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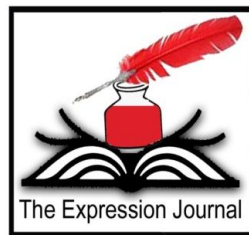
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## **FALL OF AMERICAN DREAM IN THE CONTEXT OF *THE GREAT GATSBY***

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### **Abstract**

The paper has been divided into three sections. In the first part, I will try to explore the term American Dream. In the second part, I will discuss about other American works which are also centred around the theme of American Dream. Finally, the paper aims at analysis of Great Gatsby, the greatest novel by Fitzgerald, as a work depicting the failure or unattainableness of American Dream. The term American Dream coined by J.T Adams is undoubtedly part of the American ethos, and will always will be so. The pioneer novel by Fitzgerald proves that how American dream proposed so much but offered negligible. Set against the background of Jazz Age or Roaring Twenties, the novelist captured the frenzy of society comprising of jazz bands, bootleggers, flappers and marathon dancers very well. Fitzgerald through his novel, proved that Americans were doing wrong by placing their faith in superficial external means of luxury while neglecting to cultivate the compassion and sensitivity that, in fact, separate humans from the animals. By depicting distinct social classes—old money, new money, and no money—Fitzgerald sends strong messages about the elitism running throughout every stratum of the American society. Injustice, power, greed, betrayal behind the superficial American happiness are the other important themes explored in the novel. The story is first person narration by Nick Carraway who talks about mysterious millionaire Gatsby and his obsession with his former lover Daisy Buchanan.

### **Keywords**

American Dream, Jazz Age, Roaring Twenties, Gatsby, Modern Age, Identity, Culture, American Literature.

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American Dream is the belief that anyone, regardless of where they were born or what class they were born into, can attain their own version of success in a society in which upward mobility is possible for anyone and everyone. It was believed that American Dream is to be achieved through sacrifice for hard work, risk-taking, and persistent work, rather than by chance. The term "American Dream" was coined J. T Adams in his best-selling book titled *Epic of America* in 1931. He described it as "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. "The American dream was aided by a number of factors that gave the United States a competitive advantage over other countries. Homeownership and education were often seen as paths to achieve the American dream. It was not a dream of motorcars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and woman would 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."

Though the definition of the American Dream has changed to mean different things to different generations, it's undoubtedly part of the American ethos, and likely always will be. Achieving the American dream requires political and economic freedom, as well as rules of law and private property rights. Without them, individuals cannot make the choices that will permit them to attain success, nor can they have confidence that their achievements will not be taken away from them through arbitrary force The term was coined by writer and historian James Truslow Adams in his best-selling 1931 book *Epic of America*.

The idea of the American dream has much deeper roots. Its tenets can be found in the Declaration of Independence, which believes that a society must uphold that all men are created equal, that they are equipped by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights such as Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."In a society based on these rights of individuals and such governing principles, an individual can live life to its fullest as they call and define it. America also grew and flourished mostly as a nation of immigrants who created a nation were becoming an American—and passing that citizenship to one's children—didn't require being the child of an American. Apart from financial self-sufficiency, the American dream promises

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freedom and equality. It offers the freedom to make both the large and small decisions that affect one's life, the freedom to aspire to bigger and better things and the possibility of achieving them, the freedom to accumulate wealth, the opportunity to lead a dignified life, and the freedom to live in accordance with one's values—even if those values are not widely held or accepted.

Now let's discuss that how the idea of American Dream became the part of larger American Consciousness and how it was reflected in contemporary American Literature. Many literary writings of the time mentioned about impoverished but hardworking teenage boys rise to success through pluck, determination, and good fortune. Such works personified realization of the Dream. From the very beginning, the theme of identity has been prominent in American literature. The America was a land of promise, a New World where everyone dreamed of a just, forward-thinking society. When America began to form its own culture during the revolutionary period, many started to question through their writings that what it meant to be American. Literary works in all the genres of that time were, in a way, a self-discovery. They reflected the ideas, values, and aspirations of the American people. For that reason, along with self-identity, they focused on freedom, racial discrimination, gender, equality, and individualism.

It's true that the theme of the American Dream is present in almost every work of American literature. It is seen as either a positive or a negative phenomenon by various authors. Some see it as a possibility of amazing society whereas some considered it nearly unattainable tenet. For instance, the poem *I Hear America Singing* by Walt Whitman and *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* describe the American Dream as something that can help the country develop and bring positive changes to society. In contrast, some of the works talk about the vanity of the American Dream. John Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath* counts the Joad family's odyssey to California as a symbol of the journey to the supposed Promised Land. Opportunities offered by the capitalist system to solve their problems were in reality the other side of the coin. In another work *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, the author makes a point of that American Dream not always being possible nor reachable. Throughout the novel, we see many of the problems and character flaws Lennie has. These problems symbolize the obstacles in the way that make his life harder and the American Dream less reachable.

*Great Gatsby*, the third novel by American author F. Scott Fitzgerald, was published in 1925. Set in Jazz Age New York, it tells the tragic story of Jay Gatsby, a self-made millionaire, and his pursuit of Daisy Buchanan, a wealthy young woman whom he loved in his youth. The narrator of the book is Nick Carraway, who recounts and narrates the events of the summer of 1922, after he takes a house in the fictional village of West Egg on Long Island. There he lives among the nouveau riche, while across the water, in the more refined village of East Egg, live his cousin Daisy and her brutish wealthy husband, Tom Buchanan. As the summer progresses, Nick is finally invited to attend one of the dazzling parties held by Jay Gatsby, his neighbour. At Gatsby's request, Nick invites Daisy to his house, where she and Gatsby meet again and renew their relationship. Tom soon becomes aware of the affair and confronts Gatsby at the Plaza Hotel. Daisy tries to calm them down, but Gatsby insists that he and Daisy have always been in love and that she has never loved Tom. As the fight escalates, Tom reveals what he had learned from an investigation into Gatsby's affairs—that he had earned his money by selling illegal alcohol. Gatsby tries to deny it, but Daisy has lost her resolve to leave her husband, and Gatsby's cause seems hopeless. Gatsby and Daisy leave together in Gatsby's car, with Daisy

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driving. On the road she hits and kills Myrtle Wilson, Tom's mistress, though her identity is unknown to Daisy, who knew only that Tom was having an affair. Terrified, Daisy continues driving, but the car is seen by witnesses. The next afternoon George Wilson, Myrtle's widower, arrives in East Egg, where Tom tells him that it was Gatsby who killed his wife. Wilson goes to Gatsby's house, where he shoots Gatsby and then himself. Afterward the Buchanans leave Long Island, and Nick arranges Gatsby's funeral. Fitzgerald considered *The Great Gatsby* to be his greatest achievement at the time it was published, but the book was neither a critical nor commercial success. The novel gained popularity in the 1950s and is now considered a masterpiece of American fiction. There have been several film adaptations, notably a production directed by Jack Clayton in 1974, starring Robert Redford as Gatsby, and one in 2013 directed by Baz Luhrmann, starring Leonardo DiCaprio. Critical Essays Social Stratification: *The Great Gatsby* as Social Commentary

In *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald offers up commentary on a variety of themes—justice, power, greed, betrayal, the American dream, and so on. Of all the themes, perhaps none is more well developed than that of fall of American Dream due to social stratification. *The Great Gatsby* is regarded as a brilliant piece of social commentary, offering a vivid peek into American life in the 1920s. Fitzgerald carefully sets up his novel into distinct groups but, in the end, each group has its own problems to contend with, leaving a powerful reminder of what a precarious place the world really is. By creating distinct social classes—old money, new money, and no money—Fitzgerald sends strong messages about the elitism running throughout every stratum of the American society.

The first and most obvious group Fitzgerald attacks is, of course, the rich. Fitzgerald In *The Great Gatsby*, presents two distinct types of wealthy people. First, there are people like the Buchanans and Jordan Baker who were born into wealth. Their families have had money for many generations, hence they are "old money." As portrayed in the novel, the "old money" people don't have to work (they rarely, if ever, even speak about business arrangements) and they spend their time amusing themselves with whatever takes their fancy. Daisy, Tom, Jordan, and the distinct social class they represent are perhaps the story's most elitist group, imposing distinctions on the other people of wealth (like Gatsby) based not so much on how much money one has, but where that money came from and when it was acquired. For the "old money" people, the fact that Gatsby (and countless other people like him in the 1920s) has only just recently acquired his money is reason enough to dislike him. In their opinion, he can't possibly have the same refinement, sensibility, and taste they have.

In many ways, the social elite are right. The "new money" people cannot be like them, and in many ways that works in their favour—those in society's highest echelon are not nice people at all. They are judgmental and superficial, failing to look at the essence of the people around them (and themselves, too). Instead, they live their lives in such a way as to perpetuate their sense of superiority—however unrealistic that may be. The people with newly acquired wealth, though, aren't necessarily much better. Think of Gatsby's partygoers. They attend his parties, drink his liquor, and eat his food, never once taking the time to even meet their host. When Gatsby dies, all the people who frequented his house every week mysteriously became busy elsewhere, abandoning Gatsby when he could no longer do anything for them. One would like to think the newly wealthy would be more sensitive to the world around them—after all, it was only recently they were without money and most doors were closed to them. As Fitzgerald

shows, however, their concerns are largely living for the moment, steeped in partying and other forms of excess.

Fitzgerald portrays people with no money to convey a strong message. Nick, although he comes from a family with a bit of wealth, doesn't have nearly the capital of Gatsby or Tom. In the end, though, he shows himself to be an honourable and principled man, which is more than Tom exhibits. Myrtle, though, is another story. She comes from the middle class at best. She is trapped, as are so many others, in the valley of ashes, and spends her days trying to make it out. In fact, her desire to move up the social hierarchy leads her to her affair with Tom and she is decidedly pleased with the arrangement.

Because of the misery pervading her life, Myrtle has distanced herself from her moral obligations and has no difficulty cheating on her husband when it means that she gets to lead the lifestyle she wants even if for a little while. What she doesn't realize, however, is that Tom and his friends will never accept her into their circle. (Notice how Tom has a pattern of picking lower-class women to sleep with. For him, their powerlessness makes his own position that much more superior. In a strange way, being with women who aspire to his class makes him feel better about himself and allows him to perpetuate the illusion that he is a good and important man.) Myrtle is no more than a toy to Tom and to those he represents.

To conclude, one can say that Fitzgerald had a keen eye and in *The Great Gatsby* presents a harsh picture of the world in which he saw the fall of American Dream around him into pieces. The 1920s marked a time of great post-war economic boom for America, and Fitzgerald captured the frenzy of the society very well. Although, Fitzgerald had no way of predicting the stock market crash of 1929, the world he presented in *The Great Gatsby* seems clearly to be headed for disaster. They (Americans) had assumed mistakenly that their survival lied in stratification and reinforcing social boundaries and that resulted in nothing but the death of American Dream. Fitzgerald, through his novel, proved that Americans were doing wrong by placing their faith in superficial external means of luxury while neglecting to cultivate the compassion and sensitivity that, in fact, separate humans from the animals.

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