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Dreamtime: the time of the creation of the earth, living things and the beginning of knowledge, from which emerged the laws, values and symbols important to Aboriginal society. Stolen Generations: term used to describe the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who, while children, Australian state and federal governments forcibly removed from their families. The term usually refers to those taken during the period from about 1910 to around 1970. For most Australians, the family unit is where people should be cared for, protected and educated in the behaviour and customs of their society and culture. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, feelings of kinship are also important. Kinship involves special bonds that link an individual to the extended family group. It includes an understanding of the value of sharing and being able to rely on the support of family members and those who understand the Dreamtime.

Kinship also involves respect for elders who pass on the important traditions, values and stories within Indigenous culture and who serve as role models for younger members. By the late 1980s, there were more than 100 000 people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who had: sō lost their links with family and land sō lost their understanding of kinship sō missed out on being educated in the language, culture and traditions of their people. They are the Stolen Generations — Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders who, while children, Australian state and territory governments separated from their families, usually by forcibly removing them.

SOURCE 7. 14 An extract from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's (HREOC) report, Bringing Them Home — Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

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from Their Families, 1997 (see pages 266-7) indigenous: the term used to describe the ' first peoples' of a particular country. Since the 1980s the Commonwealth Government has defined an indigenous person in Australia as ' a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted by the community with which he or she is associated'. Nationally we can conclude with confidence that between one in three and one in ten indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities in the period from approximately 1910 until 1970. In certain regions and in certain periods the figure was undoubtedly much greater than one in ten. In that time not one family has escaped the effects of forcible removal (confirmed by representatives of the Queensland and WA Governments in evidence to the Inquiry). Most families have been affected, in one or more generations, by the forcible removal of one or more children.

#### SOURCE QUESTIONS

1 Identify the estimated percentage of Indigenous children forcibly removed from their families

during the period from about 1910 to around 1970.

2 Outline two ways in which this practice has affected Indigenous families.

#### Government policy

On average, Australian governments removed about one in 300 white children from their families in the twentieth century. People began removing Indigenous children from their families not long after the arrival of Europeans in 1788. State governments began to systematically remove Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander children from their parents towards the late nineteenth century and continued doing so until the late twentieth century. They: s̃ established laws (‘ Protection’ Acts) to empower them to do this s̃ established Protection Boards to administer this policy s̃ gave power to police and Protection Officers to implement it s̃ took over from parents their roles as legal guardians of their children. A minority of politicians expressed concern that these laws and practices amounted to ‘ stealing’ children. Some argued that these children would be exploited as unpaid labour and that removing Indigenous children from their parents would effectively be condoning slavery.

Officials claimed that the removal of Indigenous children from their families was for the children’s protection from neglect and abuse and to provide them with a better life than they could expect to have within their own families and communities. In reality, officials, looking for an excuse to justify their removal, often claimed, falsely, that parents neglected and/or abused their children. Ultimately, most state governments made Indigenous children wards of the state so that there was no need to provide reasons for their removal. Governments sought out, identified and took babies and children and placed them in government and missionary-run training institutions, put them up for adoption or placed them with foster parents. They focused on mixed-race children and expected that they would assimilate with the white race as servants and labourers. They expected that these children would have children with white partners and that, over generations, Australia’s Indigenous people would ultimately ‘ die out’.

Writing in 1930, Mr A. O. Neville, the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia, put it this way: ‘ Eliminate the full-blood and permit the white admixture to half-castes and eventually the race will become white.’

Authorities removed children from their parents and families by force, threat, deception and trickery. Families tried hiding their children. Pregnant women tried to avoid being seen by police and other officials. Parents begged officials to allow them to keep their children. Some children never came back from what was supposed to be a ‘ holiday’ with a good white family. In some states, parents supposedly had the right of appeal to get their children back. Few understood what this process meant or had the money to finance it.

SOURCE 7. 15 An extract from the evidence that a Western Australian woman provided to the HREOC Inquiry

SOURCE QUESTION Explain how source 7. 15 is useful for someone studying the experiences of the Stolen Generations.

Every morning our people would crush charcoal and mix that with animal fat and smother that all over us, so that when the police came they could only see black children in the distance. We were told always to be on the alert and, if white people came, to run into the bush or run and stand behind the trees as stiff as a poker, or else hide behind logs or run into culverts and hide. Often the white people — we didn’t know who they were — would come into our camps. And if the Aboriginal group was taken unawares, they would stuff us into flour bags and pretend we weren’t there. We were told not to sneeze. We knew if we sneezed and they knew that we were in there bundled up, we’d be taken off and away from the area. There was a

disruption of our cycle of life because we were continually scared to be ourselves. During the raids on the camps it was not unusual for people to be shot — shot in the arm or the leg. You can understand the terror that we lived in, the fright — not knowing when someone will come unawares and do whatever they were doing — either disrupting our family life, camp life, or shooting at us. Confidential evidence 681, Western Australia: woman ultimately surrendered at 5 years to Mt Margaret Mission for schooling in the 1930s, in HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 1997.

Institutions, adoptions and fostering

1908 to 1980: The Bomaderry Aboriginal Children's Home

The Aborigines Protection Board established the Bomaderry Aboriginal Children's Home (near Nowra in New South Wales) with the intention of replacing 'original family ties with a new family unit, created according to a European Christian model'. Young children and babies lived there until they were about seven and the Board then sent them on to another 'home' (see the following pages). Staff encouraged the students to think of themselves as white. They denied them any contact with their families and so prevented these children gaining any knowledge of their relatives or their cultural heritage. Many remember this as a happier and more caring place than other institutions, at the same time emphasising that whatever care they received could not make up for what they had lost.

1912 to 1974: The Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Girls In 1912 the Aborigines Protection Board established the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Girls. It was a home for Aboriginal girls from about 7 to 14,

who had been forcibly removed from their parents to train as domestic servants for white families. Authorities: sō denied the girls any contact with their own families sō taught them nothing about their own cultures and traditions sō forbade the use of their traditional languages sō punished anyone who contravened these rules. This pattern continued throughout the period that the home operated. Instructors taught girls that they were white and that Indigenous Australians were inferior.

SOURCE 7. 16 The October 1952 front cover for the magazine Dawn, published by the Aborigines Welfare Board (NSW). The cover depicts girls from the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home. The accompanying description read ' These happy Cootamundra girls, spick and span in their neat school uniforms, await the bus to take them into Cootamundra High School. These women of tomorrow are being given a training that will make life easier and sweeter for them and help their eventual assimilation into the white community.'

Describe the impression source 7. 16 creates of the experiences and attitudes of these girls. Identify the aspects of the girls' lives that the picture and caption ignore. Describe the perspective indicated in the photo and caption. Assess the reliability of this image for someone investigating the experiences of the Stolen Generations.

The girls at the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home used to sit on the wooden cover of an old well, hoping to see family members coming up the drive to take them home. Forty years after the Home was closed down, several former residents created a memorial in the form of the old well, to

remind future generations of the experiences they endured as children. At a time when other girls were working in factories rather than submitting to the poor working conditions and lack of freedom often associated with domestic service, Aboriginal girls were being called on to fill the gap. Once in domestic service, these girls: sō were paid infrequently, if at all sō worked long hours with little personal freedom sō were at risk of sexual abuse. Police went after those who ran away and could then send them to the Parramatta Industrial School, Long Bay jail or even to a psychiatric institution.

#### 1924 to 1971: The Kinchela Boys Home

The Kinchela Boys Home at Kempsey, New South Wales, was among the worst of the 'homes' to which authorities sent children. It was for Aboriginal boys aged from about 7 to 14 and they went there to gain a basic education and to learn farming and some basic manual labour tasks. In the years 1924 to 1971, approximately 400 members of the Stolen Generations lived there. Discipline was strict, treatment harsh and punishment severe. Child Welfare officers rarely inspected this institution or checked on what it was doing to investigate negative reports about how the superintendent ran the Home and treated the boys in his charge. Staff referred to the boys as 'inmates'. The day began early with farming tasks before breakfast and no breakfast for those who finished late. Then came school (on the premises and with untrained teachers) until 3 pm, followed by an additional two to four hours' work as farm labourers before being sent to bed at about 8 pm. In the 1950s Kinchela boys began attending Kempsey Boys' High School, where many of them excelled at sport. Boys at Kinchela had neither the time nor the environment from which to benefit from their academic education.



SOURCE 7. 17 The late actor, author and activist Burnum Burnum was taken first to Bomaderry Children's Home and then to Kinchela Boys Home in the 1940s where he spent his teenage years. He holds a photograph of himself and other barefooted boys lining up for inspection.

#### Foster homes and adoption

From the 1950s onwards, as a cost-saving measure, governments were tending more and more to put Indigenous children into foster care or up for adoption rather than into institutions. By the early 1960s they had begun to see institutional care as encouraging segregation rather than the assimilation which was their goal. In the period from about 1950 to 1960 authorities put as many as 17 per cent of Indigenous children up for adoption (see source 7. 2, page 253). In New South Wales, in the 1960s, authorities placed 300 Indigenous children in foster care. Some children went to three or four different foster homes before being permanently placed. Some of the foster and adoptive parents were well meaning and wanted to help the children they took in. Others saw the children as a resource from which they could benefit.

SOURCE QUESTION Describe what source 7. 17 indicates about the treatment of the boys at Kinchela.

SOURCE 7. 18 An extract from a witness statement in *Bringing Them Home*, 1997, p. 50 SOURCE QUESTION In source 7. 18, distinguish between what authorities claimed they were doing for Indigenous children and the reality.

I was taken off my mum as soon as I was born, so she never even seen me. What Welfare wanted to do was adopt all these poor little black babies into nice, caring white families, respectable white families, where they'd get a good upbringing. I had a shit upbringing. Me and [adopted brother who was also Aboriginal] were always treated different to the others . . . we weren't given the same love, we were always to blame . . . I found my mum when I was eighteen — she was really happy to hear from me, because she didn't adopt me out. Apparently she did sign adoption papers, but she didn't know [what they were]. She said to me that for months she was running away from Welfare [while she was pregnant], and they kept finding her . . . Right from the beginning they didn't want her to have me. Boards frequently pressured Indigenous mothers to give up their children at birth. Often these mothers didn't understand the ' consent' papers that officials gave them to sign. In Western Australia, officials didn't need to obtain consent because the law classified all Indigenous children as wards of the state, meaning that, legally, their parents had no rights to them.

Stolen lives, stolen identities

Physical, psychological and emotional harm

Stealing children had a devastating impact on its direct and indirect victims.

Parents and communities lost their roles in nurturing these children to adulthood. Children denied these skills failed to learn by example how to be good parents. For the stolen children themselves, the separation from parents was as traumatic as if their parents had died. Denied access to their language, heritage, culture and role models within their own communities, many suffered depression and poor self-esteem. The staff they encountered

in institutions varied from those who were kindly and well meaning to those who were cruel and sadistic. None had any training suited to their work. Children of the Stolen Generations were more vulnerable than children generally. Other people ruled their lives, denied them opportunities for complaint and were reluctant to believe them if they did complain. The Bringing Them Home report (see page 266) indicated that as many as 20–25 per cent of children in adoptive and foster homes and 10 per cent of those in institutions were victims of sexual assault.

SOURCE 7. 19 An extract from confidential evidence 248, which a Western Australian woman provided to the 1997 HREOC Inquiry. She was removed from her family as a baby and sent to the Colebrook Home at Eden Hills, Adelaide. At 15 she was raped while at a work placement which the Home had organised.

I remember when my sister come down and visited me and I was reaching out. There was no-one there. I was just reaching out and I could see her standing there and I couldn't tell her that I'd been raped. And I never told anyone for years and years. And I've had this all inside me for years and years and years. I've been sexually abused, harassed, and then finally raped, y'know, and I've never had anyone to talk to about it . . . nobody, no father, no mother, no-one. We had no-one to guide us. I felt so isolated, alienated. And I just had no-one. That's why I hit the booze. None of that family bonding, nurturing — nothing. We had nothing.

The governments and agencies that separated Indigenous children from their families wanted this separation to be permanent. Therefore, they were

committed to preventing and minimising contact with parents and other family members. Authorities censored letters and put severe restrictions on family visits. Under the policy of assimilation, the NSW Government made it illegal for Indigenous parents to attempt to contact their children living in institutions. Staff taught the children to think of Indigenous people as dirty, untrustworthy, threatening and inferior. Children learned to fear and even reject Indigenous people and many blamed their parents for their removal.

As a child I had no mother's arms to hold me. No father to lead me into the world. Us takenaway kids only had each other. All of us damaged and too young to know what to do. We had strangers standing over us. Some were nice and did the best they could. But many were just cruel nasty types. We were flogged often. We learnt to shut up and keep our eyes to the ground, for fear of being singled out and punished. We lived in dread of being sent away again where we could be even worse off. Many of us grew up hard and tough. Others were explosive and angry. A lot grew up just struggling to cope at all. They found their peace in other institutions or alcohol. Most of us learnt how to occupy a small space and avoid anything that looked like trouble. We had few ideas about relationships. No one showed us how to be lovers or parents. How to feel safe loving someone when that risked them being taken away and leaving us alone again. Everyone and everything we loved was taken away from us kids.

SOURCE 7. 21 Two extracts from witness statements in the 1997 HREOC report on the Stolen Generations

[1] We were playing in the schoolyard and this old black man came to the fence. I could hear him singing out to me and my sister. I said to [my sister] Don't go. There's a black man. And we took off. It was two years ago I found out that was my grandfather. He came looking for us. I don't know when I ever stopped being frightened of Aboriginal people. I don't know when I even realised I was Aboriginal. It's been a long hard fight for me. [2] Even though I had a good education with [adoptive family] and went to college, there was just this feeling that I did not belong there. The best day of my life was when I met my brothers because I felt I belonged and I finally had a family. HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 1997, pp. 211 and 13.

#### SOURCE QUESTIONS

1 Identify what the author of source 7. 20 indicates as being the features of his childhood as one of

the Stolen Generations.

2 Describe what he sees as the impact on his adult life. 3 Identify the emotions experienced by the two witnesses in source 7. 21.

#### Employment

When children reached their mid-teens, the authorities sent them to work as farm labourers or domestic servants. This happened regardless of the individual child's interests, talents and intelligence. In cases where children received good marks at school, the authorities often ignored these results and maintained their belief that Indigenous people had limited intellectual ability and were likely to be troublesome. Employers paid wages straight into

a bank account controlled by the authorities. People could get access to their wages only if they provided an 'acceptable' reason for needing them.

Institutions had no comprehensive system of record keeping. Children taken at a young age had little knowledge of where they had come from and perhaps not even the names of their parents. Many members of the Stolen Generations never saw their parents again. In 1980, Peter Read and Oomera Edwards established Link Up (NSW), an organisation dedicated to tracing and reuniting 'children' with their families. It has now become Stolen Generations Link Up, with branches in every state.

#### Towards self-determination

In the 1960s, most Australians remained largely ignorant of the systematic removal of Indigenous people from their families that had been going on for over a century. Victims often felt too ashamed to talk about it and/or lacked a receptive audience.

At the same time, Indigenous activism, changing attitudes within governments and among welfare workers and increasing recognition of Indigenous people's rights slowly began to have an impact. From the mid 1960s, the policy of integration (see page 256) brought the beginnings of acceptance of Indigenous culture. In 1969 the NSW Government abolished the Aborigines' Welfare Board. Institutions began to close down and from the mid 1970s, under a policy of self-determination (see pages 256 -7), the government began to seek the views of Indigenous people when placing Indigenous children in foster care or for adoption. By the mid 1980s the policy on

placement had changed to one where the preferred option was that Indigenous children be placed with people of their own race. Indigenous activists pressured governments throughout Australia to adopt this Aboriginal Child Placement Principle and worked to reduce the numbers of Indigenous children whom welfare services removed from their families.

### Bringing them home

In 1995, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) began a national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. The Commission released its report, *Bringing Them Home*, in 1997. It summarised the rationale behind the policy, its negative impact, and the continuing feelings of grief and loss that individuals and communities experienced while trying to gain some sense of identity. HREOC found that forcibly removing children from their parents went against: *•* Australia's own legal standards *•* international human rights obligations *•* the values held by many Australians at the time. Governments did not recognise Indigenous parents as having any rights with regard to their children and did not consider a child's right to grow up within his or her own family. Parents had limited rights of appeal against a decision to take their children.

By continuing to approve the forcible removal of Indigenous children ' to another group', Australia was breaking its commitment to the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which it had signed in 1949. The convention defines the forcible removal of children ' to another group' as genocide (that is, the policy of destroying a culture).

Racism was one of the motives for taking the children. Those who took children 'for their own good' assumed that their own families could not properly care for them or felt that they were saving them from substandard and impoverished living conditions. They believed that Indigenous culture had nothing worthwhile to offer when compared with European culture. Government bodies and welfare organisations failed to consider that it might have been better to improve Indigenous people's poor living conditions rather than deprive their children of their own families and culture.

### Being sorry

It is not possible to make up for what has been lost by Indigenous families as a result of the forced removal of their children. The HREOC Inquiry made some suggestions, including: an apology from the institutions that had been involved in taking children assistance to Indigenous people to help them reunite with their families and regain their cultural identities public recognition of past injustices through education and a National Sorry Day the establishment of a national compensation fund. The report focused people's attention on the issue of a national apology. Australia's state and territory parliaments all subsequently passed formal motions of apology to the 'stolen children'. In 1999, the then Commonwealth Government, under Prime Minister John Howard, expressed 'regret' for past injustices but would not apologise.

We analysed the techniques used in political cartoons in chapter 1 (see page 32). Notice the techniques that the cartoonist Alan Moir uses in this political cartoon which he called 'Father of the Year in 1997'. The target is in the



centre of the picture. UÊ The head is quite large so people focus attention on the facial expression. UÊ The pupils of the eyes are small dots to make the expression severe. UÊ The exaggerated eyebrows enhance the severe expression, as well as helping to identify the Prime Minister. UÊ The body language (pointing aggressively) also expresses a message. UÊ The background is minimal, with just a chair to suggest that the Prime Minister is in the comfort of his lounge room. UÊ The children are shut out and apparently unwelcome. UÊ There are few words and a simple message. UÊ There is irony in the message on the door.

SOURCE 7. 22 A comment from the cartoonist Alan Moir on Prime Minister John

Howard's attitude to the Stolen Generations (as published in the Sydney Morning Herald)

#### SOURCE QUESTIONS

- 1 Identify the people depicted in source 7. 22.
- 2 Explain the sign on the door.
- 3 In what year do you think this cartoon was published?

Give reasons for your answer.

- 4 Outline the message the cartoonist wants to convey.

#### ACTIVITIES

Describe means state what something is like.

Outline means give a brief description or summary of the main features of something.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING 1 Describe the role the family usually serves in the upbringing of children. 2 What additional role did traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families perform? 3 Explain who the Stolen Generations are and what aspects of family and community life they missed out on. 4 Explain how Australian governments organised the removal of Indigenous children from their parents. 5 What did they claim were the reasons for removing children from their families and what was the real reason? 6 Describe the kind of life institutions offered to Indigenous children. 7 When and why did state governments begin to place more emphasis on putting Indigenous children up for adoption or fostering them and how did this affect mothers?

8 In what ways did governments fail to provide protection for Indigenous children and uphold their rights? 9 Outline the ways attitudes and practices towards Indigenous children changed from the late 1960s onwards. 10 What is HREOC? Explain its role in relation to the Stolen Generations. 11 Identify five conclusions from the Bringing Them Home report. 12 How did Australia's governments respond to demands for a national apology to the Stolen Generations in the decade after the Bringing Them Home report? RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATE 13 Use the Coming Home weblink in your eBookPLUS to view a 2007 painting of the same name by Beverley Grant. Read the symbolism and 'story' below the painting and explain the message the artist wants to convey and how this is achieved. WORKSHEET Worksheet 7. 1 Film review — Rabbit Proof Fence