

William Faulkner's Barn Burning and its Socio-Economic Levels

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Johany Hernandez Professor Gray ENC 1102 October 12, 2011 Life's OwnFoodChain William Faulkner's "Barn Burning" depicts socio-economic levels of the post-Civil War rural South. Social class and economic worth is a major theme throughout the story. It displays a hierarchy of different financial levels that is used to portray different socio-economic standpoints among groups. At the very bottom of the social structure are Sarty and his family. On the following level, there is the de Spain's Negro servant. Afterwards, is Mr. Harris. At the top of the ladder are Major de Spain and his wife, Lula de Spain.

All of these characters represent the differences among the socio-economic groups, and how they intertwine with each other in the community. At the bottom of the rank are Sarty and his family. They are farmers who work on others' plantations because they cannot afford to have their own. They are definitely an uneducated group of individuals. This can be seen when Sarty is speaking: 'He won't git no ten bushels neither. He won't git one.' Another good example would be their clothing. Sarty's sisters are "...in a flutter of cheap ribbons. The family's clothes consist of "an incredible expanse of pale clothes and a flutter of tawdry ribbons." Moreover, Abner Snopes is depicted as someone who does not desire change, even for the betterment of his family. The father walks "stiffly from where a Confederate provost's man's musket ball had taken him in the heel on a stolen horse thirty years ago." He also seems to wear the same black coat constantly. Above Sarty in the hierarchy structure is the de Spain's servant. The Negro is being described as "...an old man with neat grizzled hair, in a linen jacket. His living in the de Spain's mansion shows that he is of higher status than the Snopes family. He

lives very comfortably in the manor. The fact that he is wearing a linen jacket illustrates that he is exceptionally well taken care of. Though still a servant, he is presumably higher in the hierarchy of the social ladder. The servant is still very well underneath the hierarchy because he is uneducated. He speaks similarly to the Snopes. An instance is: ' Wipe yo foots, white man, fo you come in here. Major ain't home nohow. ' The next character, who is placed above the servant, is Mr.

Harris. Though not much is said about who he is, the story portrays him as a landowner. The Snopes' worked on his farm for a short-term period, which eventually ended in his barn burning. With the bit of information on Mr. Harris, it can be said that he is almost certainly above middle-class. Mr. Harris says ' The next time I put the hog in my pen. When he came to get it I gave him enough wire to patch up his pen. ' Examples are that he owns a farm, and a cornfield. Also, that he is able to employ Mr. Snopes and his family as tenant farmers to work on his land.

At the top of the hierarchy is a very rich man, Major de Spain and his wife, Lula de Spain. It is very apparent that they are more than wealthy by the description of the home's surroundings. "...the grove of oak trees and cedars and the other flowering trees and shrubs where the house would be, though not the house yet. They walked beside a fence massed with honeysuckle and Cherokee roses and came to a gate swinging open to between two brick pillars... he saw the house..." Also, the home itself was grand and white. Sarty thinks ' Hit's big as a courthouse. ' Inside the house, even Sarty is flabbergasted by how beautiful it is.

The narrator describes it as "...deluged as though by a warm wave by a suave turn of carpeted stair and a pendant glitter of chandeliers and a mute gleam of gold frames..." A very important example of social reign is that Mr. and Mrs. De Spain speak grammatically correct. This alone shows more class as opposed to Sarty and the servant. Throughout the story, the socio-economic classes clash against one another because of social troubles, or economic harms. Sarty and his family, who portrays the lowest of the low show how their family live day by day without reassurance of the future.

The servant—clean cut and more well-mannered than the Snopes', serves the de Spains', and ultimately somewhat bathes a bit in their riches. Mr. Harris, a minor character, yet the obvious next personality in the hierarchy, is a stable, above middle-class man who though does not own a mansion, is very well off. This now leaves Mr. and Mrs. De Spain, the ones who are not only rich, but exceed the social class norms among the other characters. They are at the top of the food chain—rich, intelligent and very powerful. The lives of these characters help understand the inner-workings of society and its inhabitants.