**AUSTRALIAN RESIDENTIAL BOARDING SCHOOLS**

This report explores the policy of forcibly removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) children from their families [in Australia]. It is estimated that 100,000 Indigenous children were taken from their families and raised in homes or adopted by white families, up until the 1960s. The policy was designed to ‘assimilate’ or ‘breed out’ Indigenous people. These children became known as the ‘Stolen Generations’. “There can be no reconciliation without addressing the past.”

**Forced removal**

The forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families was official government policy from 1909 to 1969. However the practice took place both before and after this period. Governments, churches and welfare bodies all took part.

The removal policy was managed by the Aborigines Protection Board (APB). The APB was a government board established in 1909 with the power to remove children without parental consent and without a court order. Children could be put into an institution or mission dormitory, fostered or adopted. Many children were fostered or adopted after spending time in a children’s home.

Under the White Australia and assimilation policies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were ‘not of full blood’ were encouraged to become assimilated into the broader society so that eventually there would be no more Indigenous people left. At the time Indigenous people were seen as an inferior race.

Children were taken from Aboriginal parents so they could be brought up ‘white’ and taught to reject their Aboriginality. Children were placed with institutions and from the 1950s began also being placed with white families. Aboriginal children were expected to become labourers or servants, so in general the education they were provided was very poor. Aboriginal girls in particular were sent to homes established by the Board to be trained in domestic service.

The lack of understanding and respect for Aboriginal people also meant that many people who supported the child removals believed that they were doing the ‘right thing’. Some people believed that Aboriginal people lived poor and unrewarding lives, and that institutions would provide a positive environment in which Aboriginal people could better themselves. The dominant racist views in the society and government also means that people believed that Aboriginal people were bad parents and that Aboriginal women did not look after their children.

No one knows how many children were taken, as most records have been lost or destroyed. Many parents whose children were taken never saw them again, and siblings who were taken were deliberately separated from each other. Today many Aboriginal people still do not know who their relatives are or have been unable to track them down.

The generations of children who were taken from their families became known as the Stolen Generations. The practice of removing children continued up until the late 1960s meaning today there are Aboriginal people as young as their late 40s or 50s who are members of the Stolen Generations.

In the 1990s the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (the Australian Human Rights Commission) started a national inquiry into the practice of removing Indigenous 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 that between 1 in 10 and 3 in 10 Aboriginal children were forcibly removed between 1910 and 1970.

**Continued Impact**

There have been many studies, which show the damage caused by the forced removal on Indigenous communities. While some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were removed from their families on genuine welfare grounds, and some gained access to some advantages (such as increased educational opportunities), the great majority of Indigenous children who were removed suffered life-long negative consequences.

For example, people who were members of the Stolen Generations are more likely to suffer from depression, have worse health and a shorter life span than other Indigenous people, and are more likely to be imprisoned than other Indigenous people. For example 50% of deaths investigated by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody were of Indigenous people who have been removed from their families as children.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were placed with white families did not find out about their background until late in life. Disconnection from land and language meant loss of culture for many. One of the people interviewed for the Bringing Them Home Report said: “A lot of people say that they don’t know what exactly they are, whether they’re white or they’re black. Where exactly they belong.” The impact of the Stolen Generations has also passed on to the families, who suffered the loss of the children, and to the next generation - whose parents were part of the Stolen Generations.

**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 the financial compensation for the suffering caused by the government.

In 1997 when the report was first released the former 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 recognize 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.

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 Australian 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.

Although the Australian Government took some time to apologize, at the State level governments responded more positively to the Bringing Them Home Report. In 1997 and following years all state and territory leaders apologized for the role that State Governments had played. Many church leaders have also apologized, 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 recognized each year on 26 May. More recently, Sorry Day, has become known to some as Journey of Healing Day.

Although the Australian Government has now apologized, 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. The campaign continues for compensation for members of the Stolen Generation and for the full implementation of the recommendations of the Bringing Them Home Report.

"They just came down and say, "We taking these kids". They just take you out if your mother’s arms. That's what they done to me. I was still at my mother's breast when they took me." - Alex Kruger, 1995 –

The greatest assault on Indigenous cultures and family life was the forced separation or 'taking away' of Indigenous children from their families. This occurred in every Australian state from the late 1800s until the practice was officially ended in 1969. During this time as many as 100 000 children were separated from their families. These children became known as the Stolen Generation.

The separation took three forms: putting Indigenous children into government-run institutions; adoption of children by white families; and the fostering of children into white families. The last two strategies were particularly applied to 'fair-skinned' children. These forced separations were part of deliberate policies of assimilation. Their aim was to cut children off from their culture to have them raised to think and act as 'white'.

**Link Up**

"Well there was nine of us in the family, old (Lambert) came along and said: "You can't look after these kids by yourself Mrs Clayton", but we were for months without welfare coming near us. We had the two grandmothers and all our uncles and aunties there and our father's brothers were there. We weren't short of an extended family by any means. We never went without anything. But they still took us away. What right did they have? I am still seeking answers to [my] family's removal." Iris Clayton, Wiradjuri Elder, Leeton/Canberra in 'Link-Up' Booklet 1995

Link-Up was formed in 1980 to work with Aboriginal adults who were separated as children from families. They may have been raised in state or sectarian institutions specifically for Aboriginal children or in non-Aboriginal institutions, foster homes or adoptive homes.

Most of the children separated from their families grew up knowing little about their Aboriginal names, families, culture and heritage. These circumstances made it very difficult for those who wanted to find their families.

According to Link-Up, "empowerment is the basis of our work. Empowerment means that as workers we acknowledge the person's experience and we respect their ability to make decisions about their needs and their healing process. They are the experts of their own experience". Link-Up provides support and counselling before, during and after the reunion of families. Since it’s beginning Link-Up has worked with thousands of Aboriginal families.

**Government Institutions for Children**

Kinchela is a 13 hectare area of fertile land at the mouth of the Macleay River on the mid-north coast of New South Wales. In 1924, the Aboriginal Protection Board opened the Kinchela Boys Home with the 'official' purpose of providing training for Aboriginal boys between the ages of five and fifteen. These boys were taken from their families by the State from all over New South Wales.

Conditions at Kinchela were harsh. The boys received a poor education from unqualified teachers and worked long hours on vegetable and dairy farms run by the Board on the reserve land. Boys were beaten, tied up, given little emotional support, and no attention was given to developing skills of individual boys. At the age of fifteen, the boys were sent to work as rural labourers. The board kept control of most of their earnings, which were supposed to be kept in trust for them until they reached adulthood. Most never saw their trust money.

Conditions improved in 1940, when the Protection Board was abolished and replaced by the Aboriginal Welfare Board. From the 1950s boys were sent to high school in Kempsey where they won many local athletics and sporting championships. Despite improvements, the fact remains that Kinchela was a home for 'stolen children'. Kinchela closed down in 1969, when the Aboriginal Welfare Board was finally disbanded.

Cootamundra Girls Home, established in 1911, was the first of the homes for Aboriginal children set up by the Aborigines Protection Board. The main aim of the Board was to 'rescue' Aboriginal children from their families and assimilate them into the white community. Girls were the main target of the Board, especially so-called 'half-caste' or 'mixed blood' girls. The girls were trained as domestic servants and sent out to work for middle class white families.

At Cootamundra, Aboriginal girls were instructed to 'think white, look white, act white'. This was part of the process to make the girls suitable wives for white men, in the hope that through interracial marriages, Aboriginal blood would be 'bred out'. They were taught to look down on their own people and to fear Aboriginal men.

Girls in the home were not allowed to communicate with their families. They were often told that their parents were dead and even given forged death certificates. As a result, many of the girls in the home lost their families forever. Cootamundra Home was closed in 1968, the year before the Aboriginal Welfare Board (previously the Aborigines Protection Board) was abolished.

Source: <http://australianmuseum.net.au/Indigenous-Australia-Family>

**CANADIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS**

Residential schools in Canada were based on the Carlisle Indian Industrial School model founded in 1879 by Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The aim of such a schooling system was the forced assimilation of Aboriginal people into the colonial society. This was to be achieved by wiping out their past ethnic and cultural associations and replacing them with European ones. Driven by a kind of missionary zeal, Pratt believed it was important to remove all aspects of being Aboriginal from the child and to immerse that child, as a kind of baptism, into white socialization.

The duty to "civilize" lay on the shoulders of the white man. This was rationalized as a viable alternative to war and the slaughter of people. In spite of this rationalization, however, economic considerations were their actual driving force. Trade with the Aboriginal peoples in the United States had begun to diminish, and was replaced with a scramble by white settlers to lay claim to Aboriginal lands. To facilitate this, Aboriginals were herded onto reservations, enabling the white settler community to claim the "new" territories. It was thought that residential schools would assist this process, because assimilation would make the taking of lands easier, at little or no financial cost to the settler communities.

**The Rationale**

In the nineteenth century, Canada adopted a policy of assimilation of all Aboriginal into the Christian culture of the white settlers. Church organizations were enlisted in the effort, and became enthusiastic and active participants in this system. Children were taken from their homes on the reservations and compelled to attend residential schools because "the influence of the wigwam was stronger than that of the [day] school," in the words of the Davin Report of 1879 which is contained in the report to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People in 1991.

As was true in the United States, the Canadian plan was actually motivated by economic considerations, specifically, by the prospect of creating a hard-working labor force. Aboriginal were often stereotyped as lazy drunkards. The residential schools were to be cured of these deficiencies by teaching Aboriginal children industrial or domestic skills. Boys were taught such subjects as agriculture, carpentry, shoemaking, printing, blacksmithing, and tinsmithing. Girls were taught general household chores such as sewing, shirt making, knitting, cooking, laundry, ironing, as well as dairy farming. In addition, students were expected to engage in practical work in many of these areas of instruction, providing yet another source of free labor.

**Implementation**

In order to ensure that there were sufficient numbers enrolled in all the residential schools, the Minister for Indian Affairs determined which school each student would attend. However, the children of Protestant and Roman Catholic parents could insist that their children attend a school run by representatives of their own faith.

Upon entering the schools, children were stripped of all aspects of their traditional way of life. For instance, their long hair was cut to conform to European styles, and their traditional dress was replaced by European-style clothing. They were taught to view the world through the prism of European values and beliefs. They were expected to abandon their native language and speak only in English (or French, in the schools established in Quebec). All of this was considered essential to the "civilizing" process, by which aboriginal children would ultimately be assimilated into Canadian society.

**The Results**

After education was completed, the plan called for the integration of residential school graduates into the broader Canadian society, so as to prevent any return to the reservation and further backsliding. Most attempts at placing the graduates of this system were a failure, however, because the system made no effort to eradicate the widespread anti-aboriginal prejudice of white Canadians. Unwelcome among white Canadians, most of the aboriginal graduates of the residential schools did return to the reserves, only to find that their European-style education had rendered them misfits in that society, too.

The industrial school model was eventually replaced by a new type of boarding school, the model for which attempted to overcome the problem of student placement in society after graduation. Graduates were sent to model settlements where they were supplied with land, farming equipment, and housing materials, and were expected to create a new community for themselves. That scheme was soon abandoned as a failure, however, and the failure was blamed on allegations that the graduates lacked sufficient motivation. The model settlements were replaced by a new scheme which granted residential school graduates a loan and limited agricultural materials for individual use. By the time residential schools were finally abandoned, it was apparent that this type of social engineering was unlikely to succeed. At its peak in 1931, the residential system had grown to 80 residential schools, located throughout Canada. While it is unclear how many children passed through the residential school system, one estimate suggests that one-third of all aboriginal children between the ages of six and fifteen were in residential schools during the 1930s. Other estimates place the figure closer to fifty percent.

**The Royal Commission Report**

In 1991 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was assigned the task of examining the social, economic, and cultural situation of the aboriginal peoples of Canada. This included a full examination of residential schools through oral testimonies from inmates and employees, as well as archival research.

The findings of the Royal Commission were published in 1996. The report documented widespread physical, sexual, and emotional abuse within the residential school system. It also reported that the schools routinely disparaged the traditional culture of their students, and that children were punished for speaking their own language or for practicing their own religion and culture. The Royal Commission's report went on to confirm that the system's goal of forced assimilation had "an inherent element of savagery," at its core, expressed in such phrases as "kill the Indian in the child."

The Royal Commission's report dealt with the traumatic effects that the residential schools had on the children, their communities, and on succeeding generations. Aboriginal people and professional consultants alike testified that the schools bred social maladjustment, family breakdowns, suicide, alcoholism, domestic violence, and the loss of parenting skills. This last item is significant, for without parenting skills, the schools' graduates had severe difficulty in raising their own children. In the residential schools, children learned that adults often exerted power and control through physical abuse. When they became parents they had no other parenting model to fall back upon, and so inflicted abuse on their own children. This ultimately set up a vicious cycle, which continued in succeeding generations.

**The Canadian Government's Response**

The Royal Commission further demonstrated that the churches and the Canadian government had been aware of some of the documented abuses for some time. Many reports from school inspectors corroborated the pattern of abuse. The Commission went so far as to find the department guilty of neglecting the children and breaching its duty of care. It noted that, although church organizations assumed responsibility for actual instruction, the department of Indian Affairs was charged with administering the schools and funding their construction and maintenance. However, the residential schools were always under-funded and badly administered. Because each school's funding was determined by the number of students enrolled, there was a strong incentive to take in more students than the school could properly hold. This resulted in severe overcrowding, which in turn led to high rates in death from diseases like tuberculosis.

In response to the Royal Commission Report, the Canadian government issued a Statement of Reconciliation in 1998. In it the government acknowledged that the Canadian residential school system separated many children from their families and communities and prevented them from speaking their own languages and from learning about their own heritage and cultures. The government further accepted the key role it had played in the development and administration of the schools. Children who were the victims of sexual and physical abuse were singled out for special mention. The statement included the Canadian government's explicit apology to all the victims of the residential school system. In addition, the Minister of Indian Affairs announced the availability of $350 million for community-based healing, earmarked for those who suffered the effects of physical and sexual abuse.

No monetary compensation was offered for individual victims, however. In reaction, victims of the residential school system turned to the Canadian courts. By June 1998, approximately 1,000 lawsuits were filed. It is estimated that by early 2004, more than 5,000 people may have entered into litigation for damages against the Canadian government. It has also been reported that by March 1999, some $20 million had been spent by the Canadian government in settling residential school claims. It is not clear how the state is likely to deal with these cases in the future, however. It may opt for out-of-court settlements in order to avoid setting legal precedent for the concept of monetary reparations.

Source: <http://www.enotes.com/residential-schools-reference/residential-schools>