

# 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