Abstract

This essay explores how Jay Gatsby pursued his American dream in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*. It looks at America in the 1920s and gives insight into the culture in which Gatsby’s behavior takes place. There were many changes in American society around that time, with more freedom in some areas and restrictions in others, particularly related to social class; how this affects Jay Gatsby is examined. The essay then examines what the American dream means and how it is viewed in more recent times. The subject of the American dream has always been a sensitive topic for Americans and Jay Gatsby is no exception. The essay further reviews how Gatsby and his dreamed-up character have made their way into the scene of the new American upper class, and what reactions he receives from those watching his entrance into this desirable society. His intangible dream is somewhat disturbing; and what is more unnerving is the effort and energy he puts into his outrageous plans, and the lengths he goes to in order to chase after and fulfill his unrealistic dream. The essay concludes by looking at how the American dream is portrayed in the novel. Fitzgerald seems to be mocking those who dare to dream, as no one sees their dream fulfilled and most end up worse off for having tried. The American dream comes across as more of an illusion than anything else. Those who pursue it seem doomed to fail at reaching it, as it is just that: a dream.
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1. Introduction

The novel *The Great Gatsby* has undoubtedly touched the lives of many and left some readers with numerous questions. The book takes the reader on a surprising journey in which things are not always as they seem. The novel was first published 90 years ago on the 10\(^{th}\) of April, 1925 (Barrowcliff), but it is still as relevant now as it was back then, and has become even more popular in more recent times. The novel can be classed as a social commentary on American life in the 1920s—the life of the rich, that is. The people of high society are displayed as soulless individuals without morals, all chasing after something; no one seems to be happy with where they are although their lives look perfect to the outsider. They each have their own American dream, and some of those dreams are more achievable than others. The novel paints a fantastic picture of just how reckless and outrageous the rich were, and to what lengths they were prepared to go to get their way. Morals are not the main subject of the book, rather the lack of them. The book takes place in a controversial time and it clearly displays how relationships and bonds were being tested: everyone wanted to come out on top and be a winner in some aspect of life. Ethics and morals seem to have been thrown out the window and wild and risky antics took their place in people's lives.

As the story takes place in the 1920s my analysis will start by looking at the social context of that decade. It is important to understand what was going on in the society where the novel takes place. It further opens the mind to what things were like at the time and why people behaved like they did. The essay will then look at how Americans see the American dream and how realistically it can be achieved. There are many different definitions of the American dream but the one displayed in the book is unlike most of them: it is not about money or rising from having nothing, but about the dream of reliving the past. The divide between old and new money is a huge influence in the novel so it is only right to spend a bit of time looking at what those terms really meant to people, and why there was a divide between the two groups despite them both belonging to the upper class. A look at how Jay Gatsby is portrayed in the novel and why his character is so controversial concludes my study of the question of how realistic it is for Jay Gatsby to achieve the American dream and “have it all.” Is the American dream real or is it just for a select few to reach? The book is about how Jay Gatsby sets out to achieve the dream of reliving the past and getting the girl he wants.
Gatsby does not dream of materialistic things but of the attention and status he believes will win him his American dream, Daisy. No matter how much hard work he puts in and whom he tries to impress, however, his dream will always be a failure due to his previous social standing and how he rose to success. The main theme of the novel is the deterioration of the American Dream and the condemned society of the rich in the 1920s. The American dream is killed off in the novel, just like the main character.

2. The 1920s

There was a lot of controversial behaviour amongst the upper classes in the 1920s. The decade was also known as the Jazz Age, Roaring Twenties, Age of Intolerance and the Age of Wonderful Nonsense (“Roaring Twenties”). “America became the wealthiest country in the world,” and no other country seemed to be able to rival it. During this uproar a lot of people seemed to have well-paying jobs and plenty of spare cash to spend (“America in the 1920s”). There was “dramatic social and political change” at this time and, “for the first time, more Americans lived in cities than on farms.” The national wealth more than doubled in the decade and this outrageous growth swept the nation into an unfamiliar “consumer society” (“The Roaring Twenties”).

This decade saw some real change for people living in America. There was more freedom in some areas while restrictions were applied elsewhere. The 18th amendment to the Constitution banned the manufacture and sale of alcohol, and beginning at 12am on January 16th, 1920, every bar and saloon in the United States was closed by order of the Volstead Act (“Roaring Twenties”). This did not solve the problems the government had hoped it would. It was anticipated that the ban of alcohol sales would lower crime rates, improve health in general and reduce some of the social problems in America (Thornton). The ban forced the alcohol trade underground into illegal establishments called speakeasies, which were controlled by gangsters and bootleggers. There were few exceptions to the ban, particularly one:

One of the legal exceptions to the Prohibition law was that pharmacists were allowed to dispense whiskey by prescription for any number of ailments, ranging from anxiety to influenza. Bootleggers quickly discovered that running a
pharmacy was a perfect front for their trade. As a result, the number of registered pharmacists in New York State tripled during the Prohibition era. (Lerner)

People around Jay Gatsby wonder how exactly he made his money, but in the novel he says, “I was in the drug business and then I was in the oil business” (71), confirming that he had run pharmacies and that this is possibly how he acquired his wealth. Tom Buchanan comments that he thinks Gatsby is “some big bootlegger” he then goes on say that “a lot of these newly rich people are just big bootleggers” (84). Daisy is quick to jump in and clarify that “he owned some drugs stores, a lot of drug stores. He built them up himself” (85). She is too naive to think bad things of Gatsby so he can’t have been a bootlegger in her mind. It is of course revealed later in the book that Tom had confirmation that Gatsby was dodgy. “I found out what your ‘drug-stores’ were. [...] He and this Wolfsheim bought up a lot of side-street drug-stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter” (104). Gatsby is somewhat a symbol of the larger social issues of the decade, as he both sold alcohol and gave it away at his parties. He was also reckless with his money; he chased after a married woman, and did not think much on the consequences of his actions or how they affected others.

It has been said that the 1920s were "a decade which was about crossing the line, smashing tradition, breaking boundaries. As modern America came of age in the 1920’s boundaries of all sorts, technological, geographical and social were shattered" (“The Century, America’s Time: Boom to Bust”). It was a great time to be rich as there was plenty of opportunity for people to spend money and show off their wealth. But it was also a decade that saw bitter cultural battles as there were clashes between various political movements (Mintz and McNeil). There was even plenty of conflict inside the upper class as is mentioned later on. People simply did not seem to be able to get along and celebrate each other's success.

3. The American Dream

The American dream is quite a sensitive topic for Americans. They can’t be told that they shouldn’t believe in it or work towards reaching it. The American dream is full of hope, so those who have a dream will be hopeful of achieving it one day, just like Jay Gatsby. The dream for Gatsby was intangible and unachievable, an illusion that was just
out of reach for him despite his exhaustive efforts to achieve it. But he remained loyal to his dream throughout, all the way to the end. However in order to achieve dreams, they need to be realistic and grounded. Aiming too high will only cause disappointment, and those dreams will be shattered at some point.

The definition of the American dream is pretty similar wherever one looks for clarification. James Truslow Adams claims that his 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. (214-215)

One dictionary defines “the American Dream” as “the notion that the American social, economic, and political system makes success possible for every individual” (Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged). The American dream means different things for different people but the theme is the same whomever is asked to describe what it is to them. Bewley writes that “Critics of Scott Fitzgerald tend to agree that The Great Gatsby is somehow a commentary on that elusive phrase, the American dream […] It offers some of the severest and closest criticism of the American dream that our literature affords. […] The theme of Gatsby is the withering of the American dream” (37). His thought on the novels purpose and theme are reasonable: he understands that Fitzgerald had a way of showing how the American dream has become somewhat unreachable: it is like it does not exist for some people, only for the select few.

The American author John Green has discussed the American dream to some extent, and he claims:

people come to our fair shores because here anyone who can work can work. […] [T]he American dream remains uniquely American in one sense: we are far more
likely than residents from other countries to believe that people are rewarded for intelligence and skill. We are less likely to believe that coming from a wealthy family is key to getting ahead. Unfortunately like a lot of dreams, what we are dreaming isn’t real.

This American dream thing, is very American indeed. You do not see other nations talking about the Icelandic dream, the Canadian dream or the German dream. The idea of the American dream is rooted in the Declaration of Independence: “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.” It is embedded in Americans and American culture and is something that people have through the decades believed to be attainable. A recent poll conducted by the New York Times that set out to explore Americans’ opinions on a range of economic and financial issues showed that only 64% of the participants said they still believe in the American dream (Sorkin and Thee-Brenan). This was the lowest result in two decades, which shows that the idea of the American dream as attainable for the average American is fading, and people no longer believe "that hard work [can] result in riches" (Sorkin and Thee-Brenan). In The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald paints a dark picture of the American dream: it feels like he knew of the hardships that were ahead and therefore belittled the dream as he saw fit.

The idea of the American dream was boosted in the 1920s as soldiers returned home from the First World War. With them came hope and the possibility of a new prosperous America. There was tremendous growth in most businesses and many became rich quickly. The economy was booming as people had more money to spend and did so without thinking much of it. Booms such as this have come and gone through the decades and there is always a big crash that follows afterwards, like at the end of the 1920s when the Great Depression hit. When looking further into the American dream there are so many contradictions and notions that go against it. There are endless claims that the American dream does not exist, that the American dream is just an illusion, that the American dream is only attainable for some, depending on their background or social standing. One commentator has proposed something called “The American’t Dream,” which is an interesting notion:
The American’s Dream is a satire on the “rags to riches” notion of the American Dream. Represents the ideal of people striving for success by working an unsatisfactory job, rather than a fulfilling career that feeds into their own success or passion. It propagates that rather than chasing the “American Dream” they are chasing the “American’t Dream” by allowing their own dream to be stifled by another person. (Sulibreezy)

Jay Gatsby rose from rags to riches but ended up having his dreams trampled on by other people of higher class. The American dream is what everyone aspires to achieve. The idea of starting off with nothing and becoming someone important or successful is a dream many live for. According to the novel the American dream is not for everyone: it is built on materialistic power and those that have a better social position are more likely to get ahead in life by the looks of it. James Gatz works very hard in order to be successful and become his new and better self, Jay Gatsby. To achieve his dream he needs to be someone other than his original self. Lockridge comments on Gatsby’s dream being more than just of materialistic things: “Gatsby stands ‘on the porch, his hand up in a formal gesture of farewell, concealing his incorruptible dream, as he [waves] them goodbye’ - a dream of human order amid chaos” (11). Gatsby was a secretive man and after his parties had finished, he waved everyone off as if he was a normal guy saying goodbye to friends. The fact was, though, that he had a secret past he was hiding along with a dream of a future with Daisy. He held a hope that everything would work out the way he wanted without conflict or disruptions.

Fitzgerald makes it sound like the American dream is no longer about an individual's noble pursuit of happiness. The dream has become tainted and revolves around money. Most of the characters in the book have money, and are made to look as if they are living the American dream. Their lives look fun and interesting; from the outside, it seems that people like Tom, Daisy and Jordan have it all—but that is not the case. Each of them has their own set of problems, but tries to live their life in their happy bubble where nothing is ever wrong and failure does not exist. Then there are people like Wilson, who works hard at his garage and barely makes a living. His wife does not even have faith in him as she is off with Tom every chance she gets. Wilson’s
dream is that of moving away from the dirty Valley of Ashes and living a respectable and humble life with his wife. Even that dream is killed off in the novel (Fitzgerald 23, 96, 122-125).

4. The Upper Class – Old Money vs. New Money

The 1920’s was a time of much change in America. There was a shift in the classes and the upper class was subsequently split into those of old money and those of new. Old money refers to members of the upper class who have inherited their money through a long line of ancestors. Those people are often thought to be sensible, elegant and possessed of good taste. They look down on people with new money. Those with new money on the other hand have made their money themselves in various different ways. These people have not inherited anything from anyone but built up their own fortunes (Hill 56). They are often thought to be careless and to spend their money too freely. These were often people who grew up with nothing and subsequently moved from the lower to the upper class. As mentioned previously, Tom Buchanan thinks that Gatsby is a big bootlegger like so many newly rich people are. This shows clearly what people from old money thought of those who had just entered the upper class: that they were not worthy and were definitely up to something shady.

Jay Gatsby is a man who came from having almost nothing and established a new identity for himself along with a new lifestyle, and with that moves up the classes to becomes what is known as *nouveau riche*, newly rich. Gatsby is one of those people whom people from old money look down on, and has a pretty hard time of it with some of them. He is not accepted as being one of them as he does not come from a wealthy and respectable background; he certainly was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth like some of the people he mingles with. Gatsby wants to be accepted, to be seen as one of the group. He has hopes and dreams that he has set out to try and achieve by any means necessary. A few years prior to time in which the novel takes place, Jay meets Daisy and they fall in love. She knows little about him apart from his being in the military and that he’s off to war to fight for his country. She promises to wait for him. Gatsby knows that she is from money and is in awe when he’s at her house: he feels that he’s out of his league with this girl but wants to give it a shot anyway: “He knew that Daisy was extraordinary but he didn’t realize just how extraordinary a ‘nice’ girl could
be. She vanished into her rich house, into her rich, full life, leaving Gatsby – nothing” (Fitzgerald 117).

According to Ernest Lockridge, “Gatsby’s dream divides into three basic and related parts: the desire to repeat the past, the desire for money, and the desire for incarnation of ‘unutterable visions’ in the material earth” (11). What Lockridge is saying is that Gatsby has a dream of gaining wealth, which he hopes will allow him to relive the past and fulfil the visions he has of himself. His dream is somewhat difficult to put into actual words and for people to understand, as they are somewhat unspeakable or beyond expression.

People of old money often have their wealth tied up in investments or properties and may not be able to spend it as freely as those with new money. New money is newly acquired and in most cases not tied up in anything other than what the owner has recently spent money on. According to Bewley, “Fitzgerald perfectly understood the inadequacy of Gatsby’s romantic view of wealth” (39). Gatsby saw wealth as something that would get him what he wanted, get him the girl he once lost and get him the life that he dreamt of. After all, Daisy had married Tom Buchanan, who came from serious money. While Gatsby was away at war Daisy wanted to settle down, bowing to “some force – of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality – that was close at hand” (Fitzgerald 118).

Being newly rich may buy you new friends for a while if you are willing to spend money on them, but once the party comes to an end, people of old money stick together and will regroup into their own little cliques. After Gatsby’s death, his party guests all disappear and Nick finds himself alone by his side: “At first I was surprised and confused; then, as he lay in his house and didn’t move or breathe or speak, hour upon hour, it grew upon me that I was responsible, because no one else was interested” (Fitzgerald 127). This shows just what the people he wanted to call friends were really like. They never wanted to be his friends, they were simply happy to attend his parties, drink his booze and speculate on who he really was.

A good example of how wealth is a sign of status is that Gatsby’s neighbour starts to wonder about him: “It was when curiosity about Gatsby was at its highest that the lights in his house failed to go on one Saturday night - and, as obscurely as it had begun, his career as Trimalchio was over. Only gradually did I become aware that the
automobiles which turned expectantly into his drive stayed for a minute and then drove sulkily away” (Fitzgerald 88). He is being compared to Trimalchio, the freed slave in *Satyricon*, by Petronius. A man who came from nothing, gaining power and status through hard work, Trimalchio was known for throwing big parties to impress people. His story was a rise from rags to riches but ultimately he, like Gatsby, fails at achieving what he is after (James). So after Gatsby’s parties stop, he becomes a nobody to others, a thing of the past.

There are several references in the novel to the importance and attractiveness of coming from money—from old money of course. Gatsby is completely in awe of Daisy; at one point he comments that “Her voice is full of money.” Even people who are not in love with Daisy agree that her voice is full of money and that it is attractive: Nick picks up on it when Gatsby makes the comment and agrees with him, “That was it. I’d never understood it before. It was full of money – that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it” (Fitzgerald 94). It makes her seem more pleasant and charismatic than she really is; it gives a false picture of what sort of person she is. But that is what money can do: it can give a false impression of what and how things really are. Tom and Daisy came from old money; they were supposed to be “better” than others and to be respectable people. And yet, “[t]hey were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made” (Fitzgerald 139). They ultimately ruined Myrtle and George Wilson’s lives along with Gatsby’s life, yet they are able to continue on with their own as if nothing has happened. Tom was sleeping with Myrtle and being fake and friendly with George at the same time (Fitzgerald 22-26). Daisy ran Myrtle over and killed her (Fitzgerald 107-112), Tom does not own up to having an affair with Myrtle and George assumes that the person whom she was having the affair with killed her, leading George to shoot Gatsby and then killing himself (Fitzgerald 108-126). Tom and Daisy are able to walk away from all this scot-free and continue with their perfect little lives as before (Fitzgerald 128).
5. Portrayal of Jay Gatsby

Gatsby is a controversial man. Everyone, whether a reader of the novel or a character within it, has an opinion about him. Some like him while others cannot see anything good in him. There are plenty of things to be said about Jay Gatsby: he was viewed as a kind and gentle man who worked hard for his new fortune and should be admired for that. But he is also said to be anything but nice. Scrimgeour goes as far as saying that “Gatsby is a boor, a roughneck, a fraud, a criminal. His taste is vulgar, his behaviour ostentatious, his love adolescent, his business dealings ruthless and dishonest. He is interested in people […] only when he wants to use them. His nice gestures stem from the fact that, as one character comments, 'he doesn’t want any trouble with anybody’” (73). According to Bewley “Gatsby is a ‘mythic’ character, and no other word will define him. Not only is he an embodiment (as Fitzgerald makes clear at the outset) of that conflict between illusion and reality at the heart of American life; he is the heroic personification of the American romantic hero, the true heir of the American dream” (40).

Gatsby is at first presented as the sophisticated and wealthy host at a large mansion in West Egg. This view of him soon changes as more and more information is revealed about him and his character. He does not understand that coming into the scene like he does, throwing lavish parties and spending recklessly, will only arouse suspicion and cause people around him to question his morals and ambitions. He throws amazing parties, and people arrive from the city to attend them and party till the early hours. There is music playing and people sipping champagne and eating hors d'oeuvres. His house is decorated with Christmas lights to set the mood and there is an orchestra playing (Fitzgerald 33).

When he meets with Daisy again Nick comments that Gatsby behaves like “a little boy” (Fitzgerald 69). He loses his usual cool and sophisticated manner and is like a shy boy in love. He is standing right in front of his dream and is unsure how to react. Gatsby is also shown as a ruthless businessman who makes his money through criminal activity. Gatsby has many different sides to his character and you can’t help but to understand at least some part of him. He is stylish, brutal, elegant, loyal, shy, smart, childish all at the same time; he only displays certain sides of himself to certain people,
so no one really knows the true Jay Gatsby. He is both hated and adored at the same
time, and sometimes by the same people.

He threw high-class parties and served alcohol despite Prohibition; he did not
care what others said or thought—apart from Daisy, of course. Being as he was so
controversial, people of course talked about him and speculated as to where he made his
money. He was after all part of the newly rich crowd and a new member of the upper
class, so there were plenty of people who wanted him to fail and go back to where he
came from with his tail between his legs. The American dream has often be
romanticised and that is definitely a theme of the novel. Gatsby seems to be a hopeless
romantic, chasing after a dream that once was. The worst thing about it all is that he
actually believes that he can achieve his dream and rekindle his relationship as if no
time has passed. Bewley claims that the novel is in fact an “exploration of the American
dream as it exists in a corrupt period, and it is an attempt to determine that concealed
boundary that divides the reality from the illusions” (39). Dreams can often be blinding
and people will do all sorts of things to make their dreams come true. Often enough we
are not able to see the difference between reality and illusion, especially when it comes
to matters of the heart. This is the case with Gatsby and his dream of reliving the past.

Early in the book there is a hint that Gatsby is longing for something, that he
wants for something that he does not have and is unsure how to get it. When Nick sees
him one evening he is reaching out his arms and staring at a green light, “minute and
faraway, that might have been the end of a dock” (Fitzgerald 20). Gatsby has worked
hard to reinvent himself and his identity. He is no longer a poor boy from North Dakota
without bright future prospects. He is a self-made man, a creation of his own
imagination:

The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic
conception of himself. He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means
anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father's business, the service
of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay
Gatsby that a seventeen year old boy would be likely to invent, and to this
conception he was faithful to the end. (Fitzgerald 77)
He goes to the lengths not only of coming up with a new name for himself but also of changing his persona so that people will see him as someone respectable. Gatsby is smug, self-centred and naive. Upon meeting Jay Gatsby for the first time, Nick narrates:

He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favour. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey. (40)

Gatsby has charisma and falseness, which can be deceiving to others. He comes across as being a good guy but still there is something that is not quite right about him. It almost seems like he’s a bit of a dream himself.

6. Achieving the Dream

Gatsby’s dream is not a dream of materialistic things. He does not want a big house, fancy cars, colourful shirts or anything else that can be store-bought. Gatsby wants what these things can bring him: attention, status, admiration—and of course Daisy, who is into material things. The novel shows how the main ideas of the American dream have been crushed, as material things are used to gain status and attain happiness. It however also shows that the American dream attained through materialistic fulfilment does not lead to good things or happy endings. Gatsby’s real dream is actually quite traditional: he wants the love of a woman and to spend his life with her. In order to get this woman, however, he feels he needs to be a bigger, better man than he was when they first met. He needs to be a man of status, a man with power, a man who wants for nothing as he is able to buy whatever his heart desires. During Daisy and Nick's visit to his house one day, Gatsby even comments: “I’ve got a man in England who buys me clothes. He sends over a selection of things at the beginning of each season, spring and fall,” and
then goes on to throw his piles of shirts around the room while Nick and Daisy stand there and admire him and his actions (Fitzgerald 72). He is able to acquire the money he needs, he is able to establish an identity that gets him places, and he is able to get to the woman he wants. However, he is not able to fulfil his American dream. He can never be the man that Daisy needs and wants. Gatsby believes that he is able to repeat the past, and when he is told he cannot his reply is simply, “Can't repeat the past? [...] Why of course you can!” As Nick's narration continues, Gatsby “looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand. 'I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before,' he said, nodding determinedly” (Fitzgerald 86).

Many would say that Gatsby achieves the American dream in some respects, because he rises from being a child from the Midwest who has little of life's luxuries to being a wealthy businessman in New York. But that was not Gatsby’s actual dream. His dream is not something obtainable and real. Gatsby fails to achieve his dream because the dream didn’t really exist. He was in love with an idea or memory of something that once was. He believed that with money and social standing he would be able to get Daisy back and they could start a life of their own and live happily ever after. It was a silly thought, and Jay Gatsby eventually realizes that Daisy would never have given up her life and social standing for someone she didn’t think was going to fit into her little world. His dream was to turn back time to the period when he was at his happiest. He wants to be able to repeat the past.

Gatsby seems to have been naive in his thinking that time could be re-lived and that he could make someone fall in love with him and leave her already established life behind. But “Gatsby believed in the green light [at the end of the dock], the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther.... And then one fine morning—So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past” (Fitzgerald 141). There were so many things that were against him that it seemed impossible for him to get what he desired. Nick comments that “[Gatsby] had come such a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close he could hardly fail to grasp it. But what he did not know was that it was already behind him,
somewhere in the vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night” (Fitzgerald 141).

Gatsby’s twisted idea of what life and love should be like led to the fall of the American dream in The Great Gatsby. His boyish thoughts of turning back time and regaining what he once had are unrealistic, but he does not see it that way. He was able to get some part of Daisy back temporarily, but she would never have left Tom and their life together for good. As soon as Daisy found out how he has made his money, that he was not as clean and honest as he appeared to be in her eyes, she was no longer interested in him. She did not want to associate with the newly rich or dodgy rich:

It passed, and [Gatsby] began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up, and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undauntedly, toward that lost voice across the room. (Fitzgerald 104)

She had been so shameless to spend time with her husband and lover at the same time, almost egging them on against each other. Gatsby never really stood a chance against Tom Buchanan, who seems to have it all: his money, his wife, friends and mistress, and everyone is happy. Gatsby has nothing but his tainted money, a large soulless mansion and possibly one friend, Nick.

All of the characters have dreams and all have their lives planned out in some parts. But by the end of the book it seems obvious that no one's dreams are coming true. Their lives are all shattered or disrupted because of their exaggerated dreams. Gatsby lost his life (Fitzgerald 126) because of his dream. Nick goes a bit mad and uproots his life to get away from the horrible scene he’s been living in (Fitzgerald 137). Tom lost his mistress (Fitzgerald 108) and his happy days in the city with her. Daisy is still with Tom but he is aware of her being unfaithful (Fitzgerald 104) and so their marriage is forever stained. Fitzgerald is sending the message that if you dare to chase your American dream you will fail. It feels like Fitzgerald is sending the message that the
dream is just an illusion and therefore unachievable. You will fall flat on your back and end up being miserable for the rest of your life.

7. Conclusion

A lot has changed since Fitzgerald wrote *The Great Gatsby*. In more recent times, for example, people who work hard to acquire their own wealth are looked up to. People who earn their money instead of inheriting it are seen as entrepreneurs, and many want to learn from them. The self-made rich today are not looked upon with the same suspicion as in the 1920s. They are not automatically considered to be into something dodgy and shunned from certain social groups. There is not the split within the upper class that there once was. In today’s society, Jay Gatsby probably would not have been questioned as much by the likes of Tom Buchanan, even if he were indeed into something illegal. It is just not the way people go about things today. Old or new money does not matter so much. Today people focus more on what you have to bring to the table and what they can get out of you.

In modern times many dream of money, but most would not go to the lengths Gatsby does in order to impress someone or to gain their love. In the 1920s, women relied more upon men to provide them with the lifestyle they wanted and the money needed to keep it going. People were a bit more naïve and believed that with hard work their dreams could be achieved, and therefore some committed their life to chasing after them. This is a bit more rare today, as people are much more selfish and there are probably few who would uproot and commit their lives to impressing someone else in hopes of gaining their respect and interest. Life is simply too short to live it for someone else wondering if they will love you back.

Jay Gatsby tried his absolute best to get the woman of his dreams. He created a new identity for himself and took part in illegal business dealings to make his fortune in order to impress Daisy. But that was not enough as he could not change his background, where and whom he came from, which was a crucial factor for Daisy. He was always going to be the poor boy from the Midwest; he was not born into the lifestyle that Daisy wanted and needed in order to be what she considered to be happy. His dream was a
failure from the outset, though he did not know it. He sacrificed his life so that she could live on in spite of how she treated him.

The American dream can be seen as a sort of illusion, as no one sees their full dream fulfilled. It is however natural and good to have hopes and dreams up to a certain point. It enriches the imagination and pushes people that little bit further towards their goal. As humans it is good to for us to have dreams, though some may not want to label them as dreams but rather call them goals. An important factor, though, is to know when dreams are achievable and when they are just that: dreams.
Works Cited

<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/America_economy_1920s.htm>.


