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The Failure of the American Dream in The Great Gatsby

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Abstract

This paper deals with the American Dream, which is essential for a full understanding of American culture and literature. It refers to the ideals of a nation such as democracy, equality, freedom and the pursuit of happiness.

Throughout history, The American Dream has known many changes and has been understood by people in various ways. The dream was once an ideal for the pioneers who escaped from the persecutions prevailing in Europe; then, it took the form of a search for wealth and a material life. The Revolutionary War, The Anti-slavery Movement, The Civil War, The Westward Expansion and The Gold Rush in California, were all movements that attempted to realize the Dream. With an extraordinary optimism and unchanging belief in the unlimited happiness, the Americans have devoted themselves to the fulfilment of this dream. Throughout these periods, generations of Americans have contributed to the establishment of a new culture and a new society.

In The Great Gatsby, the hero is a self-made man who started his life with no money, but with only a plan for achieving his dream. He is so blinded by his luxurious possessions that he does not see that money cannot buy love or happiness. Fitzgerald demonstrates how a dream can be corrupted by one's obsession with getting wealth, power, and expensive things.

The Great Gatsby is a novel that demonstrates the failure of the American Dream in Post-war America because of people's misunderstanding of it and their materialism view of modern life.

Résumé

Ce document traite le rêve Américain, ce qui est essentiel pour une compréhension complète de la culture et la littérature Américaine. Il se réfère aux idéaux d'une nation comme la démocratie, l'égalité et la liberté et la poursuite du bonheur. Tout au long de l'histoire, le rêve américain a connu de nombreux changements et a été compris par les gens de diverses manières. Le rêve était une fois un idéal pour les pionniers qui ont échappé aux persécutions qui prévalaient en Europe ;ensuite, il a pris la forme d'une quête de richesses et d'une vie matérielle prospère. La guerre révolutionnaire, le mouvement Anti-Esclavagiste, la Guerre Civile, l'expansion vers l'ouest et la Ruée vers l'or en Californie, étaient tous des mouvements qui avaient pour but de réaliser le rêve de certains. Avec un optimisme extraordinaire et de croyance immuable dans le bonheur illimité, les Américains se sont consacrés à la réalisation de ce rêve. Tout au long de ces périodes, des générations d'Américains ont contribué à la création d'une nouvelle culture et une société nouvelle ou le rêve permettait d'aller plus loin.

Dans The Great Gatsby, le héros est un self-made man qui a commencé sa vie pauvre ; mais il avec un plan pour réaliser son rêve. Devenu riche il as tellement aveuglé par ses possessions de luxe il ne voit pas que l'argent seul ne peut lui acheter l'amour ou le bonheur. Fitzgerald démontre comment un rêve peut être corrompu par l'obsession de la richesse du pouvoir et de luxe.

The Great Gatsby est un roman qui démontre l'échec du rêve américain dans l'après première guerre mondiale en Amérique à cause de l'incompréhension des gens du rêve Américain et de leur point de vue du matérialisme de la vie moderne.

الملخص

تتناول هذه الأطروحة الحلم الأميركي ، وهو أمر ضروري لفهم كامل للثقافة والأدب الأميركي. فإنه يشير إلى المثل العليا للأمة ، مثل الديمقراطية والمساواة و الحرية والسعي لتحقيق السعادة. يعرف الحلم الأميركي على مر التاريخ الكثير من التغيرات ، ولقد يفهمه الناس بطرق مختلفة. حلما كان يوما مثاليا للرواد الذين هربوا من الاضطهاد السائد في أوروبا؛ منذ ذلك الحين، اتخذ شكل من أشكال البحث عن الثروة والحياة المادية. الثورة الأمريكية، والحركة المناهضة للعبودية، الحرب الأهلية، والتوسع غربا وتدفق الذهب في كاليفورنيا، كانت جميعها حركات حاولت تحقيق الحلم. بتفاؤل غير عادي والإيمان والسعادة الغير محدودة ، فإن الأميركيين كرسوا حياتهم لتحقيق هذا الحلم. طوال هذه الفترات ، أجيال من الأميركيين ساهموا في إرساء ثقافة جديدة ومجتمع جديد. في غاتسبي العظيم والبطل هو رجل عصامي الذي بدأ حياته من دون أموال، ولكن مع وجود خطة لتحقيق حلمه وقد أعمت ممتلكاته الفاخرة بصيرته إلا أن المال لا يشتري الحب أو السعادة. فيتزجيرالد يوضح كيف يمكن أن يكون الحلم مشوه بهوس الحصول على الثروة والسلطة ، وأشياء غالية. تثبت رواية غاتسبي العظيم فشل الحلم الأميركي بعد الحرب العالمية الأولى بسبب سوء فهم الناس لهذا الحلم و النظرة المادية للحياة الحديثة.

Table of Contents:

INTRODUCTION1

CHAPTER ONE: Historical Background of the American Dream

Introduction.....4

1. The American Dream throughout History.....5

Conclusion.....20

CHAPTER TWO: The Failure of the American Dream in The Great Gatsby

Introduction.....21

1. The Great Gatsby and the twenties.....22

2. The American Dream in The Great Gatsby.....30

Conclusion.....45

CONCLUSION.....46

BIBLIOGRAPHY47

0Introduction

The American Dream is the belief that is based on the assumption that each person, no matter what his origins are, can succeed in changing his social position and making his dreams come true through his own efforts in getting a new, free and better life. This idea dates back to the Puritans who escaped from the tyranny of the Church of England seeking freedom of worship and creation of the 'kingdom of God on a hill'. In the Colonial period, the American Dream began as a search for ideals; in the late 18th century, it took the form of a fight for democracy. With the Westward movement The American Dream took another direction and became openly associated with a search for wealth. In the early decades of the 20th century, the American Dream became a quest for a new material and a luxurious life. It was during this period that The Great Gatsby was published. In the novel, Gatsby's dream, Daisy is a woman who is born into a rich family, and has always lived the luxurious life of the upper class. Obviously, anyone who wants to win her love must have enough money to offer her. In order to make his dream come true, Gatsby tries every means possible, including the illegal trade of alcohol, to make a fortune. However, Gatsby is suspected of killing the mistress of Daisy's husband, George, who in retaliation kills Gatsby. This dramatic development leads to the conclusion that Gatsby's American Dream, which is to win Daisy, turns out to be a total failure.

The research paper tries to put an emphasis on how and why the American Dream fails, and to show how principles such as hope, faith and the desire to fulfil one's expectations are portrayed in The Great Gatsby. This topic is of great interest because the American Dream is in the heart of American literature and history and is ultimately connected to the settlement of the New Continent. The dream began the day the Pilgrim Fathers came to America to restore their Lost Paradise and build a new Garden of Eden in this land of opportunities and great possibilities.

This paper deals mainly with two issues. The first chapter is about how the American Dream developed throughout history and investigates the nature of the Twenties or the Roaring Years. The second chapter shows relation of the Roaring Years with the American Dream and their influence on the novel and the way the American Dream fails in The Great Gatsby.

To explore these issues, we rely on three combined methods which are: description, analysis and argumentation. Description is used to show the different steps that the American Dream passed by; argumentation is used to reveal the motives that pushed people to rebel against the established rules during the Roaring Years; and analysis is made of the dark and cruel society that corrupted the American Dream and drove it to a disastrous failure.

The research is divided into two parts: the first one presents the historical background in it, I rely on sources about the history of The United States , focusing mainly on the most interesting issues especially the Colonial Period , the Revolutionary War , the Civil War and the Westward Movements and the Roaring Years. The other part is the literary background, it focuses on the literary background of the American Dream that it proposes to evaluate in relation to Francis Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby.

The first chapter of this thesis defines the American Dream from a historical point of view. The definition given by James Truslow Adams in his book The Epic of America. The previous definition goes back to the Colonial period when waves of immigrants settled down in the new continent seeking the religious freedom represented by the Puritan idealized vision of society known as the Commonwealth. Apart from the Puritans, there were immigrants who sought wealth by taking over lands for agriculture and the exploitation of raw materials. In the 18th century, the American Dream while still keeping its moral significance became a fight for democracy. The colonists succeeded in establishing America into a democratic nation enjoying liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In the Civil War Era, the Americans ended

slavery and continued their dream of expanding west. Meanwhile, the individuals succeeded in bettering their lives. The early twentieth century saw the corruption of the American Dream which was interpreted by people of a search for an easy, material, often immoral and spiritually quite decadent life.

The second chapter is about the social background of the Jazz Age and its influence on the novel and the way the American Dream has failed in The Great Gatsby. Moral decadence, social class distinction, the desire for social mobility, greed, carelessness and false relationships are the dominant features of that period. People were proposed to do anything just to acquire wealth like the protagonist Jay Gatsby who became a bootlegger to win Daisy's heart. Prohibition is also a main motif that pushed the young generation to rebel against the moral standards of the time; Speakeasies are opened especially for women, not for drinking, but also as a means of claiming equality with men. The Valley of Ashes is a symbol of death and sterility which are the outcomes of mechanization. West Egg is full of extravagance and symbolizes the emergence of the new rich beside the aristocracy of the 1920s. East Egg is a wealthy area, possessing a high social status, symbolizing the aristocracy that dominated the American social life. Moreover, the chapter emphasises the notion of failure of the American Dream in The Great Gatsby. All its principles such as equality, social mobility, hope and equal opportunities were in contradiction with the society in the Jazz Age. In the novel, a character like Myrtle Wilson is unwelcome in the upper class, and her over-ambitious nature leads her to a tragic death. Gatsby does not find his grail because social distinction prevents him from making his dream come true. Many Symbols are used by the writer to point out the unfulfilled dreams. Colors, the Valley of Ashes and the Eyes of Dr. Eckelberg are the illustrations of disillusionment and frustration of the characters. Juxtaposition is also an important feature used by Fitzgerald to contrast between West and East Egg, New York and

the Valley of Ashes, Gatsby's parties and his funeral, dream and reality and between the characters themselves.

:CHAPTER ONE

Historical Background of the American Dream

Introduction

The American dream is the idea which suggests that anyone can succeed in his life through hard work, and that anyone has the right to live a happy and a new life, own a car and a house. The American dream holds nearly all higher American ideals: the religious ideals of a modal nation and the political ideal of a democratic country and the dream of both material and spiritual comfort. In its political ideals, the American Dream refers to a democratic nation in which equality, democracy and freedom reign, the religious ideals lie in a model nation in which everybody has the opportunity to worship their religion without getting interrupted by tyranny and autocracy of king or rulers. This dream goes back to the early settlers, the Puritans who escaped from the persecutions of the Church of England. Few decades later, new waves of the immigrants landed on the new continent in search of wealth and limitless land. In the late 18th century, the dream took another shape which was the fight for ideals like democracy, property and the pursuit of happiness. During the 19th century, the love of the unknown, the desire to spread the Christian religion and the Anglo-Saxon civilization pushed thousands of the frontiersmen and pioneers to cross the wilderness to discover what is beyond the Appalachian Mountains. The Civil War has contributed to bring the dream of equality among the Americans. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the American Dream turned to be a quest for a comfortable, new and luxurious life rather than the spiritual side. These issues contributed in corrupting the noble purpose of the American Dream, where the well-breed society, the tradition and individualism ceased to exist during the early decade of the twentieth century. Prohibition, moral decadence, social distinction, the desire for social mobility and crimes became the dominant features of the decade.

1. The American Dream throughout History

The American dream is an ideal that has been present since the beginning of the American history. Typically, The American Dream is when anyone seeks freedom of worship and the pursuit of happiness, love, high social status, wealth, power and land on his way to the top. The dream has gone through different periods of time, although it is based on ideas of freedom, self-reliance, and a desire for something greater. According to the previous definition, one can make his or her own choice without paying attention to the restriction of race, religion and class. As Jim Cullen stated:

“That American Dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank, which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world. The dream or hope has been present from the start”.¹

This expression “The American Dream” was for the first time used by the historian James Truslow Adams in his book The Epic of America in which he defined as:

“The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.”²

¹ Cullen, Jim. The American Dream: A short history of an Idea that Shaped a Nation. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.p 06.

² Fenton, Edward. A New History of the United States: An Inquiry Approach. New York, New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1969.p 54.

The idea of The American Dream is older than the United States, dating back to the 1600s, when immigrants started crossing the ocean with hopes and ambitions for the new and largely virgin continent. The early immigrants crossed the ocean and settled down on a wild land, sought for nothing but for two purposes: religious freedom and the dream of wealth. The dream seekers included the first wave of the Puritans who descended from the Calvinist* branch of Protestantism. The Puritans came to America to escape from persecutions of the Church of England. The whole New World seemed for them an ideal place to enjoy freedom of worship, to realize the religious dream of building “the city upon a hill”. The Puritans led by John Winthrop, considered themselves as God’s chosen people. They believed that they were a new generation of humanity destined to begin the world over again and to build a shining ‘city on a hill’. By migrating to America, they sought to fulfill their holy mission which was to create a model nation for the rest of the world to follow. Puritans drove themselves and their society to a tremendous height of achievement both materially and spiritually. First of all, they invented the Myth of America. They raised America as a young nation for mankind. Puritans also presented the tradition of freedom, individualism and democracy in the American dream.

Other early immigrants came to America with the motivation of economic reasons. Most of them devoted themselves to the struggle of crossing the wilderness just to gain the material standards of living and improving their financial position in life. By migrating to the New World, the poor found their situation changed. Land was fertile, limitless, and free and there were unlimited opportunities.

The Puritans taught the whole world and humanity how to be democratic for the first time throughout ‘The Mayflower Compact’ which is a document requiring the immigrants to

* Calvinism; the theological system of John Calvin (1509-1564), the French theologian and leader of the Protestant Reformation.

frame and obey 'just and equal laws' that they signed before they landed on the American shores.

Jamestown was the first successful English colony was established in 1607. Settlers arrived and established commercial agriculture based on tobacco. Between the late 1610s and the American Revolution, the British shipped 50.000 convicts to its colonies. This settlement was not too easy, because there were clashes with Native Americans such as in 1622 Powhatan Uprising in Virginia where Native Americans fought the English settlers. The area of New England was settled by Puritans who established the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630. The first attempt to settle south of Virginia was in the Province of Carolina, with Georgia Colony which as the last of the Thirteen Colonies established in 1733. People had come to America to be free and to realize a fuller life as individuals; they would realize that the new world has a future which human efforts might shape.

In the late 17th and 18th centuries, the way of thought known as the Enlightenment movement became dominant in the Europe. The Apostles of the enlightenment began to use their reason to discover the world, throwing away superstition and fear of the medieval world. The effort to discover the natural laws which controlled the universe led to scientific, political and social advances. Enlightenment thinkers examined the rational basis of all beliefs and in the process rejected the authority of church and state.³

Influential leaders such as Benjamin Franklin, Samuel and John Adams, were reared as Puritans, reading the Bible, which inspired the weak and the oppressed people to stand before the kings, tyrants and church hierarchy. Also being influenced by the Enlightenment movement, Benjamin Franklin established the political ideal of the American Dream. The

³ Wendell, Barrett. A Literary History of America. 4th Edition. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957.p.55

Congress adopted a 'Declaration of Rights and Grievances' that insisted on the preservation of colonial rights, including those of life, liberty and property.

The Thirteen colonies began a rebellion against rule in 1775 and proclaimed their independence in 1776. Mainly Jefferson's work, the Declaration of Independence, was adopted on July 4, 1776, not only announcing the birth of a new nation, but also for a philosophy of human freedom that becomes an active force throughout the entire world. The Declaration was based on the French and the English Enlightenment political philosophy, but one influence in particular was: Thomas Paine (1776) The common Sense. John Locke conceptualized the traditional rights and generalized them into natural rights of humanity.

The Declaration of Independence (1776) opening passage reflects these ideas:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new Government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”⁴

Jefferson' democratic thought, expressed in his “Declaration of Independence” and “The Bill of Rights” had a big influence on the American people and it had become the tradition and the national dream for the following generations. He insisted that all men were created equal and that all qualified citizens have equal opportunities for material gain. The most prominent are the principle of democracy, liberty and equality.

The American Revolution was a true political revolution that had destroyed the foundation of the old order and transferred power from the royal family to a new social group, transferred

⁴ Brogan, Hugh. The Penguin History of the United States OF America. London : Penguin Books,1990.p174_

a monarchical society, in which the colonists were subjects of the crown, into a republic, in which they became citizens and participants in the political life.

The revolution also deeply changed social expectations. It led to demands that the vote be extended to a large proportion of the population and that holders of public offices be elected by the people. Smaller farmers, artisans, and labourers began increasingly participating in state legislative elections, and men chosen to represent their interests began to win office and power. Leaders in the new state governments were less wealthy, more mobile and more faithful.

Above all, the Revolution widespread certain radical ideals especially liberty, equality and government of the people. Among the most influential and most enduring was the invention of the modern idea of a written constitution. Basically the Constitution is a document that limits the powers of government and safeguards the rights of the people.⁵

The revolution also influenced American religious life. Americans moved away from strict Reformed Calvinism because they believed that men had natural rights, that the pursuit of personal happiness was necessary, and that all men are equal and to assure the well-being of the society, personal freedom should be inalienable.

The American Revolution had much influence beyond the boundary of the new nation. Many movements in Europe took place after the tremendous success of the American Declaration of Independence, the war itself, and the creation of a new government to replace the British rule. Kings and Queens, who believed in the Divine Right of Monarchs started to see the seeds of the liberal ideas among people. Many peoples wished to put an end to the idea of monarchy. The French Revolution was inspired by the ideals of the American Revolution,

⁵ Knollenberg, Bernhard. *Origin of the American Revolution: 1759–1766*. New York: Free Press, 1965.p.124-135

and the revolutions in Central and South America by Spanish colonies hoping to get rid of Spanish colonization.

The Enlightenment as a great spiritual movement in the 18th century has influenced the American culture; the most determined legacy of it, is the optimism of progress. Americans have an inclination to believe in progress, and they like to make changes and believe that changes are good. For the purpose of making changes and advancing themselves, they don't fear or hesitate for making initiatives in order to reach what they dreamt for.

In the 1830 and 1840, industrialism grew rapidly in the United States in which the Industrial Revolution made textile manufacturing a widespread process, increased the demand for raw cotton. And the opening of new lands in the West after 1812 extended the area available for cotton farming. Cotton culture moved rapidly all over the nation.

Meanwhile the Americans were satisfied with their economic, cultural and political achievements. A group of people were opposing industrialism and the expansion of cities, which pushed people to leave their lands, properties and possessions to follow the brightness of cities where the need for wealth became a major motive for the Americans at that time, which gave birth to Transcendentalism.

Born in America at the moment of an awakening of national consciousness, Transcendentalism tried to raise the spirit of nationalism. The spokesman of the American Transcendentalism was Ralph Waldo Emerson who supported individualism and contributed in the rebirth to the American Dream in its moral and spiritual senses through supporting self-reliance, oversoul and transcendental individual. Transcendentalism played an important role in protecting human spirit and mind from the invasion of materialism and inequality and making the unique national culture and identity very strong. Emerson's oversoul, self-reliance and transcendental individualism influenced the American way of life; Americans

have worked very hard to lead the world, with unbelievable confidence in their abilities and optimism towards the future.⁶

The movement of the Enlightenment and Transcendentalism had great influence on the American culture. The ideas and aspirations have become the tradition, belief and pursuit of the American people and made the national ideal the American Dream.

In the middle of the 19th century, the American North became industrial, exploited its raw materials and the inventions that came from Europe especially from Great Britain, which made the North not dependent on slaves to serve their needs, because mechanization invaded all the North life. The South however kept its traditional image with its agrarian tradition that made the South require more and more slaves in order to use them as labour in their lands, farms and homes. Ideological separation became evident between the North and the South. The Northern States wanted the American Dream to be achieved for the whole country, to be industrial with no slavery. Upon these institutions they planned to make the U.S a superior nation in the world. The South wanted to achieve the same goal for the U.S but with agrarian and pro-slavery institutions. In 1854, the proposed Kansas-Nebraska Act neglected the Missouri Compromise by providing that each new state of the union decided its position towards slavery. Huge number of slaves escaped from their masters through the Underground Railroad, a term defining secret ways where abolitionists transported runaway slaves to Northern Free States territory.

In the presidential election of 1860, the Republican Party, led by Abraham Lincoln, had shown its opposition to the expansion of slavery outside the state in which it had already existed. The Republican victory in the election of 1860 resulted in seven Southern states declaring their secession from the union.

⁶ Delano, Sterling F. The Harbinger and New England Transcendentalism: a Portrait of Associationism in America. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1983.p.162

During the months that followed Lincoln's election, most of the slaveholding state broke away from the Union and formed the Confederate States of America. As the Civil War began in April 1861, President Lincoln aimed only to return those states to the Union. From the beginning of the war, however, abolitionists forced him not only to make abolition an objective of the war but to join black troops as well. His Emancipation Proclamation of January 1863, which declared the freedom of slaves within the territories of the Confederacy.

Meanwhile, Southern slaves used the war as an opportunity to escape from their masters in large numbers. Over 180,000 black men who served in the Union Army, which had invaded the South by the spring of 1865. The Northern victory and the insistence of the abolitionist led in December 1865 to the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment that has officially ended slavery in the United States.

Many Americans saw the Civil War as a holy War which made America an ideal land where equality was widespread, no racial, religious, social and geographical differences.

This was illustrated by the Reconstruction Era, where several amendments of the Constitution were adopted to realize what the other nations could not achieve; the "Reconstruction Amendments" were passed to expand civil rights especially for black Americans. Those amendments included the Thirteenth Amendment that outlawed slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment that guaranteed the citizenship for all people born or naturalized within the American territory. Few years later, hatred and violence emerged from a white, Catholic organization called the Ku Klux Klan who came as a reaction to the series of amendments that were passed by the American Congress to erase and to clean the American's mind from the racism and violence led by the Klan considered as a terrorist group in 1870.

The discovery of gold in California brought the Westward Migration to a peak; California became a state in 1850, and a transcontinental railroad was built to facilitate the way for the

frontiersmen to explore the other part of their country. The various reasons for westward migration were numerous: the love of the unknown, the desire to get rich quickly, the ability of escaping from the law, or the freedom to be an individualist and self-reliant. Apart from personal reasons, the movement was given a strong political support through the development of an idea that was known as “Manifest Destiny” that implied that the Americans had the duty of taking the Anglo-Saxon civilization and the Christian religion to the entire continent.

The Frontier in the American history is not only an advance towards the West, but it is also a flash-back, return to the Puritans who were the first seed of the making of the American nation, as Frederick Turner stated:

“The advance of the Frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines. And to study this advance, the men who grew up under these conditions, and the political, economic, and social results of it, is to study the really American part of our history.”⁷

According to Turner, the westward movement or the Frontier has a great influence on the American character, politics, economy and psychology. In politics, the expansion of the frontier developed the American democracy. People on the frontier had to adapt and to deal with whatever life provided there. They learnt how to be highly self-reliant; this made the Americans active and could make their own initiatives.

The exploration of the frontier encouraged the economic development, in which it reinforced the American values like equality and competition. The pioneers, the noble, the rich and the poor transported in the same train or wagon, all the frontiersmen were equal, and

⁷ Turner, Frederick Jackson. The Significance Of The Frontier In American History. Washington D.C.:United States Information Agency,1988.p35.

shared the same problems, danger and the wilderness. Social class was not important. This experience strengthened American egalitarianism.

Fierce competition was the mainstream in the westward movement. The law of “survival of the fittest” was sacred. The principle of priority possession in taking over lands and exploiting mines, gave push to raise the belief that everyone could exert his ultimate strength to go ahead of the others. The notion of competition accelerated the economic development and spread the democracy on the frontier, and glorified heroism and materialism.⁸

The westward movement contributed in testing the American optimism, the west was full of lands, mines and gold that pushed them to risk their lives to satisfy their desires. They found so many natural articulations like the wild animals, uncivilized land and forests, but they could survive thanks to their optimism and heroism where they held the slogan ‘America is the big land of opportunities’. Respecting the personal and freedom, the frontiersmen neglected the dominance of the authority on the individuals and asked the government to limit its interference.

The Westward Expansion, the Gold Rush in California, the Anti-slavery Movement and the Civil War, are all movements attempting to realize the Dream. With an extraordinary optimism and unchanging belief in the unlimited happiness, the Americans have devoted themselves for the sake of progress. Generations of Americans have contributed to the establishment of a new culture, and have added to their beliefs, desire, wishes and ambitions into the pursuit of the nation and resulted in the integrated national ideal and characterised culture.

Aiming at those high ideals, Americans have worked very hard to make social progress and become a wealthy nation. However, with the development of industry and the

⁸ Bogue, Allan G. Frederick Jackson Turner: Strange Roads Going Down. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.p.32

establishment of capitalist monopoly, the tradition, the past, the well-breed society and the uniqueness had all changed into corruption and capitalism became the American way.

“Never did a decade from itself so quickly or self-consciously into as age as did the Roaring Twenties, the

Golden Decade, This was a strange period in history...a time when millions began their fruitful milling”⁹ .

Barrett describes it further: “It was an interesting, colourful, bewildering, disagreeable time, when retreat into a cosy past was cut off, and ahead, the angle of slope down which the world was sliding grew even dizzier.” , and he adds: “living them was an odd experience.”¹⁰

The Twenties , called by many names :The Mad Decade , The End of Innocence , The Golden Age , The New Society , Indian Summer Of The Old Civilization , and The Jazz Age which was : “a sort of musical comedy peopled by John Held , Jr.characters playing Mah Jong while resting up between sex-and-gin bouts. The bouts took place all right. It was a feverish time.”¹¹

Rapid technological change, the failure of Woodrow Wilson’s idealism, urbanization, the results of the war, are among the many causes suggested for the resulting revolt against the past. Barrett describes the situation as follows:

“With the demands of idealism swept under the green baize, with self-sacrifice and heroism abandoned at the moment when they could have been most spectacularly put to use, the years between addressed themselves to the pleasures of the body and of the imagination.”¹²

In a period notable by change, perhaps the notable change was in the attitude of the American people toward morals. An open revolt against the Puritanical rules of the American conscience became evident after the end the World War I. The war had contributed to the emotional rebellion. Many of the returning young men were disappointed by the kind of war it had been. American girls, as nurses and other war workers, were influenced by the

⁹ Barrett, Marvin. The Years Between, Boston: Little. Brown and Company, 1962,p21

¹⁰ Marvin Barrett.p5

¹¹ Allen, Frederick. Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920’s.New York, New York: Harper and Rowe, 1931.p, 14.

¹² Marvin Barrett .,23

continental standards or the lack of them. Before America's entry the war, the moral values had been situated primarily by the family, the local church, or perhaps the outstanding families in the small towns.

The new society of urban life, with the new inventions mainly the Automobile and industrialization, offered employment for the youth of the small town. The fascination and bright of the city attracted the rural young people. An emphasis was placed on advanced education and young people left homes to attend school. The division of the social level was clear; the influence of religion on moral standards was minor.

Mass production made technology useful for the middle class. The automobile, movie, radio, and chemical industries flourished during the 1920's. The most important was the automobile industry. Before the war, cars were a luxury. In the 1920's, mass-produced vehicles became common throughout the U.S. and Canada. The automobile industry's effects were widespread, contributing to such disparate economic pursuits as gas stations, motel, and the oil industry. Radio became the first mass broadcasting medium. Its economic importance led to the mass culture that has dominated society.

The entire decade of the 1920s, the men chosen to lead the nation were from the Republican Party. Members of this political party were businessmen. They felt that those active in successful businesses were suitable to manage national affairs. They wanted government to act as a helpful part in businesses but not to limit or control them. The economic growth and prosperity that was in the United States during the 1920s convinced people that the Republicans were right. Politics and government during this period involves a strong partnership between politicians and business. Although there were still voices calling for the government to take a stronger role in reform and people who worried about the poor and the oppressed, the Laissez-Faire Philosophy prevailed. The majority of U.S. citizens seemed to agree with this point of view.

The Prohibition Experiment reflected a utopian faith that alcohol problem could be abolished by legislation, but the Eighteenth Amendment in 1920, and the Volstead Act 1919 passed to apply it, proved impossible to enforce, thus, thousands of illicit stills were seized, and millions of gallons of wine and spirits were destroyed. Prohibition as an ideal was popular in the country than in the city. However, people at that time were unable to stop drinking neither in the country nor in the city. The public were shocked and frightened by the killings and lawlessness that resulted from Prohibition.¹³

Nativism emerged during the 1920s. Immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were seen with mistrust and faced discrimination, both in the form of laws enacted against them and in legal efforts to harass and punish them. During the Red Scare, for example, hundreds of immigrants were deported.¹⁴

The trial and execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartholomew Vanzetti, two Italian immigrants accused of murder, raised the Xenophobia towards newcomers. Other famous trials of the decade shed light on the darker side of human nature, as well as the public's attraction with crime. The revival of the Ku Klux Klan, a white terrorist group that had been active in the South during the Reconstruction Era, had committed many violent acts against African Americans in order to prevent them from achieving political and social equality. In the 1920s, it intensified its focus to include anyone supposed as different from the white Protestant majority, including immigrants, Catholics, and Jews.¹⁵

Many social problems occurred in the Prohibition Era. Mafia groups limited their activities to gambling and robbery until 1920, when organized bootlegging intensified as a reaction to

¹³ Sinclair, Andrew. Prohibition: The Era of Excess. New York: Harper Colophon, 1964.p.57

¹⁴ Perret, Geoffrey. America in the Twenties. New York: Touchstone, 1982.p.67

¹⁵ Noggle, Burl. Into the Twenties: The United States from Armistice to Normalcy. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1974.p.128

the effect of Prohibition. A violent, black market for alcohol flourished. Powerful gangs corrupted law enforcement agencies. When repeal of Prohibition occurred in 1933, organized crime lost all of its black market alcohol profits in most states because of competition with low-priced alcohol sales at legal liquor stores.

Prohibition seemed to make the Speak-Easy that participated in luring the younger American people where even “nice” girls were seen smoking. One can hear stories of all-night joy-rides and of drunks at the mad parties. The latest fads in dancing drew criticism from moralists. The Catholic Telegram stated:

“The music is sensuous, the embracing of partners...the female only half dressed is absolutely indecent; and the motions—they are such as may not be described, with any respect for propriety, in a family newspaper. Suffice it to say that there are certain houses appropriate for such dances; but those houses have been closed by law.”¹⁶

The young ladies of the era imitated the young men to gain moral freedom. The campaign gave particular attention to mode of dress. In July, 1920, a fashion writer reported that the American women had lifted their skirts far beyond any modest limitation. The Flappers, bold and unconventional, were alone for only a short while in wearing:

“Thin dress, short-sleeved and occasionally sleeveless; some of the wilder young things rolled their stocking below their knees, revealing to the shocked eyes of virtue a fleeting glance of shin-bones and bones and knee-cap; and many of them were visibly using cosmetic”¹⁷

Soon the limitation of “men only” at the bars gave way to the speak-easy, which provided to both men and women. The night club and the cocktail party were introduced to American

¹⁶ Allen, Frederick. Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920's. New York, New York: Harper and Rowe, 1931.p,90

¹⁷ Marvin Barrett,..p43

society. These movements established a change in the symbolic ideal of American womanhood.

The traditional concepts of love and marriage were thrown away “American in the 1920’s became obsessed with the subject of sex.”¹⁸ Freudian principles were used to justify sexual freedom. Virtues of honor and fidelity were replaced by corruption and rebellion. Proponents of equality for women included “the right, equally shared between men and women to free participation in sex experience.”¹⁹ Moral reasons for any prohibition in sexual life before or after marriage ceased to exist. Divorce rate increased because of the independence of women workers in offices and industry. With a job, women could “live their own lives”. Authority of parents and of husbands was not obligatory on the working women. If unmarried, it was not necessary to stay in the small town and wait until the right man came along. The young lady in this case could go to the city, live in an apartment, work in an office, be free, and still be a lady. Married working women did not feel tied down by household hard work but were free to enjoy the fellowship of adults and the power of the wages under these circumstances, the feeling of economic independence on the part of the working wife convinced the husband of his uselessness:

“At the present time women vacillate somewhat absurdly between two schemes of life, the old and the new...they are in revolt against the immemorial conventions. The result is a general unrest. With many symptoms of extravagant and unintelligent revolt.”²⁰

¹⁸ Leuchtenburg, William E. The Perils of Prosperity. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press , 1953,p.167

¹⁹ Frederick Allan . p,117

²⁰ Menken,H.L. In Defence of Women. New York : Alfred A.Knopf, 1922.p194.

Conclusion

CHAPTER TWO

The Failure of the American Dream in The Great Gatsby

Introduction

The American dream is in the heart of American literature. The dream is about bettering man's situation by acquiring such things as love, higher social status, wealth and power on his way to the top.

The early settlers' dream of moving West to find land and start a family has changed in the twentieth century into a more materialistic version of gaining a big house, a nice car, an easy and a comfortable life.

Many of the literary works were considered as masterpieces of Twentieth century literature were produced during the 1920's. It was a decade dominated the use of specific themes, and modernist techniques and characters who represented the 1920's.

One of the most fascinating, and most representative novelist of the 1920's style, is F.Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940). The 1920's are often called the 'The Jazz Age', a phrase first used by Fitzgerald in the title of a short story collection. Theses Tales of the Jazz Age recorded various aspects of the decade.

In his work, The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald tells the story of a young man from the Midwestern States who became wealthy as a bootlegger, for the sake of the girl of his dreams, Daisy. In the end, Gatsby is deceived by his dream. Fitzgerald successfully explores such themes as the ironic contrast between the material prosperity of the U.S society and its moral decadence, and the resolution of dreams in the face of the bleak reality. Fitzgerald shows how a dream can be corrupted by man's focus on wealth, power and luxury.

1. The Great Gatsby and the twenties

When The Great Gatsby was published in 1925, it was immediately considered as a masterpiece of American Modern writing. The novel is focused mainly on the barriers between men and women, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, rich and poor, capital and labour,

educated and half-literate. The influence of the boom of the 1920's on the moral values of the Americans is obvious; the decade was a more realistic and morally harder world then. For example, Daisy is not in need of love, because she knows that there are more interesting things than love, whereas Gatsby seeks equality, but reality proves that it is only a political ideal.

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Meanwhile, Modernism emerged as a social protest against the extravagance, rudeness, and immorality of the Jazz Age. The Waste Land and The Great Gatsby are works in which T.S.Eliot, and Francis Scott Fitzgerald shared the burden of showing the coming generations the dark side of the Roaring Years that seemed brilliant and glittering, but in reality it was a dark decade where materialism, oppression and ultimately frustration became the dominant features. Each writer used his own way of dealing with these themes; Fitzgerald used places like East Egg, West Egg, the Valley of Ashes and New York as an illustration of the moral decadence, materialism and social distinction of the period. T.S.Eliot used The Christian Tradition, The Oriental Myths and a variety of images of dry land, stones and death to show the disillusionment and the frustration of people of the period.²²

The Great Gatsby is a recollection of events that took place in North Dakota, in the summer of 1922 .Jay Gatsby, who is Jimmy Gatz, has changed into a rich man with the help of a man called Dan Cody. He has loved and lost Daisy Fay. He understands that in order to have Daisy back, he has to get a good deal of money. When we meet him, he is a successful man but a bootlegger. We enter the story with Nick Carraway who plays an important role both as narrator and as one of the major characters to guide the readers into the dishonest

²¹ Hart, James David. The Oxford companion to American literature. 5th ed., London & New York, 1983.p.125

²² Wakeman, John, Ed. World authors, 1950-1970; a Companion to Twentieth Century Authors. New York, 1975. p.167

relationships that the characters of the novel are involved in : for example , Gatsby with Daisy , her husband Tom with Myrtle , Nick with Daisy’s friend Jordan Baker.

Things look simple at the beginning: Nick, like Gatsby himself, wants to change his life through success, but to fulfil this dream; people should get involved in ambiguous ways: Jordan cheats at golf; Myrtle gets involved with Tom in an illicit relationship to be “very glad to pick some money.”²³ Nick quickly understands that the social world comes through or is built on ambiguities. The Americans during the Jazz Age were ready to do anything, to be anywhere for the sake of wealth.

The Great Gatsby is about American issues. The world of the novel is a world of broken dreams and false relationships; a world of money and wealth rather than of social responsibility; a world in which people are free to decide their moral behaviour.

One issue in the novel is loyalty in love and friendship. Nick considers Gatsby as his good friend throughout his narration , Nick says about Gatsby :“ there was something gorgeous about him...it was an extraordinary gift for hope , a romantic readiness...which it is not likely I shall ever find again.”²⁴ An instance is of the love of Gatsby for Daisy; he devotes his entire life for the sake of taking Daisy back. Love of Gatsby for Daisy will remain in the reader’s mind because it is painful, sterile and from one side. In reality, Tom and Daisy are not loyal to an idea, or to a person, especially when they push Gatsby to believe that he is the murderer of Myrtle. The need of loyalty and love was old-fashioned during the Jazz Age, people tried to gain the material success at the expense of the spiritual one.

Readers, who come to read Fitzgerald’s novels and the twenties, get the idea that the theme of the American Dream is just personal freedom and financial success. However, early twentieth-century thinkers* clarified that the American Dream is more idealistic, it was

²³ Fitzgerald, F. Scott. The Great Gatsby. London: Penguin, 1994. p104.

²⁴

Ibid. p15.

□

* Josiah Royce, William James and Walter Lippmann.

virtually associated with the building of a nation and the difficulties that faced the founding fathers in the Seventeenth century. However, during the twenties, the American dream became associated with materialism because the Americans were blinded by wealth. Gatsby becomes materialistic because of Daisy's refusal of him because of his humble background. But Gatsby here tries to relate materialism with idealism. Material life offers one of the few accepted ways in which the American can express his idealism. This is how Santayana puts the issue:

“For the American the urgency of his novel attack upon matter, his enthusiasm in Gathering its fruits, prevent meanderings in primrose paths; strategy must be Short cuts ... There is an enthusiasm in his sympathetic handling of material forces which goes far to cancel the illiberal character which it might otherwise assume ...; he dreams of growing rich, and he grows rich ... He dreams of helping to carry on and to accelerate the movement of a vast, seething progressive society, and he actually does so. Ideals clinging so close to nature are almost sure of fulfillment; the American beams with a certain self-confidence and sense of mastery; he feels that God and nature are working with him.”²⁵

Gatsby does not want only to be a successful person, but to be a gentleman. Meyer Wolfsheimer who is a Jewish bootlegger, who shared business with Gatsby, reminds us that he has fulfilled all his desires, because he was a farm boy who learnt how to read and think with no help, but he is very proud of his past and his achievement, whereas Gatsby hides his past in order to be a gentleman.

Gatsby does not want to be praised for what he is, but for what he is not. In this, he represents the tension of the early twenties. Wolfsheimer has no social class but he thinks about Gatsby as “a perfect gentleman” and “a man of fine breeding.”²⁶ Myrtle has married her husband George “because I thought he was a gentleman”. Even Tom Buchanan, with his

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Santayana, George. Character and Opinion in the United States. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956. 259

²⁶ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p57.

interests in science and art, wants to maintain aristocracy, and to impose the values of his social class.

When Gatsby says, “Here’s another thing I always carry”²⁷, it is a final proof that his early life has disappeared, a photo “of Oxford days” showing that he has always belonged, so to speak, among his peers. Gatsby is not only the leading man of the Jazz Age but also the last great figure of the gentleman hero. He understands and gets upset from the inequality that is one of the most important opponents of the American Dream that was an accepted behaviour at that time. Comparing with Tom or Meyer or one of his guests, we find that Gatsby has nobility, generosity, bravery thanks to his Mid-Western background in which these qualities are unknown in East or West Egg.

The Great Gatsby is actually a social protest; Fitzgerald draws a sharp image of the social realities at that time, one of these, is class division; rich and poor, mighty and weak, fortunate and oppressed. One of these characters is Myrtle who wants to escape from her class to join the Buchanans, Nick said about her:

“Her apartment was on the top floor – a small living room, a small dining room, a small bedroom and a bath.... Several old copies of “Town Tattle” lay on the table together With a copy of “Simon called Peter” and some of the small scandal magazines Of Broadway. Mrs. Wilson was first concerned with the dog. A reluctant elevator boy went for a box full of straw and some milk to which he added on his own initiative a tin of large hard dog biscuits – one of which decomposed apathetically in the saucer of milk all afternoon.”²⁸

There are many things that are noticeable about her but, like Gatsby, she never understands anything about style. He wants to be a gentleman; she wants to be a lady: she surrounds herself with the artworks of the middle class. She does not understand even these things very well, who wants to explain to Tom that she is able to be a lady even with her limited

²⁷ Ibid. p35.

²⁸ Ibid. p25.

understanding of what the upper class is. Everything about the apartment suggests that Myrtle, like Gatsby, get her ideas about style and class from the advertisement.

Myrtle has tried to build her social status. She does her best to pretend to be a lady who belongs to the upper class to provide herself with self-image; she has bought books, furniture, and magazines.

The language in The Great Gatsby is useful to the life of New York which is very harsh, and contradictory, it goes with movement of Gatsby from the Mid-West in which we start with the moderate, careful and practiced accent of Gatsby, to another manner of harsh, conflicting and violent accent of the Easterners. We move from day to night, from the description of dreams to that of nightmares.

In The Great Gatsby, the corrupted dreams of Gatsby represented the period of the Post-War in America and the western world. The novel penetrated the spirit of the period; through it, he gave a faithful description of the reality of the period. "...I began to like New York racy, adventurous feel of New York at night and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines give to the restless eye...to like New York."²⁹

The Post-War period was distinguished by the spiritual sadness. The image of the waste land was common in the twenties, especially after the publication of T.S Eliot famous poem The Waste Land (1922). In this poem, Eliot used the Christian Tradition, The Indian and the Chinese and the Oriental Myths, a variety of images of dry land, stones and careless characters to make an impressive picture of the grief of loneliness and failure to love. The mystified image of the western civilization shown in the poem reflected in the image he has drawn about the nation, a place where material possession has been replaced by other system of principles and ideals. Most of the critics of Fitzgerald's works have noticed that the major theme of The Great Gatsby was the corrupted dream of Gatsby that was destroyed by wealth with its shortcoming on the human spirit.

²⁹ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p61.

One setting of the novel is the Valley of Ashes, symbol of the urban civilization in the novel, its atmosphere looks like a ruined, sterile and dry land in which ashes mixed with clouds making the place frightened and ugly. This is because the truth is revealed, no way for imagination to make this setting vivid and colourful. Nick describes it:

“About half-way between west egg and New York the motor road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile, so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land...already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of grey cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest and immediately the ash-grey men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight.”³⁰

The Valley of Ashes gives a representation of the urban society with its ugliness and despair. Indeed it is; a large deserted land for the wastes of the modern city and industry, the symbol of a society that worships materialism, we can associate it with Eliot's symbolism of the waste land in its sterility and death. Nick sees in the valley, a strange transformation of nature, where the poor Wilson lives in. The man who seeks wealth in order to make an end to his miserable life by every means possible, this man is blinded by the glittering of the upper class's lifestyle. His dream is shared also by his wife Myrtle, they consider Tom Buchanan as a source of power, they feel weak and oppressed without him. This is mainly translated in this passage, and Nick states that:

“Above the grey land and the spasms of the bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of doctor T.J.Eckleberg. The eyes of doctor T.J.Eckleberg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose. Evidently some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness, or forgot them and moved away. But his eyes, dimmed a little

³⁰ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p29.

by many painless days, under sun and rain, brood on the solemn dumping ground.”³¹

The Prohibition Bill is an act passed by the American Parliament that forbade the selling, the manufacture and the consumption of alcohol as an attempt to moralise the American public and to recall the old order of the Puritans. However, it has a bad effect on the American people where organized crimes increased and speakeasies are opened for the youth to enjoy the wine brought by the bootleggers. From the rumours that we have heard in Gatsby's parties, he is a bootlegger, especially Tom who has some doubts about the source of his wealth saying “Who is this Gatsby...some big bootlegger!”³² Alcohol in his parties in a big quantity proves that he gets involved in a secret business with Meyer Wolfshiem.

Tom and Daisy is the representative of aristocracy which became the dominant features in the Roaring Years. Tom with his money and social status obtain Daisy. This is the tragedy of the social reality of the period in which the traditional social values of democracy ceased to exist. Values like social mobility and economic opportunities paved the way for the emergence of the greedy, selfish and hypocritical class that live and get all they seek, but the upper class continues their life seeking breed.

This sense of class is shown also in Wilson's garage; throughout this image we get the idea about the owner's social condition. “The garage is situated at the edge of the valley of ashes to which it belongs, and is contiguous to nothing.”³³ This image gives an illustration of the working class position at the bottom of social order and offers no way for dream and beauty. Moreover, there is irony in Fitzgerald's description of Wilson, he appears as physically and spiritually ill, later we understand that this illness is the result of his failure to

³¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p29.

³²

Ibid. p114.

³³ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p30.

have wealth, that made him a murderer instead of being the victim, whereas Tom the true murderer is protected by his wealth, who normally should bear the blame of Gatsby's death.

The death of Gatsby and George Wilson is the result and the fate of those who seek to share the dream of the Buchanans, that dream who leads the representative of the democratic values to the grave.

2. The American Dream in The Great Gatsby

The idea is that we are Nordics .I am and you are, and you are and –“after an infinitesimal hesitation, he included Daisy with a slight nod and she winked at me again “and we have produced all the things that go to make civilization – oh, science and art and all that .Do you see! ³⁴

³⁴ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p18.

This quote, one of the first significant statements made by Tom Buchanan, draws the lines between races to support the social expectations of women. Fitzgerald wants to guide the reader through an understanding of the outcome of the use of gender and race in The Great Gatsby.

Gender is not to be understood as sex, but as an identity. Nick describes Daisy as a silly, young thing; she is “the other girl” with “an absurd, charming little laugh”³⁵. Jordan remains the young woman. The differences are obvious. A woman is able to control herself and is mature. A girl is unreliable, young, immature and thinks that everything is a game. Daisy perhaps puts it best when after giving birth to a girl she says, “I am glad it’s a girl. And I hope she will be a fool –that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little.”³⁶ This is best represented by Tom. He always speaks of ‘paternal contempt’. This patriarchal attitude was common during the 1920’s. Whereas Daisy believes that Tom has a “woman in New York”, Tom feels that Myrtle, his mistress, is just his ‘girl’. He sees every female as a ‘girl’ including his wife, his mistress and Jordan. Tom feels he is in control of his life, his wife, and his mistress. There was the women’s right movement that emerged in the early 1920’s and called for women’s rights and equality with men, woman had the right to vote only a few years later.

The novel reflects the way the American society was constructed at that time. It was based on a racial organization and on set of common geographical and physical characteristics. Racial organization is meant to be a pre-nineteenth century vision within this classification; the Jewish population can be seen as a race. This can be seen in the characterization of Wolfshiem. Nick describes him as “a small flat-nosed Jew who raised his large head and regarded me with two fine growths of hair which luxuriated in either nostril. After a moment

³⁵ Ibid. p18.

³⁶ Ibid. p14.

I discovered his tiny eyes in the half darkness.”³⁷ It is interesting to note that Fitzgerald rarely gives a detailed physical description of a person all at once. He usually spreads the physical description throughout number of chapters and even years. In this case, however, Wolfsheim is fully and in detail. Why?

In the 1920’s, there was a shift accruing in the social world. Status was no longer determined solely on name but also on money. The merchant class, mainly Jewish, was on the move. Individuals were attempting to join the upper class. In The Great Gatsby, Wolfsheim wants to belong to a class that does not accept him. The social structure was changing and indeed was manipulated. With the murder of Gatsby, the outsiders are once again relegated to their place. Wolfsheim does not attend the funeral of Gatsby because he is no longer in need of him.

The second definition of race is concerned with the separation between classes and races on the base of physical and geographical characteristics. Tom is described as a: “straw hair man.”³⁸ Jordan has “autumn-leaf yellow”³⁹ hair. They are characterized by typically Nordic features referring to the fair-haired, blue-eyed Nordics that made civilization. Daisy is the only person in the group who has “dark shining hair”⁴⁰; she is the only Non-Nordic which means that she does not make civilization like Tom, Jordan and Nick. Her physical characteristics put her apart. The barrier between black and white seems clear. For example, Gatsby and Nick are on their way to the city when they met: “a limousine ...drove by a white chauffeur, in which sat three modish negroes, two bucks and a girl. I laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled towards us in haughty rivalry.”⁴¹ Nick laughs about the car, its passengers and their attitudes. His laughter reflects the attitude of superiority of the whites and the inferiority of the blacks.

³⁷ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p47-48.

³⁸ Ibid. p11.

³⁹ Ibid. p15.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p157.

⁴¹ Ibid. p73.

Gatsby's death alerts people of the danger of social mobility; it is a lesson for blacks, Jewish, and female, not to look for crossing into a social class or social level within the class that is not their own, because it will lead to a disastrous end like of Gatsby and Myrtle.

The failures of Gatsby's dream and that of the American dream are due to the fact that reality cannot stand with ideals. The ideals of equality, equal opportunities and happiness are too far to be realized.

People at that time could not get the same opportunities and did not enjoy the same equality and liberty. Fitzgerald has presented the historical East/West division of the states on the division of class and society in the 20th century.

The Mid-West represents the new land of hope and the old pioneer spirit, corresponds to West Egg in New York. For Fitzgerald, there was certain old-fashioned, constant, Victorian values like honesty, idealism, romanticism, faith, ambition, which are represented and personified in Gatsby. The Great Gatsby reflects the East-West division of the country in the division between West and East Egg. Gatsby and Nick live in West Egg, which means that they have the same qualities and have kept Western values. The Buchanans, on the other hand, have become Easterners who represent the corruption and the decadence of the East.

The Valley of Ashes situated in "About half-way between west egg and New York"⁴², where George and Myrtle Wilson live, embodies the decline of the spiritual life and the lack of values associated with wealth. Here, the failure of the American dream is obvious. Images of death and despair are associated with this valley that describes the effects of the American dream on society. The death of Myrtle Wilson occurs in the Valley of Ashes, and this paves the way for events that lead to the death of Gatsby and his dream.

Another setting in the East is the centre of New York. It is the place where Myrtle has her apartment and can meet Tom, where Nick does his work by selling and buying bonds, the place where Gatsby and Tom fight for Daisy and where illegal deeds are done. ___

⁴² F. Scott Fitzgerald. p29.

As mentioned before, the American Dream cannot be realized because of the social barriers that exist between classes. American political ideals clash with the actual social conditions. Tom Buchanan introduces the reader to a careless group includes specifically Myrtle, her sister Catherine, Mr and Mrs McKee, Tom and Nick As Longman stated: “the scene in the New York apartment works its way ultimately to a kind of raw, sinister farce, again thoroughly dramatized. What makes it dramatic, and gives the comedy its edge, is that it is suddenly seen not from Nick’s point of view but from that bewildered alcohol-stupefied Mr. McKee.”⁴³. This apartment is situated in New York where all the wrongdoings are done. Myrtle is obvious pretending to be something she is not; she wants to be the woman Tom perhaps will marry. Myrtle does everything to gain wealth. Her friends are not very different from her; the New York apartment shows the vulgarity of the setting.

The setting shows the type of people, who rely on the others to build up their personalities or to live independently far from the traditional social conventions.

There is something common among these characters at the room of New York. Catherine, Myrtle’s sister is a bit strange because Catherine is a lesbian, Nick states: “She came in with such priority haste and looked around so possessively at the furniture that I wondered if she lived here. But when I asked her, she laughed immoderately, repeated my question aloud and told me she lived with a girl friend at a hotel.”⁴⁴ Nick describes Mr. McKee in a strange way as well: “Mr. McKee was a pale feminine man from the flat blow...he informed me that he was in the “artistic game” and I gathered later that he was a photographer and had made the dim enlargement of Mrs. Wilson’s mother which hovered like ectoplasm on the wall.”⁴⁵

Throughout these descriptions, the persons are presented as an empty spiritual who seek wealth with every means possible. Myrtle who is engaged with Tom in an illicit sexual affair,

⁴³ Langman, F.H. Style and Shape in The Great Gatsby. Orig. pub. 1973. Donaldson. p51.

⁴⁴ F Scott Fitzgerald. p34.

⁴⁵ F Scott Fitzgerald. p34.

wants to be rich and her husband relies on Tom's advice and business to feel strong and capable. Wilson is useless and unimportant, and the "white ashes dust which veiled his dark suit and his pale hair as it veiled everything else in the vicinity-except his wife."⁴⁶ Myrtle behaves as the rich but in reality she is not; she is simply the mistress of Tom. Myrtle's goal in being with Tom is to improve her social rank, but, she is treated badly by Tom. Myrtle confesses that she gets impressed by Tom's image: "he had on a dress suit and patent leather shoes and shoes and I could not keep my eyes of him ...when we came into the station he was next to me and his white shirt front pressed against my arm."⁴⁷ Her desire for Tom is originated by her fascination with his wealth.

The novel provides us with more examples of the lazy and corrupted people like the guests of Gatsby's parties who do even know Gatsby and whose main interest is to spend some time dancing, drinking and gossiping.

Gatsby's parties show that the rich during the Jazz Age are just a reflection of society at that time. Gatsby's parties are noisy, vulgar and extravagant, but they impress everyone, rich and poor. Nick tells the reader that "in his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whispering and the champagne and the stars ...on week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city."⁴⁸

The consumption of these liquors was illegal during The Prohibition, a fact that disturbed Gatsby and his guests who desired to be near him because of his wealth. The guests at Gatsby's parties were totally unable to exist independently of each other and the reason was the fact that, they were trying to become part of the rich class.

The American Dream cannot be achieved because people like Tom and Daisy Buchanan used power and wealth as means to oppress others and to live a happy life at the expense of the others. Tom's life impresses everybody because since his youth he is "a national figure in

⁴⁶ Ibid. p30.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p40.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p43.

a way, one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterwards savours of anti-climax” We are also told “his family was enormously wealthy—even in college his freedom with money was a matter of criticize—but now he’d left Chicago and come east in a such fashion that took your breath away.”⁴⁹ Tom is careless or free with his money and is morally irresponsible.

Tom is not kind with others, even with his wife; the brutality of his character is derived from the cruel society during that period: “side by side with his aspect of Tom’s character is another element deriving from his physical prowess and manifesting itself in his penchant for pushing people around...it is characteristic of Tom, too, that he is forever interpreting people’s conversations ...he reveals himself to be...completely common, mean, and vulgar.”⁵⁰

Fitzgerald portrays Daisy in two very different ways. First, he portrays her as charming and extremely beautiful; in Gatsby’s eyes, she is perfect. As the story develops, the reader remarks Daisy’s love for money. For example, Gatsby has to lie to her about his real identity because he knows that she is not going to accept to marry him. She married Tom because of his money, and because he can provide her with a wealthy lifestyle.

Additionally, as the story continues to develop, the reader starts discovering the other side of Daisy ‘the ones that Gatsby cannot see.’ Her characteristic as a careless person is evident; Nick says “It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy...They smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their cast carelessness, or whatever it was kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made...”⁵¹ This carelessness is represented through the story especially

⁴⁹ F Scott Fitzgerald. p10.

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Hindus, Milton. *F. Scott Fitzgerald: An Introduction and Interpretation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968. p 39-40

⁵¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p179.

when they let Gatsby take the blame for Myrtle's death, and then does not even attend Gatsby's funeral. Moreover, her relationships show that she cannot care for Gatsby and Tom at the same time, though she acts as if she is in love with Gatsby, but she stays with Tom not because she loves him, but because, he can provide her with the money and the life she wants. Her carelessness is also shown through her relationship with her daughter; she is not able to take responsibility and care of her, instead she has a nurse to do all the work.

In The Great Gatsby, there still remains one unanswered question: what makes Gatsby great? In order to deal with it, we propose first to show the role played by Nick Carraway as a narrator, because his point of view has been discussed and debated among critics like Town, Donaldson, Nehaus, Mallios and Elmore who unanimously agree that he is "one of the few honest people."⁵²

In the novel Nick whose view of Gatsby is somehow romantic. The narrative and his confession of being honest make him unreliable as a narrator. Since we believe it is in how Nick sees Gatsby that the truth of the narrative is revealed, we must focus not only on Nick's narrative view, but also to reach into Nick's narrative consciousness to discover why, for Nick, Gatsby is "great". Nick narrative traces the path of his feeling, before he met Gatsby, until the moment he writes the narrative, we mean two years after Gatsby's death. We see Nick's "unaffected scorn"⁵³, grow into admiration and loyalty. This growth is evident at the beginning of the novel When Nick offers us an initial retrospective summation of his feeling toward Gatsby as exempt from Nick's usual reaction to men like Gatsby.

"Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction Gatsby who represented everything at which I have an unaffected scorn ...there was something gorgeous about him...it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a, romantic readiness ...which it is not likely

⁵² Ibid. p41.

⁵³ Ibid. p6.

I shall ever find again. No-Gatsby turned out all right the end ...”⁵⁴

Although Nick does not praise Gatsby greatness here, Nick’s view of Gatsby has changed through time. Nick’s understanding of Gatsby is a gradual process that his early views towards Gatsby change after Nick thinks deeply about Gatsby’s life and death; and although this proves his unreality, it seems that Nick is trying to record his impression and experience as it happened faithfully. Throughout this process we can discover what makes Gatsby great in Nick’s eyes.

His narrative serves as an explanation, in Nick’s view, of someone who is misunderstood. It becomes Nick’s job to save Gatsby from speculations and evil’s tongue that surrounds his life like his death. Nick said:

“Most of those reports were a nightmare – grotesque, circumstantial, eager and untrue ... I found myself on Gatsby’s side, and alone ...it grew upon me that I was responsible , because no one else was interested – interested , I mean , with that intense personal interest to which everybody has some vague right at the end.”⁵⁵

Two years after Gatsby’s death, Nick is still faithful to Gatsby by clearing the misunderstanding that surrounds Gatsby and by saving him from evil tongues.

The American Dream implies an attitude of hope and faith which dates back to the early Puritans who were full of will and desire to achieve religious freedom that allowed them to worship and praise their god. This idealism and faith are represented by Jay Gatsby.

Gatsby has centred his life; his wealth, his big house just across Daisy’s house and his parties, just for Daisy. Everything that Gatsby has achieved is based on his only and one desire, Daisy. But, he does not fulfil his desire. Gatsby accepts the state of solitude, to surrender himself to the pain of losing Daisy.

⁵⁴ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p6.

⁵⁵

Ibid. p 171-172.

Although Daisy marries Tom instead of waiting for the young Gatz to return from military service, Gatsby does not stop loving her. Gatsby hopes that Daisy has done the same.

According to the narrator, Nick says:

“He wanted nothing less of daisy than that she should go tom and say: “I never loved you.” .After she had obliterated three years with that sentence they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken. one of them was free , they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house – just as if it were five years ago.”⁵⁶

When Myrtle was killed, Gatsby did not leave the town because: “He would not consider it. He could not possibly leave daisy until he knew what she was going to do. He was clutching at some last hope and I could not bear to shake him free.”⁵⁷ Gatsby’s last hope is that Daisy.

Symbolism plays an important role in The Great Gatsby, especially light. In the first chapter, Daisy hears Gatsby’s name mentioned by Jordan Baker apparently the first time. Meanwhile, she looks as if she herself produces light. Daisy’s brightness on the porch results from her feelings for Gatsby and realizing that he lives close to her. In fact, Gatsby tries to create lights in his parties to imitate nature, and to create a special setting in which: ‘dispensed starlight to casual moths.’⁵⁸ The narrator, Nick Carraway, states: “The light grows

⁵⁶ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p 116.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p125.

⁵⁸ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p83.

brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun.”⁵⁹ This can be interpreted as follows: Gatsby’s party light are like stars, or seem more powerful than the sun , or Gatsby’s light seems splendid , but it also seems to overreach the limits imposed by nature , a suitable effect for Gatsby whose dream is to repeat the past.

One color that is frequently used is white. The first time Nick meets Daisy at the Buchanan’s home, she is dressed in white. This may be seen as beauty, cleanness, wealth and innocence; it also symbolizes Daisy’s laziness and uselessness within the story. She is completely devoid of knowledge of the outside world. When she is taken into Gatsby’s home for a tour, and is shown his beautiful imported shirts, Daisy starts crying saying that these shirts are beautiful. But she is expressing her envy and jealousy of Gatsby’s new richness.

In the Valley of Ashes, there is a large advertisement board on which the blue and big eyes of Doctor T.J.Ecklburg are painted. The pair of eyes is not bright and seems to be tearing, looking at the valley of ashes and also the people there. The symbolized meaning of the blue eyes is not revealed until the eight chapters. When George Wilson talks to Michaelis (friend of his) about his wife’s disloyalty to him, he says, that she can fool him but she cannot fool god, Wilson is looking at the eyes of Doctor T.J.Ecklburg. God and the reader see everything and they know that Gatsby’s dreams are not going to be realized. God knows the Wilsons’ tragedy, Tom and Daisy’s coldness. So T.J.Ecklburg’s eyes look sad and disturbed. All of this shows the author’s attitude towards the people’s life and idealism of that time.

Green is a very strong color in The Great Gatsby. It symbolizes hope. The green lamp first appears at the end of chapter one, Nick goes back home in the evening and sees that Gatsby looks at the green light at the clock of daisy’s house under the moonlight.

The green light is mentioned a second time in chapter five. When they meet at Nick’s house, Gatsby invites Daisy to visit his luxurious house. She is attracted by Gatsby’s great wealth. At that time , Gatsby thinks that he has realised his five-year old dream and talks

⁵⁹ Ibid. p44.

with her of the green light : “if it was not for the mist we could see you home across the bay
“Gatsby says , “you always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock.”⁶⁰
For him, Daisy is near to hand. Gatsby thinks that the dream which is represented by the
green light will come into reality.

At the beginning of chapter two, Fitzgerald shows us a certain isolated area of land that is
located between West Egg and New York named by Fitzgerald the Valley of Ashes “This is
the valley of ashes-a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridge sand hills and
grotesque gardens, where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke.”⁶¹
The Valley of Ashes represents the modern life which is like a superficial hill created by
industry. Factories and trains are produced in the manufacture of wealth, and have polluted
America with its wastes. The whole valley symbolizes a world whose inhabitants are
spiritually lost, they worship money and wealth. The promise of happiness, hope and
freedom that America gave its settlers has been corrupted by greed, and the emptiness of a
dream based on wealth.

Another important symbol in the novel is class and social standing. It is like a barrier for
almost every character. East and West Egg act as symbols of social class by the physical
structure. Tom and Daisy live in the East that is far more refined and consists of people with
more money and higher social status. East Egg also represents the “old money”. Nick and
Gatsby are in the West which is for people who don’t have a real social background, even if
they have money. West Egg represents the “new money”. The green light shines from East
Egg to West Egg luring Gatsby towards what he has always wanted. There is also a barrier of
water between the two cities that keeps people like Gatsby and Daisy apart and prevents
them from reaching their goals.

⁶⁰ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p142.

⁶¹ Ibid. p30.

The last symbol we want to mention is the moth. The image with clear meaning is the insect-moth. The earlier part of chapter three begins with a description: “there was music from my neighbour’s house through the summer nights. In the blue garden men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars.”⁶² The insect-moth takes actions at night, and likes to fly around the light, whenever there is light. This gives the impression that Fitzgerald shows his negative attitude of men and women in Gatsby’s parties through the moth. In the daylight, these people are out of sight. But at night, this feature of moth shows the purposeless way of life at that time is reflected in an inner emptiness and a confused life of American youth in 1920’s.

In The Great Gatsby, the author employs the contrastive or the juxtaposition technique, which provides the novel with a clear understanding of the themes. He contrasts scenes, characters, as well as dream and reality. It is not only to deepen the tragic theme, but also to show the reader how this novel reflects the failure of the American dream.

The author gives us a vivid description of various scenes in the novel; the most impressive ones are the contrast between Gatsby’s funeral and his parties, and the contrast between East and West Egg. The Jazz Age is a time of broken dreams and a time of the boom. It is clearly reflected in the description of Gatsby’s richness and his material success. Gatsby’s parties are full of crowds; men and women go and come without invitation; the music, the laughter and the faces show the lack of purpose and emptiness in the guest’s souls. People at that time lost faith in the American dream and devoted their lives to drinking and dancing. The expectations of the early settlers changed into despair and loss. In the blue garden, men and girls came and went:

“...on week-end his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight. While his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Monday eight servants, including an extra gardener,

⁶² F. Scott Fitzgerald. p50.

toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before, every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiter in New York---every Monday these same oranges and lemons left his back door in a pyramid of pulp less halves.”⁶³

The representation of the meaningless parties serves to show Gatsby’s tragedy by contrasting the magnificence of his parties and his miserable death. Gatsby’s funeral is sorrowful compared with his parties. It shows how people at that time were cold and merciless. Many of Gatsby’s friends do not attend the funeral and find a lot of excuses for their absence because they know that Gatsby is no longer useful for them. Gatsby now is no more generous like he used to be. Daisy, once Gatsby’s lover, has not attended or sent a message or a flower. The sharp contrast between the parties and the funeral reveals the hypocrisy among people and the moral decadence of the Jazz Age.

The moral conflict in the novel is resolved into a conflict between East and West Egg the ancient and corrupted East and the unrefined but virtuous West. Nick reflects his moral background with his Middle-Western background. Nick’s experience in the East results in his return with sorrow to the West:

“After Gatsby’s death, the East was haunted for me like that, distorted beyond my eyes power of correction. So when the blue smoke of brittle leaves was in the air and the wind blew the wet laundry stiff on the line. I decided to come back home.”⁶⁴ The East is a representation of sophistication and moral decadence while the West is the setting or place of virtue and harmony. The author uses East and West Egg with its geographical contrast to show the contrasts of values.

Furthermore, the contrast of characters and personalities is clear in the novel: Gatsby is presented as sensitive, idealistic and faithful to his love. Although his wealth comes from

⁶³ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p45.

⁶⁴ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p183-84.

criminal activities, Gatsby tries to hold the reader's sympathy. Compared with Gatsby, Tom is threatening and cunning : "They are careless people", Nick says about him and Daisy : "Tom and daisy... they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together and let other people clean up the mess... they had made"⁶⁵. When he finds that things are not moving to his favour, he is willing to arrange things to suit himself. When he discovers Gatsby's interest in his wife, for example, he is quick to force Gatsby to a fight. We are not sure that Tom wants Daisy because he loves her. His desire to keep his wife is just to assert his pride of a man who refuses to have his wife taken away from him by another man. In addition to this pride is his social position. To lose Daisy to a man who is his social inferior is impossible. Gatsby finds himself against Tom's brutality and social arrogance. Tom does not only destroy Gatsby's dream. After the accident, he makes Gatsby share the responsibility for Myrtle's death. The Buchanans show how people can use their position to look down on others and live their life carelessly. As Nick says about Daisy, "in a moment she looked at me with an absolute smirk on her lovely face as if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged."⁶⁶ It is this superior mind that allows Tom to cheat on his wife and allows him and Daisy to escape from the death of Myrtle. They can use their wealth and position to avoid being accused because in a materialistic society, people like Tom, rich, unkind and cunning, will always win. Idealism and sentimentality become old-fashioned during the Jazz Age.

The most interesting opposition in The Great Gatsby is the conflict between dream and reality. The American dream means that people may hope to satisfy every material desire and to find happiness. Throughout the novel, Gatsby seeks to destroy time, to delete the years of separation from Daisy. When Nick tells Gatsby that the past cannot be repeated, Gatsby is

⁶⁵ Ibid. p85.

⁶⁶ F. Scott Fitzgerald. p24.

doubtful and unconvinced: “Can’t repeat the past...why of course you can!”⁶⁷The tragedy of Gatsby is that he fails to understand that he cannot recapture the past.

The contrast of dream and reality indicates a transition from faith and hope to the greed and selfishness in a world where material interests have removed sentimentality and faith. Gatsby’s dream is very weak against a material society. Gatsby’s fate has changed to a tragedy, because he is not aware of his unrealistic dream of love. He sinks into this kind of unreal dream so deeply that he cannot wake up. The end of Gatsby is miserable.

Conclusion:

The American Dream is deeply rooted in the American history, it dates back to the Puritans who land on the New Continent seeking the religious freedom and creating “the kingdom of god on a hill”. The following waves of settlers seek bettering the financial position, and in the late 18th century, the American Dream for them is self-governing. In the 19th century, the discovery of gold and the strong need for expansion are the American Dream for them.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p148.

The 20th century, the wealth becomes the idol for the Americans. The American Dream was corrupted by greed, materialism and the fierce competition within the middle class to join the upper class. Meanwhile, The Great Gatsby was published; it reveals the darkness and the hollowness of the Twenties that seems glittering and golden. The failure of the American Dream is eventually associated with the death of the final example of the old settler who is full of idealism and will to find his grail, Daisy. Thus, the grave is his fate.

Conclusion

The American Dream is the belief that everybody has the opportunity to pursue whatever he dreams of. This has given people the chance to achieve what they want. A person who is hard working and persistent can reach any goal he strives for; this is what the American Dream is about. The origin of the American Dream dates back to the Puritans who crossed the ocean to search for freedom of worship. The following waves of settlers were looking for exploiting the virgin land that seemed limitless and free for taking. In the colonial period, the

American Dream for people was the fight for democracy. The 19th century, the discovery of gold and the love of the unknown push the Americans to go west first to widespread the Anglo-Saxon civilization and the Christian religion to the entire continent, second for the quest of more lands. In the twentieth century, the American Dream took another path and become mainly linked with the quest for wealth. Social distinction, social mobility, moral decadence, prohibition and crimes became dominant in the 1920's. It was during that period The Great Gatsby was published.

The central character Jay Gatsby comes from a humble background, he has a love affair with a charming girl called Daisy, but he cannot obtain her because he is not self-sufficient. Jay then began to do everything to get enough money to get into her class, even illegal activities, but in vain, because she got married with another rich man called Tom. After tragic event, Gatsby was killed mistakenly by George.

Finally, the failure of the Gatsby's dream to have Daisy back is the failure of the American Dream in The Great Gatsby.

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