

# Historical context of barn burning

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William Faulkner's "Barn Burning" takes a lot of real life cultural values and ways of southern life in the late 1800s. Many of those values and ways are expressed by sharecropping and tenant farming. Sharecropping and tenant farming began during the end of the Civil War all through the Great Depression. Sharecropping is an agreement between a tenant and a landlord in which a tenant farmer is allowed to work and live on a piece of land for free, but in exchange for living there for free, they give the landlord a share of the crop they grow.

Sharecropping was mainly big in the southern states where slavery was once legal. The pay for being a tenant farmer was very low and the living itself was not very desirable. In Faulkner's "Barn Burning" Abner Snopes is a white tenant farmer. He has this attitude that he should be given everything and should not be working as a sharecropper because he is white. At this time in history, many sharecroppers were freed slaves. Snopes believed that because he was white, he shouldn't be a sharecropper. Like many sharecroppers at this time, Snopes had plenty of debts that needed to be paid off.

Instead of paying off his debts, Snopes decides to burn down his landowner's barns. This leads Snopes and his family to move from county to county. This was a very common life for sharecroppers at this time. The life of a sharecropper was full of debts, and trying to make enough money to pay off those debts and make enough money for a living. Upon leaving his sharecropping job, Snopes finds a job at the household of Major De Spain. When they arrive, Snopes dirties a white rug and sneers at the black servant when the servant told him not to step on it.

Sometime after this, the servant comes to the Snopes' new home and instructs Abner to clean the rug. During this time, servants and housekeepers were treated with more respect than sharecroppers were. Abner Snopes was appalled by this because he believed that because he was a white man, he should have been treated with more respect. De Spain finds out about Snopes' ruining the rug and charges them one hundred dollars added to their debt, and twenty bushels of corn. These types of arrangements were quite common at this time between sharecroppers and their landlords.

The sharecroppers had little to no money, so the landlords would charge them for items, or take an extra percentage of their crops. The setting of this story is very important because it gives you a sense of what life was like back during the late 1800s. "Barn Burning" takes place in the south after the civil war. After the civil war, the south was in the period of reconstruction. A lot of the south was destroyed from the war, and it affected everyone in the south from their economy, to their personal lives. Many people lived impoverished like the Snopes family.

Abner Snopes holds a lot of resentment because he couldn't be successful in his life. Instead of changing his life and working hard, he resents everything and everyone around him. This attitude eventually leads to his downfall. William Faulkner's "Barn Burning" takes a lot of real life situations and puts them into fiction. He is able to put the life around him in to stories of fiction.

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