

Stolen Children

At the beginning of the 20th century it was decided that Aborigines of mixed race should be assimilated into mainstream Australian society. This led to a practice in which light-skinned Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their parents and adopted by white families. Some families even “blackened up” their children to avoid them being taken. As many as 30,000 “stolen children”, as they were called, were uprooted in this way between 1900 and 1970.

It was only in the 1980s that these practices were given media attention. There was a public outcry and the issue forced white Australians to face up to the less heroic aspects of their country’s past. In 1998 a National Sorry Day was held (although not supported by the federal government) to apologize for past wrongs in general and the sufferings of “the stolen generation” in particular. In 2000, the year of the Sydney Olympics, 400,000 people took part in a “Walk of Reconciliation” across Sydney Harbour Bridge. At the games themselves the Olympic flame was lit by Aboriginal athlete Cathy Freeman.

Archie Roach is an Australian singer-songwriter. He was himself one of the “stolen generation”. Along with his sisters he was forcibly removed from his Aboriginal parents and placed in an orphanage. Later he was fostered by Scottish immigrants. Roach didn’t learn about his origins until he was a young man. He reacted with anger and left his foster home carrying only a guitar. After living on the streets of Adelaide and Melbourne for many years he had his breakthrough as a musician and has become a highly respected artist. He has toured in America and Europe with artists like Tracy Chapman and Bob Dylan.

This song is from his debut album *Charcoal Lane* (1992).

assimilate integrere
mainstream society her: det toneangivende (hvite) samfunnet / det tonegivande (kvite) samfunnet
uprooted rotløse, uten tilhørighet / rotlause, utan tilhørslse
outcry høylytt protest, oppstandelse / høglydt protest, oppstyr
issue sak, tema
reconciliation forsoning
orphanage barnehjem/ barneheim

Took the Children Away

by Archie Roach

This story's right this story's true
I would not tell lies to you
Like the promises they did not keep
And how they fenced us in like sheep
Said to us come take our hand
Sent us off to the mission land
Taught us to read, to write and pray
Then they took the children away

Took the children away
The children away
Snatched from their mother's breast
Said it was for the best
Took them away

The welfare and the policeman
Said you've got to understand
We'll give them what you can't give
Teach them how to really live
Teach them how to live they said
Humiliated them instead
Taught them that and taught them this
And others taught them prejudice

You took the children away
The children away
Breaking their mother's heart
Tearing us all apart
Took them away

One dark day on Framlingham
Come and didn't give a damn
My mother cried go get their dad
He came running fighting mad
Mother's tears were falling down
Dad shaped up and stood his ground
He said you touch my kids and you fight me
And they took us from our family

Took us away
They took us away
Snatched from our mother's breast
Said this is for the best
Took us away

Told us what to do and say
Told us all the white man's ways
Then they split us up again
And gave us gifts to ease the pain
Sent us off to foster homes
As we grew up we felt alone
'Cause we were acting white yet feeling black

One sweet day all the children came back
The children came back
The children came back
Back where their hearts grew strong
Back where they all belong
The children came back
Said the children came back
Back where they understand
Back to their mother's land
The children came back

Back to their mother
Back to their father
Back to their sister
Back to their brother
Back to people
Back to their land
All the children came back
The children came back
The children came back
Yes I came back

snatch rive bort
humiliate ydmyke/audmykje
prejudice fordommer/fordommar
shape up her: stille seg opp
ease the pain glatte over smerten, sorgen /
glatte over smerta, sorga