


DIRECTED BY
TONY KRAWITZ



THE
TALL
MAN

LIFE IN PARADISE.

DEATH IN CUSTODY.

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A **STUDY GUIDE** BY MYKE BARTLETT



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*Tall Man is skinny and tall and scary.
 You got to watch out for that Tall Man spirit.
 Tall Man is ugly and stinkin' and fat.
 He lives up in the hills.
 The Tall Man's really big and he smells.
 He walk around late at night.
 He'll get ya.*



Introduction

The death of Cameron Doomadgee in a Palm Island prison cell opens this hard-hitting documentary, based on the book of the same name by Chloe Hooper. Beginning with death and ending in despair, the film exposes troubling racial tensions, institutionalised injustice, and the slippery nature of truth. Forced to work around its dubious star – Senior Sergeant Chris Hurley, who stood trial for Doomadgee’s manslaughter – the filmmakers rely on second-hand accounts to craft a compelling portrait of a shadowy figure. In some ways, the film is more successful for Hurley’s absence. Created through rumour and hearsay, his silhouette becomes that of a mythical white bogeyman, the Tall Man, who represents the injustices and the violence perpetrated by his race against this nation’s first people.

Despite that, the film refuses to deal with its subject in a black-and-white manner, instead offering a sometimes sympathetic portrait of the sort of man produced and protected by a corrupt system that does view the world in such stark binaries. Still, the film remains one of shocking contrasts – between a paradisiacal setting and a hellish existence, between the promises of a legal system and the justice it delivers. Featuring a compelling blend of community voices, expert accounts and archival footage, this often confronting piece creates space for debate, rather than being a platform for accusation. As such, it should prove a rich text for senior secondary students of English, Media and humanities areas including History and

politics. This study guide aims to provide starting points for discussion of both the issues raised and of how the film portrays them, with a focus on several aspects of production.

Background

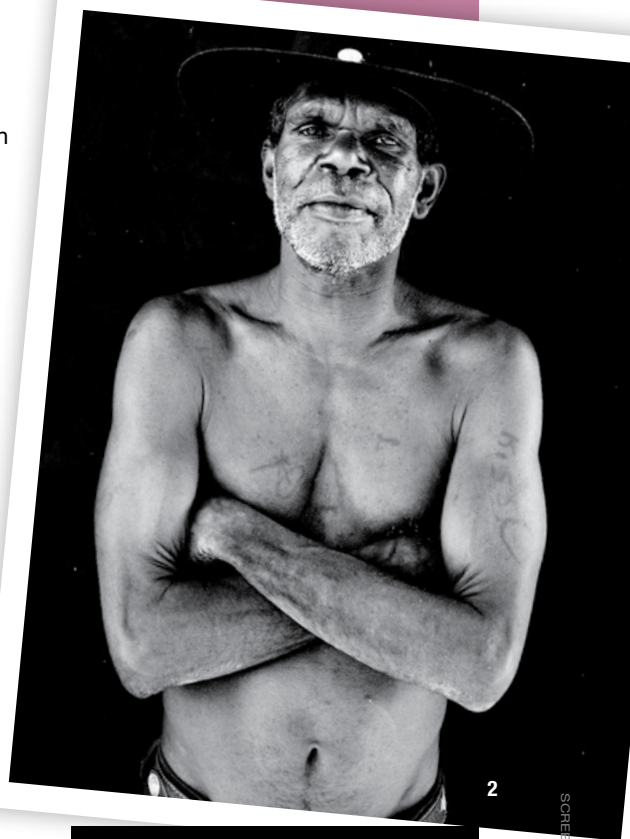
Cameron Doomadgee was found dead in the Palm Island police station in 2004, having suffered the sort of injuries one might expect to see in a car crash victim. After the police denied responsibility, claiming Doomadgee had merely tripped over, the infuriated community rioted and burned down the police station. Subsequent inquests found that Senior Sergeant Chris Hurley and his colleagues had lied and colluded to taint any investigation into the death. Despite this, even after the intervention of the Beattie government, Hurley was found not guilty when tried for manslaughter.

Author Chloe Hooper’s book on the events surrounding Doomadgee’s death, *The Tall Man: Death and Life on Palm Island*, on which the film is based, has won several awards since its publication in 2008.

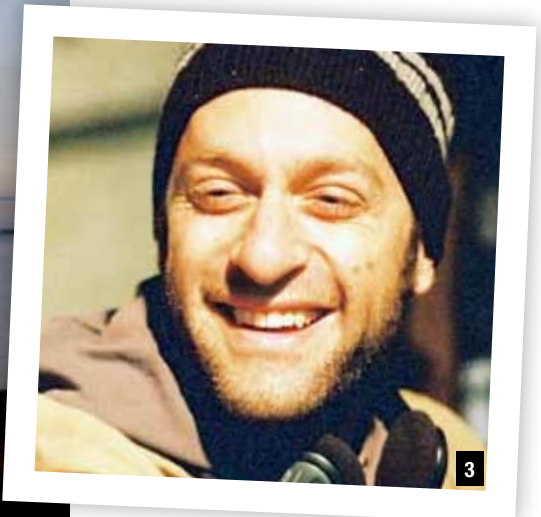
Curriculum links

The Tall Man is suitable for senior and tertiary students studying English (Issues), Film as Text, Cinema Studies, Social Values, Australian History.

Teachers of students under fifteen should be aware that the film contains violence and strong language. The film runs for 78 minutes.



1: CAMERON DOOMADGEE (R) AS A YOUNG MAN (PHOTO COURTESY OF TRACY TWADDLE) 2: LLOYD DOOMADGEE, CAMERON DOOMADGEE'S BROTHER (PHOTO: HAMISH CAIRNS)



1: MAN RIDING HORSE ON PALM ISLAND (PHOTO: HAMISH CAIRNS) 2: PRODUCER DARREN DALE 3: DIRECTOR TONY KRAWITZ

1.

THE FILM: COMMUNITIES AND BOGEYMEN

It's telling that the first voices we hear are those of the Palm Island community, sharing the legend of the Tall Man, a mythical bogeyman who descends from the hills to wreak indiscriminate violence. This is a film that depends on a plurality of voices, discussing a story's impact, rather than merely telling a tale.

Talking about her book, author Chloe Hooper has said: 'I didn't want this to be a book about issues, I wanted it to be a book about people.'¹ Certainly, Doomadgee is more than a mere catalyst. He exists here as a three-dimensional character, portrayed by those who loved him as a gentle, innocent spirit.

Similarly, Hurley is allowed to develop beyond his bogeyman outline, so that we are able to understand what might bring a man to, allegedly, commit such violence. Although we are left in little doubt as to what happened, we are more interested in the people involved.

From the start, however, we hear two kinds of voices. There are the human voices of the local community, friends and relatives of the dead man, and there are the voices of authority. Gossip about local legends gives way to a cold news report about Doomadgee's death and a recording of Hurley's testimony to an inquest.

Immediately the filmmakers are calling into question the credibility we afford our official channels – the news media, the police – by seeming to privilege the emotional above the objective. Chris Hurley is put on pause, trapped on fuzzy video tape, while Doomadgee's de facto wife gives a personal tour of her partner's belongings. The community is here, with us in the moment, whereas the other voices seem far away.

As such, Hurley and the police at large are quickly established as 'the other'; the bogeymen. Doomadgee, on the other hand, is held up as an example of the brutality that results when the island's authority is challenged. As one witness says, if you question the police's actions, 'you are in trouble as well'. Even the rioting that saw the police station burned to the ground seems cast in a sympathetic light, the police perspective again confined to archival footage and news reports. In contrast, the 'payback' for the riots are portrayed from the pointy end, with a young Aboriginal man telling us:



THE FILMMAKERS

TONY KRAWITZ, DIRECTOR

Tony Krawitz wrote and directed the film *Jewboy*, which premiered at the 2005 Cannes Film Festival, and went on to screen at many major festivals including Pusan, Jerusalem and Sundance. Krawitz has also directed on *The Surgeon* for Channel Ten and *City Homicide* and *All Saints* for Channel Seven. He was the second unit director on the series *The Silence* for ABC TV.

DARREN DALE, PRODUCER

Producer Darren Dale began his career with Australian public broadcaster SBS Television in 1997. He has been a production manager for various SBS TV programs and was associate producer on *Headlines Across Australia*, an Indigenous news and information series. Since 2001, Dale has been a company director of Blackfella Films, Australia's premier Indigenous production company.

ROCHELLE OSHLACK, EDITOR

Oshlack has worked in post-production for film and television for over twenty-three years. Her recent credits as film editor include the box-office hit musical *Bran Nue Dae*, the critically acclaimed documentary series *First Australians*, the UN Media Peace award winner, *Lani's Story*, and now *The Tall Man*.

SAM PETTY, SOUND DESIGNER

Sam Petty has a wealth of experience in sound production and design. He has gathered numerous AFI nominations over the years, and has won AFI awards for *Somersault*, *Little Fish*, *Global Haywire* and *Animal Kingdom*, as well as IF awards for *Little Fish*, *The Square* and *Balibo*.

‘They came in with their big fucking machine guns. Sorry for swearing. But they came in with their big guns and everything eh.’

When we do hear fresh voices talk in Hurley’s defence, we are presented with a sudden shock of white faces. Anglo residents of Burketown, Hurley’s previous posting, assure us that he wouldn’t ever commit such a violent act, repeating the word ‘gentle’ as if it is a spell that might alone clear his name.

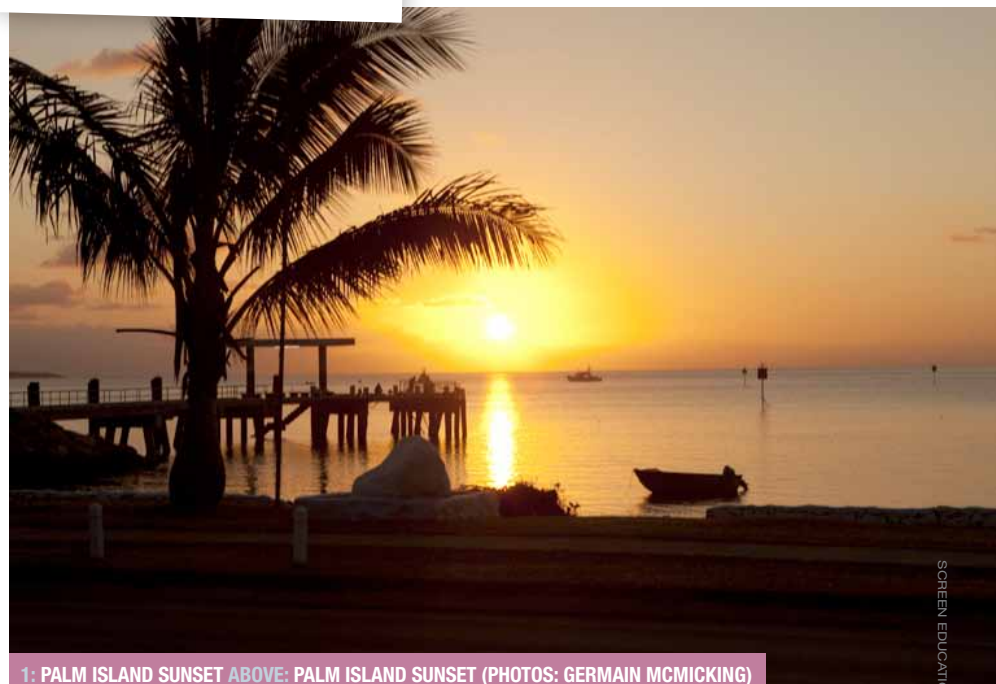
In some ways, this sudden breaching of the racial divide highlights community racial tensions more sharply than the preceding footage of rioting and destruction. White people, it suggests, will always stick up for one another. Even author Chloe Hooper now appears on screen in Hurley’s defence. ‘He was at all the social events,’ she says, ‘he was teaching kids to drive in the police car on the oval, taking them camping.’ Yet, strangely, her appearance seems to somewhat undermine his defence, as if the author has felt compelled to intercede and tell us Hurley had redeeming features, as the filmmakers are unable to show us. More convincing is the character reference given by Aboriginal activist Murrandoo Yanner, who tells us of Hurley’s moment of realisation while fishing that he was a racist, and of his new determination to do something about it.

There are certainly other voices prepared to speak in Hurley’s defence, most notably Ian Leavers, the Queensland Police Union president. Leavers is unflagging in his support for Hurley and clearly resentful of the ‘interfering’ government that saw him stand trial. His testimonial, however, effectively works against Hurley, as he is transparently defending his own agenda. Indeed, the film ultimately implies that Leavers shares some of the burden of guilt, having assisted in the cover-up. As journalist Tony Koch (representing the ‘human face’ of the news media) puts it:

Once you start telling one lie and having one little cover-up it’s like a snowballing effect, you know, everybody

has to lie or, you know, lots of people have to lie. Lots of people have to cover up to get back to that one omission from Hurley when he wouldn’t put his hand up.

Our final view of Leavers, taken from file news footage, is of a man with his head bowed, chewing over his words and apparently distressed by the findings of the final inquest. Whether he is upset because the inquest has been damning of the police or whether he is considering his culpability is unclear, but the use of slow motion ensures we are given time to draw our own conclusions.



1: PALM ISLAND SUNSET ABOVE: PALM ISLAND SUNSET (PHOTOS: GERMAIN MCMICKING)

Questions:

- Would our view of the events on Palm Island change if we began the story from the perspective of the police officers?
- Which voices do we find most convincing? Explain your responses.
- Do you feel that the filmmakers intend us to believe Hurley was responsible for Doomadgee’s death?
- Is it possible to draw any other conclusion?
- Does the film suggest why Hurley might have killed Doomadgee? If so, which voices offer the most compelling explanation?
- Identify evidence presented by the film that suggests the police account of events cannot be trusted. How was the investigation ‘tainted’?
- How effective is the use of diagrams, illustrating the injuries Doomadgee suffered, when juxtaposed with Hurley’s account of the incident?
- Similarly, how effective is the use of crash-test footage, when juxtaposed with video footage of Hurley’s re-enactment?
- How important is it to the meaning of the film that the final lines are given to Doomadgee’s de facto Tracy, rather than to Hurley?

Key figures in the film

Chris Hurley

The Tall Man lives in the hills but comes down and watches people while they are sleeping. For no reason he will slap you across the face.

Chris Hurley is a tall man: 'He tall, he tall, he tall, you know.' – Chloe Hooper, writing in *The Monthly*²

'He's the only cop who'd been in my house. Only cop ever taken my kid bush.'

– Murrando Yanner

Although he is absent from Krawitz's documentary as his apparent victim, Hurley presents a fascinating character study. He is not quite a villain, but neither is he blameless. At first, we see him from a distance, arresting an innocent man and apparently battering him to death. By the film's end, we might not sympathise with him, but at least we understand the forces that have created him. He is the system and he has been corrupted by the system.

As already mentioned, it is telling that Hooper is first to come to his defence. In an interview with Sally Warhaft, Hooper says she first saw the man as being 'almost ogre-like', and shares the story she had heard (an anecdote detailed in the film) about him breaking the foot of Doomadgee's sister. Arriving on Palm Island, she saw Hurley as an 'archetypal bad guy, but slowly I realised that was ... wrong'. In fact, Hurley had been something of a 'model cop', constructively involved in the lives of Indigenous communities. Still, in her writing about the events on Palm Island, Hooper has questioned Hurley's motives for working within such communities. Is he there to make a difference, or 'Does he stay with the "natives" because he cannot resist the power, the absolute power, he has among them?'³

- What are your first impressions of Chris Hurley?
- At what points in the film do these impressions change, if at all?
- Make a list of words used to describe him. Are any words used repeatedly?



A PALM ISLAND MAN (PHOTO: HAMISH CAIRNS)

- How does the choice of title inform our opinion of him? Should the filmmakers have considered using a more neutral title?
- Are we supposed to identify with Hurley at all, given the harsh conditions in which he worked?
- How important is the story of Barbara Pilot's foot to our opinion of Hurley?
- How are your final impressions of Hurley affected by his last lines: 'Well, it's happened sir. Regret – you can't regret what you've done.'
- Explain which of the following statements you find most convincing:
 - a. 'Chris Hurley ... had a commitment ... to try and make a difference in those communities.'
 - b. Chris Hurley was a man in a difficult situation, who can't face up to his actions.
 - c. Chris Hurley enjoyed the power he had working in Indigenous communities.
- Might your opinion of Hurley have been different if he had spoken up for himself throughout the film, rather than being 'judged' in his absence? What might he have said in his defence?

Cameron Doomadgee

He was always there for me and his mum and his family. And he was always joking and ready for a laugh, you know, and he'd always lift our spirits. And I think he saw the good and the right in life.

– Tracy Twaddle

'Very tall. Elegant in terms of how he moved around.' – Erykah Kyle

- What are your first impressions of Cameron Doomadgee?
- Make a list of words used to

describe him. Are any words used repeatedly?

- Is it important that we are shown details of his personal life – his shirts, for example?
- Is it important that two eyewitness accounts suggest Doomadgee was 'happy-go-lucky' when arrested? Would our opinion of him be different if he had been arrested for aggressive behaviour?

Ian Leavers

'I was watching the main union rep Ian Leavers and his face just kept dropping and dropping and dropping.'

– Lisa Watson

- What are your first impressions of Ian Leavers?
- What are your final impressions?
- Do you find his defence of Hurley to be convincing? Explain your answer.
- What is the effect of the final shot of Leavers, where the sound drops away and his head is bowed?

Lloyd Bengaroo

'Lloyd Bengaroo was in an incredibly difficult position. He was literally caught between two tribes.' – Chloe Hooper

Lloyd Bengaroo, in his late fifties, was overweight and overburdened. A Police Liaison Officer is supposed to work with police, representing the interests of the community, but Bengaroo did not convince in the role. Instead he was seen as a police 'watchdog' or 'errand boy', and was not much liked or respected. – Chloe Hooper, writing in *The Monthly*⁴

- What are your impressions of Lloyd Bengaroo?
- Explain how the comments above reflect the apparently irreconcilable differences between the Indigenous community and the police. Can Bengaroo be seen to embody this conflict?

Roy Bramwell

'Roy Bramwell's accounts ... were terribly poignant and likely, one would think, to be true.' – Andrew Boe



'Roy Bramwell had given so many different accounts of what he'd seen that he would just be massacred by Hurley's lawyers on the stand.' – Chloe Hooper

- How convincing is Roy Bramwell's testimony? Does the film give credence to his accounts of Doomadgee's death?
- Why might Bramwell's accounts have become confused?

'If I was a really educated man, you know, like going to college and that, after school, we'd have had justice for this thing, you know.' – Roy Bramwell

- Does the exclusion of Bramwell from the trial suggest a systematic bias against Indigenous communities?
- Do revelations of Bramwell's violence against women in his household affect our view of his evidence? Or do they merely draw Hurley's actions in releasing him into question?
- How does Bramwell's emotional reaction to the trial's outcome affect our interpretation?



Other individuals to consider

- » Murrandoo Yanner
- » Darren Robinson

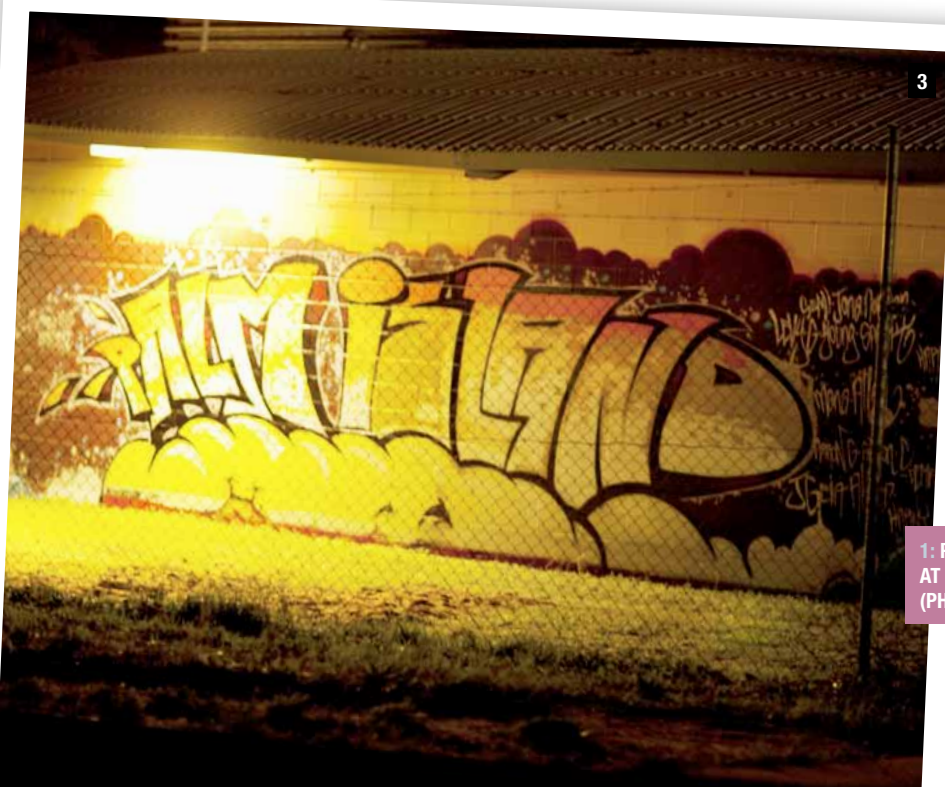
2.

THE SETTING: HEART OF DARKNESS

On the island, to reach puberty is to reach the abyss. The young inherit a community with 92% unemployment, where half the men are dead by 50, where they own nothing, control nothing, have sovereignty over nothing but their own bodies. – Chloe Hooper, writing in *The Monthly*⁵

'Palm Island's a place where blackfellas have grown up under the thumb of the white man.' – Alfred 'Tiny' Bonner

As Hooper points out in her writing on Doomadgee's death, Palm Island is the world's most dangerous place outside an actual war zone. Despite its natural beauty, there are terrifyingly high levels



1: PALM ISLAND AT NIGHT 2: WITNESS ROY BRAMWELL AT HOME ON PALM ISLAND 3: PALM ISLAND GRAFFITI (PHOTOS: GERMAIN MCMICKING)



ABOVE: MURRANDOO YANNER (PHOTO: GERMAIN MCMICKING) 1: CAMERON'S SISTER VALMAE APLIN (PHOTO: HAMISH CAIRNS) 2: WITNESS NOBY CLAY (PHOTO: HAMISH CAIRNS)

the decision affect how we view them? In contrast, where are many of the white interviewees filmed?

'You have two minority groups involved in this, that is the police and the Indigenous community.' – Ian Leavers

'The silent majority are about to get noisy.' – Denis Fitzpatrick

of violence and appalling rates of male suicide. At least two instances of suicide are reported in connection with the events detailed in the film.

- What are some of the defining images used to establish the setting?
- How is a contrast established between the island's paradisiacal environment and its hellish nature?
- Does this reflect on the relationship between the Aboriginal inhabitants and the white figures of authority?
- 'You are going into a parallel universe. One where it's hard not to be completely overwhelmed.' – Andrew Boe. In what way is Palm Island a 'parallel universe'?
- Leavers describes being a policeman on Palm Island as 'not easy work'. Does an understanding of the harsh working conditions help us to view Hurley in a better light?
- Is there an implication that those of us who have not been to Palm Island will never be able to understand how a 'good cop' could be driven to violence?
- "'What do you do for sport?' one of the lawyers asks. 'Throw rocks at coppers.'"⁶ How is violence depicted on the island? What images or comments highlight the dangers of living on Palm Island?
- Who is to blame for the violence? Is it a historical issue?

- Compare footage of the rioters to footage of the police union meeting. Are both equally confronting?

Racism and justice

What chance do we have in this state of any justice ever if not only can a copper get away with murder but the whole service come out proudly and strongly in support of that. What's that say to me or to any other indigenous person in this state? – Murrandoo Yanner

'We are oppressed people.'

- In what ways does the film portray the death of Doomadgee and subsequent investigations as being inherently racist?
- Why are many of the Aboriginal interviewees filmed standing behind fences or beside walls? How does

- Why have the filmmakers placed these quotes side by side?
- Are the police a minority, or an instrument of the majority?
- Do the quotes suggest that even the most powerful can feel persecuted?

When people live beyond the pale it is hard to see in them anything of ourselves. About time they realise we have feelings too,' Cameron Doomadgee's sister Valmai said when we talked about the findings of the Deputy Coroner. 'We're human.' I am struck by how often I've been told that by Palm Islanders: 'We are human too.' – Chloe Hooper, writing in *The Monthly*⁷

- Discuss the above statement. How does the film attempt to 'humanise' the Islanders?



SCENES IN FOCUS

It's worth looking at several key scenes to understand the film's visual language and examine the emotional impact.

Students should note:

- what is seen and heard
- how the scene contributes to the overall narrative
- the intended emotional effect.

Each sequence referred to is time-coded.

SEQUENCE 1 (02:19:23 – 10:38:00)

Cameron Doomadgee is arrested.

- This sequence begins with a shot of a police wagon driving down an island street, passing a group of youths. Is this shot meant to be merely illustrative, or is it intended to remind us how commonplace altercations like that between Hurley and Doomadgee are?
- The use of music is particularly effective during this sequence. When does the music fade in and when does it fade out? What is the effect of the music and what is the effect of its absence?
- How important is it that this sequence features a large number of people, all telling essentially the same tale? The only point of difference seems to be Hurley's account.
- There is a pause, halfway through this sequence, where we are shown various nature scenes. Men riding horses, horses grazing, children jumping off a pier. Why has this footage been included at this point?
- We are shown an animation detailing Doomadgee's injuries. Overlaid is a recording of Hurley answering questions in court about his height and weight. How does this affect our opinion of Hurley's account of events?
- The final words in this sequence are also Hurley's – he explains why he was upset about Doomadgee's death. These words are juxtaposed with photographs of Doomadgee and footage of his clothes, hanging in a wardrobe. How does this

juxtaposition influence our opinion of the policeman?

SEQUENCE 2

(0:16:00:05 – 0:20:40:00)

The riot

- How is music used for emotional effect throughout this sequence?
- This sequence starts with the line 'There was a fall.' Given what we already know about Doomadgee's death, does this position the reader to understand the community's rage?
- Lisa Watson tells us a cameraman told her the mob were going to 'kill the first white person they see'. Would the impact of this sequence be different if we had first-hand reports from white people present on the day, describing their fear?
- The archive footage of the policemen does show them in a state of panic and we are told they fear for their lives. Do the filmmakers undermine any sense of sympathy we might have for these men by choosing to end the footage with a line that reveals a derogatory attitude towards the Islanders? ('We may have to discharge a few fucking rounds into the air to scare the shit out of these cunts.')
- By comparison, the 'payback' raids on Islander households are told from the point of view of the victims – one of whom apologises for using the same sort of foul language we've just heard the police use. Does this encourage greater sympathy?
- What is the effect of ending this sequence with the line 'this was copper payback'? Does it paint the police as being as violent and irrational as the rioters who burned down the station?

SEQUENCE 3

(0:54:05:00 – 1:07:26:02)

The trial

- Hurley's plea is played over footage of Palm Island. Why?
- Understandably, there are repeated accounts of Doomadgee's injuries and the alleged 'fall'. Hurley's account is juxtaposed against illustrations of the injuries, footage

of his re-enactment and footage of a football game. How do each of these choices affect our opinion of Hurley's testimony?

- Additionally, Hurley's testimony is intercut with experts including Andrew Boe and Chloe Hooper, who give differing accounts. Anecdotal evidence is also supplied of violent behaviour by Hurley in the past. Is the intention to undermine the findings of the trial?
- The sequence in which a verdict is delivered opens with a scene of people crossing the street. On the soundtrack, we hear the clicking of a pedestrian crossing in 'don't walk' mode. When the not guilty verdict is announced, this clicking switches to the familiar 'walk' sound. Are the filmmakers implying that it was inevitable Hurley would be released, just as it is inevitable that a traffic light will change from red to green? What does this say about the filmmakers' opinion of our justice system?

SEQUENCE 4

(1:12:51:16 – 1:17:19:04)

The final moments of the film, where we return to Palm Island in the aftermath of the final inquest.

- Why does the director choose to illustrate this sequence with domestic footage of Islander contributors (e.g. Penny Sibley's household, Elizabeth swimming)?
- What is the effect of overlaying Hurley's testimony from the trial on top of the archival footage of Doomadgee's funeral? Do we feel his apology is sincere?
- Lawyer Andrew Boe says, 'It's unfortunate that we live in a society that's not more simple.' The footage we are shown is of a sunset, a boy pushing a toy pram and a girl laughing. Is there an intended dissonance between his statement and how the Islander society is depicted?
- The film ends with a statement from Tracy Twaddle about her former partner. What is the emotional effect of this reading, when considered in tandem with the footage of Tracy nursing a baby and the photos of the couple on the wall of her house?



4.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Activity 1:
Background research

There are two main areas of research that might be incorporated into Australian History or English issues-based work.

The first is a research project on Palm Island itself. The island has a complicated, torturous history that should provide a revealing case study in Aboriginal relations. Aborigines were exported from the isle during the nineteenth century, only to be sent back in the early twentieth, with the settlement quickly gaining a reputation as a penal colony. Its isolation and shark-infested waters made it particularly attractive as a picturesque prison. After 1986, the island has moved towards self-governance, with self-appointed ‘president’ Jeremy Geia declaring independence from Australia in 2001. The gesture was intended to highlight the neglect islanders had endured from the mainland authorities.⁸

Students might also research media coverage of Doomadgee’s death and the trial and inquests that followed. How was the death originally reported? How were the findings of the original inquest reported? How did the media react to the Director of Public Prosecution’s decision not to prosecute Hurley? How were threats of a police

strike covered? It would be particularly interesting to examine the opinion pages to identify opposing viewpoints.

Suggested texts:

- » Tony Koch & Andrew Fraser, ‘Police run for their lives as rioters torch buildings in a tropical island rampage’, *The Weekend Australian*, 27 November 2004, p.1.
- » Tony Koch, ‘Island of Distress’, *The Australian*, 29 March 2005, p.9.
- » ‘Officer’s blow killed Mulrunji, says coroner’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 September 2006, <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/officers-blow-killed-palm-islander-coroner/2006/09/27/1159337221289.html>>, accessed 12 May 2011.
- » ‘Policeman to be charged over Palm Island death’, ABC News, 26 January 2007, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200701/s1834259.htm>>, accessed 12 May 2011.
- » Cosima Marriner, ‘Calm in Palm Island after verdict’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 June 2007, <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/>

ABOVE: WITNESS ROY BRAMWELL AND GLADYS NUGENT AT HOME ON PALM ISLAND (PHOTO: GERMAIN MCMICKING 1: VALMAE APLIN (CAMERON’S SISTER) AT HOME (PHOTO: HAMISH CAIRNS) 2: ERYKAH KYLE (FORMER PALM ISLAND MAYOR) AT HOME ON PALM ISLAND (PHOTO: HAMISH CAIRNS)

national/palm-island-officer-not-guilty/2007/06/20/1182019160877.html>, accessed 12 May 2011.

- » Evan Schwarten, ‘Police colluded to protect Senior Sergeant Chris Hurley over death in custody of Cameron Doomadgee – coroner’, News.com.au, 14 May 2010, <<http://www.news.com.au/national/police-colluded-to-protect-senior-sergeant-chris-hurley-over-death-in-custody-of-cameron-doomadgee-coroner/story-e6frfkvr-1225866797404>>, accessed 12 May 2011.
- » Chloe Hooper, ‘Chloe Hooper: Tracking Chris Hurley’, Crikey, 30 June 2008, <<http://www.crikey.com.au/2008/06/30/chloe-hooper-tracking-chris-hurley>>, accessed 12 May 2011.
- » Alan Ramsey, ‘Political inaction endorses brute force’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 September 2006, <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/political-inaction-endorses-brute-force/2006/09/29/1159337342017.html>>, accessed 12 May 2011.

- » Sean Parnell, 'Palm death cop Chris Hurley got \$100,000 payout', *The Australian*, 28 May 2008, <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/palm-death-cop-got-100000-payout/story-e6frg6oo-1111116462971>>, accessed 12 May 2011.

Activity 2: Watching the film

The sections above offer points of discussion regarding characters, but students might complete more detailed profiles of individuals featured. These might use the film as a starting point, and be supplemented by additional research. Students could note surprising, unexpected or contradictory facts from the film, or from their own research. Has the film omitted any details to influence the viewer's perception of an individual? How else might individuals be portrayed?

Activity 3: Social values

As we know, media products – documentaries particularly – aim to depict reality by use of certain representations that reflect social values. It is worth debating whether *The Tall Man* reflects dominant social values or seeks to challenge them. Key to this is understanding the tension between how many of us imagine society to be (just, fair, civilised) and the reality as shown in the film (unjust, cruel, dangerous). Arguably, the film reflects emerging or perhaps oppositional values.

Students might compare the depiction of Aboriginal people in this film with depictions elsewhere in the media. Why are Indigenous people in *The Tall Man* generally interviewed within a domestic context? We witness islanders cooking, singing, horse-riding and fishing and are given far more insight into their personal lives than those of the white experts or witnesses interviewed. Is the intent to 'humanise' the community and challenge dominant representations?

Similarly, how are the police represented? Consider footage from the union protest meeting, where the chanted responses evoke images of football hooliganism. Are the police deliberately depersonalised, or is this merely a side effect of their decision not to participate in the documentary? In challenging the instruments of authority, is the film questioning dominant social values?

Students should consider:

- social attitudes towards both the police and Aboriginal people during the production period
- ways in which these social values positively or negatively shaped the documentary
- how the documentary represents these two groups
- how it supports and/or challenges attitudes.

Activity 4: Further investigations

Students might investigate other case studies that bear similarities to the Doomadgee affair.

1) The most obvious recent example is the horrific death of a 46-year-old Aboriginal elder who was left to 'cook' in the back of a police van. The case has received extensive coverage and would allow students to compare this tragic event and its aftermath with that depicted in *The Tall Man*. How central are issues of racism, justice and violence? How does press coverage and police reaction differ from that given to the events on Palm Island?

Suggested texts:

- » Toni O'Loughlin, 'Australian Aboriginal prisoner "cooked to death" in van', *The Guardian*, 14 June 2009, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jun/14/australia-aborigine-cooked-prison-van>>, accessed 12 May 2011.
- » 'Man dies in 50 degree heat during 'inhumane' treatment', *WA Today*, 13 June 2009, <<http://www.watoday.com.au/wa-news/man-dies-in-50-degree-heat-during-inhumane-treatment-20090613-c6gx.html>>.

accessed 13 May 2011.

- » Richard Ackland, 'Rules don't matter in the Wild West – nor does a life', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 July 2010, <<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/rules-dont-matter-in-the-wild-west--nor-does-a-life-20100701-zqgn.html>>, accessed 13 May 2011.
- » ABC website, *Four Corners* page, <<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2009/s2598658.htm>>, accessed 15 May 2011. (Contains a wealth of background information.)

2) Looking further afield, there are parallels to be drawn with *Conviction* (Tony Goldwyn, 2010), a feature film detailing the true story of a woman's struggle to clear her brother of a murder charge. Betty Anne Waters spent twenty years attempting to prove her brother Kenneth's innocence, training as a lawyer for the specific purpose of arranging an appeal. There are similarities in that the Waters family were from a severely disadvantaged background, and neglected by the system that was supposed to care for them.

However, there are also clear differences. Betty Anne was able to gain access to a level of education denied to the isolated Islander community, which was ultimately the means of her brother's liberation. The barriers she managed to overcome were – arguably – primarily economic, rather than social, or racial. Nonetheless, the film should prove a useful complementary text.

3) More contentious parallels might be drawn with contemporary global problems. As a starting point, students might consider the following comment by Murradoo Yanner:

I think in a generation or two you're going to find all those young boys who would've normally suicided strapping bombs on and walking into police stations and stuff. And that's not something I encourage. That's just something I can see coming because I see the change today.



It's certainly a dark prophecy, but is it groundless? Do the parallels drawn with events in the Middle East have merit? What have been the sources for unrest there, and do they match the circumstances in Australia? Is Yanner justified in his concern that violent uprising would be possible here, if Aboriginal communities continue to feel neglected and oppressed? What might be done in Australia to lessen the problem of Indigenous disadvantage?

Endnotes

- ¹ 'Chloe Hooper in conversation with Sally Warhaft about The Tall Man' (video), SlowTV, *The Monthly* website, July 2008, <<http://www.themonthly.com.au/chloe-hooper-conversation-sally-warhaft-about-tall-man-1100>>, accessed 8 May 2011.
- ² Chloe Hooper, 'The Tall Man: Inside Palm Island's Heart of Darkness', *The Monthly*, March 2006, <<http://www.themonthly.com.au/inside-palm-islands-heart-darkness-tall-man-chloe-hooper-185>>, accessed 9 May 2011.
- ³ *ibid.*
- ⁴ *ibid.*
- ⁵ Chloe Hooper, 'Who Let The Dogs

Out? Palm Island After The Inquest Into An Death In Custody', *The Monthly*, November 2006, <<http://www.themonthly.com.au/monthly-essays-chloe-hooper-who-let-dogs-out-palm-island-after-inquest-death-custody-315>>, accessed 9 May 2011.

⁶ Hooper, 'The Tall Man', *op. cit.*

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ 'Aboriginal community announces independence', ABC News Online, 15 November 2001, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200111/s417112.htm>>, accessed 10 May 2011.



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