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THE IDEA OF THE AMERICAN DREAM IN F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S THE GREAT GATSBY

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ABSTRACT. This research paper explores the concept of the American Dream as portrayed in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. The novel, set in the Jazz Age of the 1920s, serves as a profound critique of the moral decay hidden beneath the glittering surface of wealth and ambition. The study examines how Fitzgerald presents the illusion of the American Dream through the life and downfall of Jay Gatsby, whose pursuit of success and love ultimately leads to disillusionment and tragedy. By analyzing characters, symbolism, and historical context, the research reveals how materialism, social division, and the loss of genuine values transform the American Dream into a corrupted vision.

Keywords: *American Dream, F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, materialism, illusion, social class, wealth, disillusionment, love, 1920s America.*

INTRODUCTION. The concept of the American Dream — the belief that anyone can achieve success through hard work and determination — has long been central to American culture. However, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, this dream is reinterpreted as a tragic illusion shaped by greed, moral emptiness, and unattainable desires. Written during the Jazz Age, a period of economic prosperity and cultural change, the novel mirrors the disillusionment of a generation that equated happiness with material wealth. Fitzgerald uses the character of Jay Gatsby, a man who rises from poverty to immense wealth, as a symbol of the corrupted dream. Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy Buchanan reflects not only his romantic idealism but also the social reality of class barriers and the moral decline of modern society. This research seeks to uncover how Fitzgerald exposes the darker side of the American Dream, transforming it from a symbol of hope into one of loss and despair.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

The idea of the American Dream originates from the early history of the United States, reflecting the conviction that anyone, irrespective of their birth or social standing, could attain success, personal liberty, and upward advancement through effort and resolve. By the 1920s, this concept had transformed notably because of deep social, economic, and cultural shifts. After World War I, America went through a time of economic growth, swift industrial development, and city expansion. Innovations in technology, large-





scale production, and the emergence of consumer culture resulted in unparalleled wealth and opportunities for individuals who could engage in the growing economy. The period, commonly known as the “Roaring Twenties,” was marked by opulence, jazz tunes, flapper lifestyle, and a significant focus on financial achievement. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* embodies this historical backdrop, showcasing both the hopes and the contradictions present in the American Dream of that era. Although the dream offered social advancement and individual success, the reality became more defined by the accumulation of wealth and social standing instead of ethical or intellectual achievements. Fitzgerald sets his story in Long Island, New York, an area representing the stark divides between old wealth, new wealth, and the laboring class. The novel depicts East Egg as the realm of inherited riches and social standing, while West Egg, home to Gatsby, symbolizes self-generated wealth and ambitious striving. This spatial separation reflects the larger social dynamics of the 1920s, highlighting the obstacles and constraints that persisted in influencing the quest for the American Dream.

Additionally, this era witnessed the rise of a culture characterized by ostentatious consumption, in which success was gauged not by moral behavior or civic responsibility but by wealth and social status. This change significantly affected the ethical and mental aspects of American society. The dream, once a representation of aspiration, freedom, and equality, gradually came to be linked with shallowness, avarice, and social division. In this context, *The Great Gatsby* not only mirrors the historical context of the American Dream but also provides a critique of its evolution. Fitzgerald reveals the conflict between idealism and reality, showing how the allure of the dream frequently clashed with social corruption and ethical compromise, offering a critical perspective to analyze the culture of the 1920s

GATSBY AS A SYMBOL OF IDEALISM AND CORRUPTION

Jay Gatsby, the protagonist of *The Great Gatsby*, acts as a nuanced emblem of both the hopeful and the ethically flawed aspects of the American Dream. His life narrative illustrates the struggle between idealism and corruption, mirroring the wider societal forces of 1920s America. Gatsby's unyielding quest for riches, societal acknowledgement, and self-satisfaction is fundamentally motivated by his affection for Daisy Buchanan, who symbolizes not just romantic longing but also social standing and acceptance in the upper echelons of East Egg. His dream is thus both individual and representative: it embodies the desire to elevate his modest beginnings into a life filled with elegance, power, and emotional fulfillment. In this regard, Gatsby embodies the quintessential archetype of the self-made individual, a key character in the story of the American Dream. Nevertheless, Fitzgerald depicts Gatsby's ascent to prosperity as closely connected to unlawful practices, such as organized crime and bootlegging, emphasizing the ethical dilemmas that may arise with





the quest for material achievement. Gatsby's persona reveals the detrimental impact of a society that links wealth to value, where rising socially frequently relies on circumventing or violating rules instead of solely depending on diligence and morality. His opulent gatherings, grand estate, and fixation on image illustrate the external representation of success that conceals the moral uncertainty beneath his accomplishments. In this manner, Gatsby represents both the attraction and the risks of the American Dream, illustrating how the concept of self-created wealth can be skewed by social influences, avarice, and the aspiration for prestige.

Additionally, Gatsby's idealism goes beyond just material goals; it includes a profound human desire for love, acknowledgment, and purpose. His commitment to Daisy embodies a nearly legendary quest for flawlessness, an unwillingness to embrace the flaws and constraints of reality. This unwavering hope and vision render Gatsby a tragic character: he is admirable in his ambitions, yet ultimately fated by the society that influenced his dreams. Fitzgerald employs this duality to criticize the American Dream, implying that the chase for money and upward mobility, when separated from moral values and ethical concerns, may result in individual disillusionment and societal division. Gatsby's narrative demonstrates the coexistence of idealism and corruption, highlighting how the quest for satisfaction can lead people to betray their principles, exposing the intricate relationship between ambition, ethics, and societal expectations in the 1920s. Ultimately, Gatsby represents the contradiction of the American Dream: he is both uplifting and sorrowful, symbolizing human potential for hope and ambition while also exposing the ethical and societal consequences of pursuing a dream in a morally unclear reality. His existence symbolizes the larger community, showcasing both its hopes and its shortcomings.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE DREAM AND MORAL DECAY

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald demonstrates that the American Dream's promise of prosperity and fulfillment often leads to disappointment and moral corruption. Gatsby's relentless pursuit of wealth and social status, driven by his love for Daisy, ultimately ends in tragedy, illustrating the unattainable nature of the dream for those outside the established elite. The Buchanans, who represent inherited wealth and social privilege, continue their lives without consequences, showing a society indifferent to morality. Fitzgerald critiques the 1920s obsession with materialism, suggesting that the dream has shifted from personal growth and ethical striving to the superficial pursuit of wealth and recognition. The novel's portrayal of extravagant parties, hollow relationships, and social hypocrisy highlights the moral decay underlying the glittering facade of the era, revealing the dark side of ambition when it is divorced from integrity.





CONCLUSION. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* presents a critical reflection on the American Dream, emphasizing both its allure and its inherent fragility. Through the historical context of post-World War I America, Gatsby's rise and fall, and the moral bankruptcy of the elite, the novel reveals how the pursuit of wealth and social status can corrupt human values. Gatsby embodies the dream's promise of self-made success and its vulnerability to ethical compromise, while the collapse of his aspirations underscores the disillusionment inherent in a society driven by materialism. Ultimately, Fitzgerald warns that the American Dream, when reduced to mere wealth and social prestige, risks becoming an illusion, highlighting the tension between human hope and social reality.

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