Roach: Took The Children Away

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aywDT6yHMmo>

- What similarities are there in their lyrics?
- What did you feel when listened to this music and watched these two clips?
- What were the emotions that they conveyed?
- What are some of the things that the artists say about the government policies specifically?

Victorian Acts relating to Aboriginal people

Read the Victorian Act of Parliament which is widely known as the “Half-caste Act”. Its formal title was: *An Act to Provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria (1886)*

Available at: http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/hist_act/tapa1886265.pdf

- In what ways did this legislation affect the lives of Aboriginal people and families?
- How was this act used to separate families?
- Do some further research about the Act and try to find out some of the responses of Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal people in your community

- Do you know your local Aboriginal community?
- Do you know whose traditional lands you are on?
- What was the nearest mission or reserve to your local community?
- What are some of the stories from your local community?

Research further material via your local council’s website, by looking at the Australian map of Indigenous communities, and looking at a map of Victorian missions and reserves

(see <https://web.archive.org/web/20040831012400/http://www.abc.net.au/missionvoices/>)



Figure 6: Aboriginal Reserves and Missions in Victoria³⁴

³⁴ http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/images/indigi_map.png

Aboriginal Poetry

Read Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poem:

'Aboriginal Charter of Rights' in *We Are Going* (1964).³⁵

Available at:

<http://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/noonuccal-oodgeroo/aboriginal-charter-of-rights-0719030>

- What is the poem about?
- What is Kath Walker trying to convey to the reader?
- What can be understood in this poem about Aboriginal experiences?
- What is Kath Walker saying that Aboriginal people want?

Other resources to investigate:

Films:

*Rabbit Proof Fence*³⁶

Visit <http://aso.gov.au/titles/features/rabbit-proof-fence/> for video clips and information.

*Lousy Little Sixpence*³⁷

Visit <http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/lousy-little-sixpence/> for video clips and information

Plays:

Stolen by Jane Harrison³⁸

Visit <https://riversideparramatta.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Stolen-Teachers-Resource-Notes.pdf> for a play reading and discussion

³⁵ Kath Walker, *We Are Going: Poems* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1964), p. 12.

³⁶ Phillip Noyce (director), *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Australian Film Commission, 2002.

³⁷ Gerald Bostock and Alec Morgan (directors), *Lousy Little Sixpence*, Ronin Films, 1983

³⁸ Jane Harrison, *Stolen*, (Strawberry Hills: Currency Press, 2000).