

In New South Wales, Indigenous children with European ancestry had been removed from their families since the setting up of the Aboriginal Protection Board (the Board) in 1883. Although assimilation was not really government policy then, those children were taken away so they could be 'merged' into non-Indigenous society. The *Aborigines*



*Protection Act 1909* (NSW) gave the Board the power to 'assume full custody of the child of any aborigine' if a court found there was neglect. Many Indigenous families were able to leave New South Wales and go to another State because it took so long to get cases to court. The Board asked for more powers and by 1915 they could take Aboriginal children from their homes without a court hearing.

To remove a non-Indigenous child from its parents it had to be proven in court that the child was in danger. This was not the case with an Indigenous child. The removal of the children was often not planned. An Aboriginal Protection Board official, the reserve manager or a policeman could declare that a child was in 'danger' and that child could be removed without even its parents being informed beforehand. The only way a parent could stop their child from being taken away was by appealing the decision in a court.

Many parents were forced to sign or thumbprint documents they could not even read that meant their children could be taken away. There are many stories of children being hidden so the authorities could not take them. Some parents did not even get to say goodbye to their children. They were taken while they were out hunting, or while the children were playing away from their home. There are also many heartbreaking stories of children who were ripped out of their mother's arms and taken away. Many children who were taken have memories of their family members chasing the car that was taking them away. The parents were often not told where their children were going. The children were often told that they were no longer wanted or that their family was dead.

The Board was also granted the power to force Indigenous children over the age of 14 to leave their reserve or mission and go to work elsewhere. Boys were sent to Kinchela Training Institute or had to work as labourers on farms. Many of the girls were sent to the Cootamundra Training Home where they were taught how to be domestic servants. *See image 1*

From 1912 - 1938 over 1400 children were taken from their parents in New South Wales. At that time the State had an Indigenous population of fewer than 10 000. In 1937 the New South Wales Aboriginal Protection Board was replaced by the Aboriginal Welfare Board. It was essentially the same organisation, although some changes in New South Wales did take place. The Board's powers to force children out to work were now restricted, but they still had the power to remove 'neglected' or 'uncontrollable' children. The practice of removing Indigenous children and placing them in foster homes or training schools to 'assimilate' them continued in New South Wales until 1969.