



**SOCIAL STRATIFICATION  
IN *THE NOTEBOOK* MOVIE**

**A FINAL PROJECT**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement  
For S-1 Degree in American Studies  
In English Department, Faculty of Humanities  
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## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

I state truthfully that this final project is compiled by me without taking the results from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, S-3 degree and in diploma. In addition, I ascertain that I do not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned.

Semarang, May 11<sup>th</sup> 2018

Rizky Safe

## MOTTO AND DEDICATION

*“Wealth is not having many possessions. Rather, true wealth is the richness of the soul; being content with oneself.”*

**Prophet Muhammed** صلى الله عليه وسلم

*“Science goes only so far and then comes God.”*

**The Notebook (2004)**

*This project is dedicated to May, Hayyi, and Etika.*

*SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN 'THE NOTEBOOK' MOVIE*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE.....	i
PRONOUNCEMENT.....	ii
MOTTO AND DEDICATION.....	iii
APPROVAL.....	iv
VALIDATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENT.....	vii
ABSTRACT.....	viii
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	2
2.1.Max Weber’s Theory of Stratification.....	3
2.2.The United States’ Hierarchy Societies.....	4
2.3.Condition of Americans in the 1940s.....	6
3. RESEARCH METHOD.....	7
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	8
5. CONCLUSION.....	15
REFERENCES	

## ABSTRACT

Dalam esai ini, penulis membahas tentang stratifikasi sosial yang tergambar dalam sebuah film asal Amerika Serikat, *The Notebook*. Pembahasan menitikberatkan pada analisis di setiap adegan yang mengandung unsur kelas ekonomi, prestise, dan kekuasaan sebagaimana terdapat dalam teori Max Weber yang berjudul *Three-Component of Stratification*. Teori itu nantinya akan dihubungkan dengan kondisi stratifikasi masyarakat Amerika. Untuk memperoleh dan menganalisis data, penulis menggunakan studi pustaka dengan pendekatan sosiologi sastra. Dari hasil analisis tersebut, ditemukan cukup banyak adegan yang bersangkutan paut dengan stratifikasi sosial sebagai hirarki yang membedakan antar masyarakat. Tujuan dari penelitian ini ialah untuk memahami konsep stratifikasi serta perbedaan sosial di tengah-tengah komunitas masyarakat Amerika yang tersaji dalam film *The Notebook*, sehingga dengan itu kita mampu lebih peka dan bijak dalam menghadapi isu serupa.

Kata kunci: Stratifikasi sosial, Weberian, Ekonomi, Prestise, Masyarakat Amerika



## LIST OF PICTURES

Picture	page
1. Noah asks Fin about Allie (00:05:28)	8
2. Noah's first meet with Allie (00:05:21)	8
3. Allie is playing with Sara (00:05:44)	8
4. Sara tells Allie about Noah (00:06:22)	9
5. Noah approaches Allie (00:06:06)	9
6. Sara reveals Noah's occupation (00:06:31)	9
7. Luxurious lunch (00:26:35)	10
8. Allie's mother reaction (00:26:38)	10
9. Allie's father reaction (00:26:39)	10
10. She scolds her daughter (00:38:37)	10
11. Disagreement of the relationship (00:38:17)	10
12. Allie hugs her father (00:39:08)	10
13. Upper-upper class party (00:51:39)	11
14. Lon proposes Allie to marry him (00:51:48)	11
15. Lon gives Allie a ring (00:53:23)	11
16. They observe from a distance (01:31:50)	13
17. Allie's mother explains about her ex (01:31:42)	13
18. Ex boyfriend of Allie's mother (01:31:54)	13
19. Noah tries to convince Allie (01:37:19)	14
20. Argument scene between Allie and Noah (01:36:56)	14
21. Fight scene of Allie and Noah (01:37:23)	14

## 1. Introduction

People are simply different from one to another, not only based on the natural variations like age and sex, but also based on social differences. Social differences create stratification which divides people into classes. Social stratification has always been a foremost issue in all parts of the world, including in the United States. It is seen from how persons in every region put concern on a system that affects the opportunities to obtain some desirable things in society.

The object of this study is an American romantic drama entitled *The Notebook* that is directed by Nick Cassavetes. It arises from the 1996 best-selling novel written by Nicholas Sparks. The film was released in 2004. It narrates about a poor boy named Noah Calhoun who is falling in love with a rich girl, Allison Hamilton. Setting of the film takes place in the summer in North Carolina in two periods: 'today' and the 1940s. This film is, according to Box Office Mojo, one of the best romantic dramas that receive the highest-grossing of all time.

Screenplay starts with the sunset silhouette of a canoe on the creek that represents the greatest moment of Noah and Allie in the film. In a nursing home, an old man comes to read a story from a notebook for an old woman that supposes to remind her, who is suffering from dementia, about her love affair with the old man. A gap between them in social class controls the major conflict that is interesting to be analyzed in stratification perspective.

To analyze the conflict, the writer uses social stratification theory as an instrument to unveil the data. Theory of stratification is propounded by

Maximilian Emil Weber (1864-1920). He suggests that class ranks of society are based not simply on whether the people possess the wealth of production or not, but also based on market situation and market capacity. So, he formulates three-component theory of stratification or also known as Weberian stratification.

The writer limits the analysis by picking up three-component theory of stratification that emphasizes on three distinct ideal types. The scope of this study is to explore which scenes indicate class, status, and power of characters and also to discuss about social stratification problem as seen in the movie.

The study purposes on disclosing the order and stratification of society, chiefly in the United States of America, that are portrayed in the movie. From the analysis, we can grasp the sense of the film deeper regarding to its main issue. The significance of this research is to improve the ability of both writer and reader in understanding American Cultural Studies, especially sociology and social stratification in specific. This research is also to comprehend and sharpen the analysis on how stratification can be identified in the movie. Furthermore, the study of social stratification is intended to make people concern about inequality in their societies and to make people deal with it.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

In analyzing the issue of the film, there are three theories that can be applied to the analysis, which are: the Weberian theory, the description of class structure in the United States, and the background of condition of Americans in the 1940s.

## 2.1 Max Weber's Theory of Stratification

Social stratification is “an order by which a society places people in socio-economic strata, based on their occupation, wealth, income, social status, and obtained power” (Saunders, 1990:2). It originates from the Latin *strātum* that means parallel or horizontal layers. Stratification as a comparative social position has been clearly appears in a social group, geographic region, or social unit. There are five types of social stratification, such as the caste system, class system, estate system, gender stratification, and slavery (Kerbo, 2009:50). In this subject, we are about to discuss the second one, that is the class system.

The idea of social stratification in Weberian model explains the numerous concepts. According to Max Weber's book entitled *Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie* (2002:177), the distinct ideal types are divided into three, which are:

- **Wealthy.** It is known as economical resources in which economic class symbolized by belongings, facilities, and income. Weber identifies economic act as “instrumental to the peaceful exercise of the power of control which in its intended meaning is oriented towards meeting the demand for goods and services” (Pyakuryal, 2001:15).
- **Prestige/Stände.** This is known as status groups in which a social standing to the degree of respect a person takes from others. It can depend on the reputation or achievement of a person. The indicator, whether it is positive or negative, is according to how good people know each other. Prestige is pinpointed on “status and privileges obtained at

the moment of birth, legally qualified, bonded by education, by a certain life style, stable values and by practiced occupations” (Chipecta, 2011:78).

- **Power.** It is measured by the capability of individuals or groups to do something. It is also known as political resource. For Weber, “power is about using the levers of hope and coercion to discipline a society via government” (Waters, 2015:8). This type is about the chance of people to identify their own will in a public action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action. It relates to the capability to command resources in a particular domain.

Thus, Weber states that class is related to inequalities in the workings of capitalism and the market place, while status is about the way people think of one to another, and power is views of politics in its widest sense. The explanation draws conclusion that class/wealthy is influence of people through the economic order, status/prestige is encouragement through the social order, and party/power is control through the political order.

## **2.2 The United States’ Hierarchy Societies**

In *Economy in Society* (2011:457) book written by Jacek Tittenbrun, modern societies basically differentiate three general social classes: that are the upper class, the middle class, and the lower class. Besides, sociologists like Dennis Gilbert and Joseph Hickey make the more detail categories to depict the socio-economic of people, such as the old money, the new money, the working class, the working poor, and the poverty level.

The upper class belongs to the top of all classes. It is defined as a person that has much wealth, power, and influence (Kerbo, 2009:101). Upper-upper class category consists of old money that is inherited through families for generations. Old money have controlled their money wisely over many generations and enhanced the value of their holdings by careful financial management. They fit in high-class societies and live in exclusive regions. For the meantime, the lower-upper consists of new money people that earn money out of hard-work, timely investments, and or strong competence. Lower-upper class people do not feel the prestige that old money people have, but in some ways their lives are the same as the people of old money (Barkan, 2011:248). People with new money might still maintain manner attached to the middle and lower classes. In other words, old money is people has been inherited over several generations, while new money is people who has been made recently.

Beneath the upper class hierarchy, there is the middle class. People of middle class, according to Peter Blau and Otis Duncan in *The American Occupational Structure* book (1967:418), “get their money by their professional jobs, whether as managers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, bankers, financial advisers, teachers, or professors”. They live in the suburbs or in rather expensive urban areas. Occasionally they are called as the white-collar class, referring to many middle-class people to wear suits in white shirt to work.

The next ladder after the middle class is working class that is classified as the lower class. The working class is the highest subdivision of it. Its members may have gone to technical training or vocational college. The working class

could be “a carpenter, an electrician, a factory worker, a truck driver, or a police officer” (Gilbert, 2011:247). The working class is identified as the blue-collar men with a heavy physical task to their work. Most of them are “moderately uncomfortable in financial situation” (Barkan, 2011:250). The standards of living between both working class and middle class seem similar, but not identical. In lower stage of it, the working poor class represents people with low educational level and also people who are not highly skilled. Their salary is below a given poverty line. They regularly work two or more part-time jobs and do not accept health insurance or other job security. Then, the very last step is the poverty level. Many members of people with this underclass classification live mainly in inner cities. Some of them are homeless and they are usually jobless. To fulfill their needs, sometimes they do unskilled tasks for little pay (Blau, 1967:423).

### **2.3 Social Condition of Americans in 1940s**

The *Notebook* film gives us a picture of the situation before, during, and after the World War II. The 1940s were the time where America changed the social structure of the workforce and revived from the Great Depression. The United States declared war after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 that incited women took many new roles whilst men fought the war. The troops to support during World War II became the daily topic in America. Women could also serve in the military by joining the Women Army Corps and Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services. Some also volunteers in the hospitals for wounded soldiers. In 1944, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 or the G.I. Bill of Rights was signed into law. It is a law that afforded a

range of benefits or rewards for returning World War II veterans. After the war, the economy of the United States was rapidly improving (Park, 2006:3).

### **3. Method**

Library research is genuinely needed to conceive social stratification theory that is used in this extended essay. McIvor Ashcroft (2000:416) describes a successful library research as “the orderly study and examination of several perspectives of library and information science in which results are according to the analysis of data that composed in unity with pre-established research objects and methodologies”. Mary George in *The Element of Library Research* states that library research “involves identifying and locating sources that provides factual information or personal/expert opinion on a research question” (2004:8). Quite a few reference books, journals, and articles which are linked to the research are what the writer used to accomplish this essay.

The approach which is used to analyze issue of the film is sociology of literature. It is a study about social inferences. Sociology of literature aims to support an understanding between literary works and society. In an article titled *The Sociology of Literature* published in International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (Jadhav, 2013:38), Robert Escarpit tells that sociology of literature approach portrays the concept of literature not as an aesthetic one but as a socio cultural fact.

“Milton C. Albrecht points out that the sociology of literature encompasses a variety of viewpoints of the sociologists, historians and critics rather than



a clearly defined subject matter or general theory. Their views about the sociology of literature have been manifested mainly in two ways. The first way is historical, the effort to describe historical trends in art or literature, to trace their growth, achievements and changes over time. The second way is an attempt to discover how the forms of art come into being and to account for their qualities and styles.” (Jadhav, 2013:74)

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Most of Americans hold an ambition to pursue a better life by increasing their revenue. The American dream as a national ethos of the United States steers the individuals to attain prosperity through hard-work. Consequently, besides the existence of social mobility which has been burst, it brings up a mindset that the rich men are absolutely greater than the poor men. The gap between rich and poor people in American society established like racial segregation between the blacks and the whites in 1849-1950. That kind of inequality is displayed fairly well in some literature works, including *The Notebook*.

The film exposes social stratification issue initially in [00:05:28] scene where Noah and his plumber’s friend, Fin, are in the night carnival.



(Picture 1: Scene 00:05:28)

[Noah asks Fin about Allie]



(Picture 2: Scene 00:05:21)

[Noah’s first meet with Allie]



(Picture 3: Scene 00:05:44)

[Allie is playing with Sara]

Noah : “Who’s this girl with Sara?”

Fin : “Her name’s Allie Hamilton. She’s here for the summer with her family. Dad’s got more money than God.”

It appears when Noah detects his interest in Allie as he sees her for the first time. The response of Fin demonstrates his concern about Allie's class and status. In this dialogue, Fin informs about her family who reflected as an upper class people. The hyperbole phrase 'got more money than God' notifies that her dad is extremely rich. The wealth of Allie, from this discourse, is considered as old money since she gets all the richness inherited from her father. The way Fin expresses that indicates he has an admiration or respect toward her who belongs to top class as well. He pays attention to the position of Allie in social hierarchy. Thus, this can be an indication that exhibits positive reputation of her prestige.

Next conversation in scene [00:06:22] will show us a contrast at the time when Sara Tuffington, Fin's girlfriend, informs about Noah to Allie.



(Picture 4: Scene 00:06:22)

[Sara tells Allie about Noah]



(Picture 5: Scene 00:06:06)

[Noah approaches Allie]



(Picture 6: Scene 00:06:31)

[Sara reveals Noah's occupation]

*Sara* : "*Noah Calhoun.*"

*Allie* : "*What?*"

*Sara* : "*Works down at the lumber yard with Fin.*"

*Allie* : "*Oh.*"

The conversation above leads to a description on Noah and Fin who are categorized as working class men from a phrase 'Works down at the lumber yard with Fin'. Their occupation determines both hierarchies in society since the woodworkers do not have much money as an upper class possess. Economic aspect of them triggers a lower status in a community.

Love affair between Noah and Allie starts to face an obstruction after the event when Allie's father invites him to his house.



(Picture 7: Scene 00:26:35)

[Luxurious lunch]



(Picture 8: Scene 00:26:38)

[Allie's mother reaction]



(Picture 9: Scene 00:26:39)

[Allie's father reaction]

*Allie's uncle: "If you don't mind my asking, how much do you make at your job?"*

*Noah : "How much money do I make? About cents an hour."*

The reaction goes bad indirectly as soon as Allie's family know the amount of money Noah makes. He realizes that and clarifies his income is not much indeed, but he do not need a lot of money, rather he saves most of it. However, it does not change the opinion of Allie's parents. They consider that a poor guy like Noah does not deserve to get closer with their daughter in a serious relationship. The mother of Allie says [00:28:11] to her husband that it is trouble to see them together and the disagreement emerges ever since then.

From the dialogue showed in [00:26:29] scene above, we come to know that the money that lower class people make places them down from upper class people who have bigger income. Economic resources determine Noah's position as it is explained in Weberian stratification. The film gives us an example how the one who is lack of economic feature can miss his position in certain society.



(Picture 10: Scene 00:38:37) (Picture 11: Scene 00:38:17) (Picture 12: Scene 00:39:08)  
 [She scolds her daughter] [Disagreement of the relationship] [Allie hugs her father]

*Allie's mother* : *"He's a nice boy, but he's..."*

*Allie* : *"He's what? He's what? Tell me."*

*Allie's mother*: *"He is trash, trash, trash! Not for you!"*

This datum from [00:38:33] scene confirms that Allie's mother even labels Noah as a trash because of his economic condition and his poor life style. Allie's father agrees [00:39:08] that he is not suitable for his daughter. They come from upper class and he belongs to lower class. Along with it, we can infer that Noah's prestige goes down here since Allie's parents have no respect at all toward Noah.

Following their love relationship which is objectionable for Allie's parents, it makes they have to split up. Noah writes 365 letters for Allie, but all goes unanswered because her mother, who forbids her to make contact to him again, does conceal the letters. In result, she finally has another affair with Lon Hammond. He illustrates as a superbly rich man coming from old Southern money. He arises from the same community with Allie, which is upper class.



(Picture 13: Scene 00:51:39) (Picture 14: Scene 00:51:48) (Picture 15: Scene 00:53:23)  
 [Upper-upper class party] [Lon proposes Allie to marry him] [Lon gives Allie a ring]

*Lon* : *"Allie, I've been thinking a lot about why we shouldn't get married."*

*Allie : “Okay, I give up, why shouldn’t we get married?”*

*Lon : “I couldn’t think of anything at first, and then it just dawned at me; your parents.”*

*Allie : “My parents?”*

*Lon : “Absolutely. The problem is that they love me. I’m exactly the type of man they want you to end up with. You know, I’m wealthy, I’m from the south, I got a decent job. You know, I’m an incredible dancer, I’m a really smart guy.”*

*Allie : “Well, you see you have to get their permission first, and I think you may have overestimated their affection for you.”*

*Lon : “Oh, I don’t think so. ‘Cause I asked them already and they said yes.”*

Conversation holds as portrayed in [00:51:30] scene at the party underlines the position of him in social hierarchy. The moment when he says ‘you know, I’m wealthy, I’m from the south, I got a decent job’, he asserts his belongings and occupation which indicate the strength of his capacity through the economic order. He mentions where he comes from to claim that he is an old money man who lives in an exclusive and luxurious area. Allie’s parents who believe that the standing of financial power so much, implicitly recognize the high reputation of Lon. He has all the respect out of what he belongs. It shows that the economic situation or wealthy will affect the prestige of individuals. Therefore, it is easy for Lon to get an agreement of Allie’s parents. Lon can match and fit in upper class community events because of his position that are supported by economic and status aspect, as seen in this scene where it shows Lon is sitting comfortably in the extravagant party with Allie and her parents.

In [00:47:41-00:55:22], the film shows some social cultural facts in some events related to the setting of time. Fin calls Noah to hear exclamation of war from a radio that invites Americans to be troops. In that time, the United States

intensely offer their people to join the troops indeed. Hence, Noah and Fin enlist together, chase Erwin Rommel— a field marshal of Nazi Germany— through the North African dessert for two years, and deploy to Patton Third Army in Europe. In the meantime, Allie volunteers as a nurse's aide to take care of those who are injured in the battlefield. After Noah returns from the war, he buys his dream-house by selling his old house and by using his GI Bill as a veteran.

The next dialogue that concern on social stratification matter is [01:31:46] scene in which Allie's mother tries to divulge her previous love episode before she married with her husband (Allie's father) to her daughter.



(Picture 16: Scene 01:31:42)



(Picture 17: Scene 01:31:50)



(Picture 18: Scene 01:31:54)

[They observe from a distance] [Allie's mother tells about her ex] [Ex boyfriend of Allie's mother]

*Allie's mother* : "Do you see that man, there?"

*Allie* : "Hmm-mm."

*Allie's mother*: "Don't look like it now, but 25 years ago.. oh my goodness, he was really something. We were out of my minds in love, let me tell you. Well, naturally, your grandfather was furious, so we decided to run away. We didn't even make the next town before the police picked us up."

This part of scene presents two interrelated points. The first is that Allie inherits prosperous life from her father while he inherits from Allie's grandfather as well. It proves that Allie's family is old money people through generations, signifying their upper-upper class stratification. The second is that the dialogue above implies the reason why the mother and father of Allie do not approve Noah

as Allie's spouse. Her parents disallow her relation with Noah due to his economic status like how her grandfather rejected the relation between her mother and a poor builder man. Old money families used to guard against downward social mobility to prevent their generation wealth being cut off. In this case, Allie's parents are afraid of Allie to lose her economic and social acceptance in their community if she married with Noah.

Conflict in social stratification reaches its climax when Allie's mother finally lets her daughter to choose her own decision. Nevertheless, Allie is still in doubt since she has already given her word to Lon.



(Picture 19: Scene 01:37:19) (Picture 20: Scene 01:36:56) (Picture 21: Scene 01:37:23)  
[Noah tries to convince Allie] [Argument scene between both] [Fight scene of Noah and Allie]

*Noah* : “*This is not about keeping your promise, and it’s not about following your heart. It’s about security.*”

*Allie* : “*What is that supposed to mean?*”

*Noah* : “*Money!*”

*Allie* : “*What are you talk?!*”

*Noah* : “*He’s got a lot of money!*”

In this [01:36:22] act, Noah tries to convince Allie that she should not be influenced by the other people. He understands that by saying ‘He’s got a lot of money’, it refers to Lon who is fabulously rich and it would probably make her turn away from him. Noah suggests she should take aside the status or stratification between them if she really loves someone. When he says ‘it’s not

about following your heart', he realizes that Allie loves him more than she loves Lon and she actually does. In his view, it is only about wealthy and prestige considerations remain the problem.

Economic status and prestige of Noah keep on undervalued in society since his income, occupation, and belongings are not as good as what upper class communities own. Noah has no strong reputation or accomplishment to lift his degree of people's respect, especially in Allie's community. However, this scene tends to criticize the society in an economic aspect that, as what Noah believes, it is not a space to break good relation among upper and lower class.

## **5. Conclusion**

From the analysis of all social stratification scenes, the writer concludes that there are two out of three ideal types of Weberian theory. The most apparent component in this film is wealthy/economic class. It shows in all scenes from the very first scene to be analyzed until the last scene. Another aspect of that is showed in this film is prestige/status. Prestige features appear implicitly from the reputation and how characters see others. It figures on the first scene when Fin expresses his respect to Allie, the forth scene in which Allie's mother says that Noah as trash, and the fifth scene as Lon talks to Allie at the party. Prestige aspects that are found in the scenes are very influenced by wealthy components. If the wealthy of character is good, the prestige of that character is up.



There is no any 'new money' upper class person discovered in the character of *The Notebook*, but the old money type is discoverable from Hamilton family and Lon as seen in the first, fifth, and sixth data/scenes. In lower class category, the working class comes from Noah, his father, and Fin.

To sum up, theme of social stratification in this film can teach you a thing that the differences between you and other people are not a big deal to be united as long as you can appreciate, respect, and love all human-beings irrespective of their status, property, or profession.

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