



#### Introduction

OOVER'S GOLD (Franco di Chiera, 2005) is a 52 minute documentary about a future US President, a West Australian goldfield, Italian migration, and the results of that mix in Australian History.

In the remote goldfields of Western Australia – a land of 'red dust, black flies and white heat' – an ambitious young American geologist embarked upon a remarkable career that would ultimately lead him to the White House as the thirty-first President of the United States.

Herbert Hoover was just 23-years-old when London's Bewick Moreing and Company shipped him off to Western Australia as an inspecting engineer, responsible for assessing the viability of the evergrowing portfolio of gold mines under its management. Arriving in Coolgardie in 1897, Hoover worked feverishly, appraising mines and scouting for new prospects for the company's London investors. It was his identification of the Sons of Gwalia mine at Leonora as one 'well worth securing control of' that was to be the turning point in his fortunes – and those of thousands of Italians and other southern Europeans who were to journey to Western Australia to work on the goldfields.

Installed by Bewick Moreing as the manager of the Sons of Gwalia mine, Hoover contracted several Italians as underground workers with the promise that, if they proved satisfactory, the way would be open to 'the employment of many more'. He was determined to cut costs and undermine the growing strength of the trade union movement. He found the Italians 'fully 20 per cent superior' and that 'the rivalry between them and the other men [was] of no small benefit'.

In the decades to come, many Italians, mostly from Italy's north, arrived in Western Australia to work on Bewick Moreing-controlled mines. The biggest and most enduring Italian community was associated with the Sons of Gwalia mine. It had rapidly become one of Australia's deepest and richest mines, and being sufficiently distant from Kalgoorlie-Boulder's 'Golden Mile', it had developed a character and significance all of its own.

Hoover's Gold tells the parallel stories of the young Hoover and the Italian workers he championed. Filmed on location in Western Australia and the United States, we meet John Calegari, Renzo Mazza,







ABOVE: IN ROWS FROM TOP (L-R)

IN MEMORY OF **GUGLIELMO**SON OF ANDREA AND MARIA
BALBUZZI ACCIDENTALLY KILLED ON
SONS OF GWALIA MINE. 8TH SEPT.
1932, AGED 23 YEARS ERECTED BY
HIS SORROWING SISTER, RELATIVES
AND FRIENDS FROM TRENT, ITALY

2 IN SACRED MEMORY OF PETER
BENDOTTI WHO LOST HIS LIFE
BY ACCIDENT AT THE GWALIA MINE
JUNE 26 1934 AGED 29 YEARS LOVING HUSBAND OF CAROLINA, FOND
FATHER OF LITTLE AGNESE & MARIA,
DEAR BROTHER OF DOMENICO

3 IN LOVING MEMORY OF WILLIAM BURKE WHO WAS KILLED AT GWALIA CENTRAL MINE, 10TH AUG 1911. ERECTED BY SISTER MAGGIE

4 IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR
DEAR HUSBAND AND FATHER
GIUSEPPE CECCHINI ACCIDENTALLY
KILLED 3RD APRIL 1934 AGED 44

YEARS

**5**IN LOVING MEMORY OF **ROBERT W. DAVEY** ACCIDENTALLY KILLED
8TH NOV 1946 AGED 31 YEARS.
ERECTED BY HIS LOVING WIFE

6 IN MEMORY OF MY DEAR SON JOHN EDWARD FOLEY WHO WAS ACCIDENTALLY KILLED ON SONS OF GWALIA MINE. 30 SEPT 1906 AGED 22 YEARS ERECTED BY HIS LOVING MOTHER

7 JAMES H HICKMOTT ACCIDENTALLY KILLED AT MERTONDALE
ON 21ST JAN 1911 AGED 31 YEARS
ERECTED BY HIS LOVING MOTHER,
FATHER AND SISTER

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF EDWARD ALBERT THE BELOVED HUSBAND OF JANE JOHNSON WHO WAS KILLED AT THE GWALIA MINE 4TH DECEMBER 1907 AGED 46 YEARS ERECTED BY HIS GRIEVING WIFE

OIN LOVING MEMORY OF MY DEAR HUSBAND FURTUNATO LUBA WHO WAS KILLED AT GWALIA CM 17TH OCTR 1909 AGED 31 YEARS. ERECTED BY HIS LOVING WIFE R.I.P.

1 OMARTINOVICU RODJEN U
BRAIC YUGOSLAVIA ACCIDENTALLY
KILLED SONS OF GWALIA MINE 5TH
MAY 1939

1 1 IN LOVING MEMORY OF JOHN THOMAS PEARCE THE BELOVED HUSBAND OF HANNAH PEARCE WHO WAS ACCIDENTALLY KILLED AT THE SONS OF GWALIA GOLD MINE ON THE 28TH APRIL 1907. ERECTED BY HIS LOVING WIFE AND DAUGHTER

12BROTHER JOE AND FRIENDS WILL REMEMBER ALEXANDER TAGLIAFERRI. KILLED GWALIA MINE. 27TH AUGT 1924, AGED 25.

1 3 IN LOVING MEMORY OF GIOVANNI TAGLIAFERRI WHO WAS KILLED ON THE GWALIA MINE ON THE 12TH NOV 1936. AGED 29 YEARS. REMEMBERED BY HIS BROTHER PETER

1 4 IN SACRED MEMORY OF OUR BELOVED BROTHER ANDY ZANOTTI, WHO WAS KILLED AT THE GWALIA MINE ON THE 10TH NOV 1930 AGED 33 YEARS ERECTED BY HIS BROTHERS LUIGI STEVE AND ANGELO. R.I.P.

15 IN LOVING MEMORY OF FRE-DERICK DEEPLY BELOVED HUSBAND OF FLORENCE WINDSOR WHO WAS ACCIDENTALLY KILLED AT SONS OF GWALIA CM 25TH MARCH We also hear from leading US and Australian experts – Tim Walch, Ron Limbaugh, Patrick Bertola, Richard Hartley and Criena Fitzgerald, all of whom have differing perspectives on Hoover, the Italians, and the Sons of Gwalia. We witness evocative reconstructions of key moments in the goldfields experience of the Italians and the young Hoover.

Ultimately, we discover how the changing fortunes of a remote Western Australian gold mine were to strangely mirror the career of the man who was to become America's president at the onset of the Great Depression.

#### **Curriculum applicability**

Hoover's Gold is a useful classroom resource for middle and upper secondary English in the areas of:

- Constructing a biography
- Immigration and multiculturalism
- Australian history seen through the case study of a community
- Understanding and analysing how filmmakers construct their product

# Before watching the film

Imagine that you are walking through an outback cemetery.

- 1 You see several hundred graves, but you particularly note the headstone inscriptions (previous page). Read them and decide what, if this was the only information you had, they tell you about this place and:
  - · the main economic activity of the community,
  - · the origins of the population, and
  - the nature of life in that community.
- 2 Brainstorm a list of questions you would ask to find out more about this community and its history.

Now look at *Hoover's Gold*, and see how many of those questions are answered by it.

# Exploring ideas in the film

Hoover's Gold can help us explore a variety of elements:























- the construction of a biography,
- a case study of immigration,
- · a snapshot of a mining community, and
- an awareness and critical evaluation of the craft of the filmmaker.

## A biography

A major focus of the film is the role of Herbert Hoover, an American mining engineer later to become a President of the United States. Does *Hoover's Gold* present a convincing biography of this man?

- 1 What impression do you get of Hoover?
- 2 What are his qualities and his values?
- 3 Are there any criticisms made of him?
- 4 What variety of evidence is used?
- 5 Is the selection of evidence fair?
- How does the way in which the evidence is presented influence your judgement? For example, what interpretation of the evidence does the narrator give us? How do the images selected portray the man? How are controversial aspects of

- his life and ideas presented within the narrative?
- 7 Do you think that this is a fair, informed, balanced and accurate depiction of Hoover and his role in Australia at this time?
- 8 If you could call on more evidence or information to help you make a judgement about Hoover, what might it be?

To find out more about Herbert Hoover go to: Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum http://hoover. archives.gov/

Hoover Institution (Stanford University) http://www-hoover.stanford.edu/

### A case study of immigration

Hoover's Gold presents information about Italian migration to the Kalgoorlie area goldfields between the 1890s and the 1930s. What does it tell us about the migration experience?

- 1 What were the qualities or attributes for which this group of immigrants was brought to Australia?
- 2 Why were they brought from one particular area of Italy?

- 3 When these immigrants arrived and became settled, what did they do?
- 4 What difficulties did they face economic, social, linguistic, cultural?
- 5 Were they successful?
- 6 How did they influence the community that they had been brought into?
- 7 Did they retain their separateness, or did they assimilate into the community?
- 8 In 1934 there were 'race riots' in Kalgoorlie. What were the causes of these riots?
- 9 What were their impacts?
- 10 Was this incidence of chain migration to Australia encouraged by Bewick Moreing's employment practices a success or a failure?
- 11 What more would you need to know to answer the previous question in more detail?

Some good starting points to find more information about Italian migration to Australia are:

http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/58.html

http://www.teachingheritage.nsw.edu.au/c\_building/wc2\_italmigration.html

http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/subjects/sose/austhist/immigration.htm

# A snapshot of a mining community

In *Hoover's Gold* we see a glimpse of a community between the 1890s and the 1930s. It can be used as a way of seeing how to investigate your own local community.

- 1 What can you say about the economy of that society?
- 2 Was it a fair and equal place?
- 3 What can you say about the society?
- Were there divisions based on race, class, wealth, jobs, possessions?
- 5 What elements bound this community together and promoted coherence rather than division?
- 6 Do you think it was a successful and harmonious community?
- 7 What more would you need to find out to make this judgement?

For more information go to:

Leonora Gwalia Historical Museum http://www.gwalia.org.au/

Australian Prospectors and Miners Hall of Fame http://www.mininghall.com/

Golden Quest Discovery Trail http://www.kalgoorlie.com/goldenquest/index.asp

Into the Outback: How the young Herbert Hoover



















made his name – and fortune – in Australia http://www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/2000/marapr/articles/hoover.html

And all so far from home ... (a site dedicated to WA goldfields towns, including cemetery records for Leonora-Gwalia) http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~westaust/index.html

## A critical analysis of the film

What was the maker of *Hoover's Gold* trying to achieve? How did he go about creating the work in the way he did? Is it a successful and satisfying documentary?

These are questions that can be explored by looking at the following Q&A with the filmmakers and discussing your ideas in class.

**Q:** What was the inspiration behind this documentary? And/or how did it come about?

A: Barry Strickland became intrigued by the Western Australian goldfields exploits of Herbert Hoover while preparing the Golden Quest Discovery Trail Guidebook. This fascination led him to write Hoover, a one-act play that premiered at QFest (Cue Outback Festival) in 2003. In a serendipitous encounter with Marian Bartsch of Mago Films, the idea for a television documentary was born. With the involvement of SBS Independent, filmmaker Franco di Chiera was brought on board to further research and develop the Italian part of the story. Together, he and Barry Strickland co-wrote the script for Hoover's Gold. While Barry's paternal grandparents met and married on the goldfields, Franco's father and uncle worked as miners there at different times. The story is therefore close to them. It not only documents the remarkable hardships and achievements of early immigrant communities but how Hoover's experiences were to influence the course of history on the Goldfields and lay the foundations for the path to his presidency.

- 1 What does this information tell you about the origins of this project?
- 2 Does it seem to be one person's creation, or the result of teamwork and collaboration?
- 3 The answer says that the film 'not only documents the remarkable hardships and achievements of early immigrant communities but how Hoover's experiences were to influence the course of history on the Goldfields and lay the foundations for the path to his presidency.' Do you agree that the film does achieve this? Use specific examples from the film to support your answer.

**Q:** What do you like/find challenging about making documentaries? Did you encounter any particular challenges in making this documentary and, if so, how did you overcome them? Any lucky breaks, and if so, how did they come about and how did you embrace them?

**A:** The challenge was to tell a historical story that would have a contemporary resonance and document more than just the facts. The intention was to provide an emotional journey that would both entertain and enlighten audiences. Certainly, the story has relevance to Australia's immigration debates of the last ten years and Hoover's managerial style is close to that of











a modern day CEO - where the bottom line is profit. Indeed, his initiatives weren't that different from today where there is a trend for large corporations to employ workers offshore to save on labour costs. The parallels are definitely apparent. Narratively, the greatest hurdle was to inter-weave the two story threads - Hoover and the early Italian community of Western Australia's goldfields. In addition, there was the story of the legendary Sons of Gwalia gold mine. The narrative arc tracks their births, development and eventual deaths - Hoover died a year after Sons Of Gwalia closed and the Italian community for which Hoover had been the main catalyst, disappeared overnight. Gwalia became a ghost town. However, I didn't want to end the film on a negative note. The film also acknowledges and celebrates the achievements of Hoover and the Italians as well as the colossal amount of gold produced by the mine. How history judges Hoover's employment philosophy is ultimately left up to the audience.

- 4 Do you agree that there is a 'contemporary resonance' established in the film, that it is relevant to understanding our society today? Support your ideas with examples from the film.
- Do you think that the 'narrative arc' tracking the three themes of Hoover, Italian migration and the Sons of Gwalia mine is achieved in the film? Support your ideas with examples from the film.
- 6 How do you judge Hoover? Do you think the film allows you to make an independent judgement, or do you think your judgement is inevitably influenced by the way Hoover is

represented in the film? Explain your ideas.

7 Do you think filmmakers must allow viewers to make up their own minds, or do they have the right to influence the viewers to accept the filmmaker's own views? Discuss your thoughts on this issue.

**Q:** How does the documentary relate to your past work, if at all? Was this film a natural next step or a radical departure from your previous work in film, TV etc?

A: From my perspective, *Hoover's Gold* takes a multi-layered approach to its thematic concerns. It uses straight interview, dramatic reconstructions, letters, black and white photographs, archival footage and traditional music to bring this history to life. Despite the many devices, I hope I have told a simple story about a complex set of circumstances. I like to think that historical documentary does not need to be relegated to the outer edges of television programming or restricted to subjects of war, planes, trains and automobiles (and ships) in order to get a prime time-slot. The last history documentary I directed – *No Milk, No Honey*, which has a similar structure to *Hoover's Gold* – attracted one of SBS Independent's highest ratings for a locally commissioned program. I found the response inspiring as it really does show that history lives.

As a first generation Australian, I'm attracted to stories about immigrant communities, whether they be of English or non-English speaking backgrounds - stories about people who are forced to decide their destinies under great economic. environmental, cultural or political pressures. The stakes are high in Hoover's Gold with miners separated from their families and dying from accidents and lung diseases. However, these moments of sadness are imbued with the uplifting sounds of Perth's Italian Men's Choir. Traditional music has played an important part in my previous documentaries. For me, it's another way of conveying history and capturing the authenticity of the culture and the period it represents. Ultimately, Hoover's Gold is a culmination of my documentary passions and style with the added touch of a personal family connection. Gold is the symbol of wealth for which so many migrants searched all their lives. In the end, numerous of them succeeded - albeit at a high price. Hoover's 'gold' was the Italian workforce he contracted and the many foreigners which followed in their footsteps. It not only made him rich beyond belief but his goldfields experiences were seminal to him becoming president of the United States of America.

- 8 Discuss the way the film uses the variety of techniques and devices mentioned above.
- 9 Do you think that they are well integrated to make an entertaining and compelling result?
- 10 Can you suggest any other techniques or devices that could have been included in the film and that you think would have increased its impact or effectiveness? Explain your ideas.
- 11 What are the layers of meaning behind the title: 'Hoover's Gold'? Do you think this is an effective title?

**Q:** Apart from 'it's a masterpiece' what would your ideal viewer response to the doco be?

**A:** I hope viewers are affected emotionally by this story and in the process, entertained and enlightened about a part of Australia's little-known history – that an American President

spent his formative years on Western Australia's goldfields and his decision to contract Italian miners caused a chain of events that was to last generations. From the legacy of the Italians in Western Australia to the Kalgoorlie Race Riots and the fortunes of Sons of Gwalia, it is a story of great significance. At a time when proposed changes to industrial relations legislation are generating great concerns among ordinary Australians, *Hoover's Gold* serves as a cautionary tale about the exploitation of 'cheap' labour and putting profit before humanitarian values.

12 Do you think the filmmaker has achieved this?

Q: What is your next project or what are you working on now?

A: Like many of the ideas I feel most passionate about, several of my current projects are on the rejection circuit. Two concern my own family, one dealing with juvenile diabetes and the other about internet romance, comparing it to proxy marriage in Australia's post-war migration period. I am also involved with proposals dealing with environmental and historical themes. I have an interest in personal histories, however, they don't seem all that popular with TV executives these days - although documentaries of this genre appear to be doing particularly well at the box office. Australian television is still spending millions of dollars a year on 'reality' programs at the cost of diverse programming, limiting the choice available to viewers. Public broadcasters around the world also joined the bandwagon. Taxpayers' money continues to be spent on copying popular commercial television formats rather than providing a genuine alternative. It wasn't so long ago that the groundbreaking efforts of public television were being replicated by commercial television stations. Now it's the other way around. I believe that SBS is at the forefront of addressing this problem, balancing a commitment to their charter with the commissioning of accessible programs which provide a real choice to Australian audiences. Hopefully, Hoover's Gold will be regarded as part of that choice.

- 13 The filmmaker here offers a criticism of the culture of film production in Australia. Analyse the programming of the main national channels for a week.
- 14 Do these criticisms seem justified? If so, what could be done to overcome the situation? You might invite a person involved in the media to talk to your class about this situation.

This study guide was produced by ATOM (damned@netspace. net.au). For more information on *Screen Education* magazine or to download other free study guides visit www.metromagazine.com.au For hundreds of articles on Media Studies, Screen Literacy, Multiliteracy and Film Studies, visit www.theeducation shop.com.au **Note:** An educational institution may make copies of all or part of this Study Guide, provided that it only makes and uses copies as reasonably required for its own educational, non-commercial, classroom purposes and does not sell or lend such copies.

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