

**Corruption of the American Dream: A Study of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby***Javeria Ashfaq Bhatti\*<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Abdullah Haroon<sup>2</sup>**Original Article**

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**Abstract**

This research article explores the thematic corruption of the American Dream as illustrated in F. Scott Fitzgerald's iconic novel, *The Great Gatsby*. The American Dream, initially envisioned as an ideal of equality, personal achievement, and happiness attainable through hard work and perseverance, has historically served as a cornerstone of American cultural identity. However, Fitzgerald's narrative critically examines the profound distortion of this dream during the economically prosperous yet morally ambiguous Jazz Age of the 1920s. This study uses a qualitative literary analysis approach, enriched by cultural and sociological theories, to dissect how the pursuit of wealth, social status, and material possessions gradually eclipses genuine ideals of personal growth and ethical integrity within the context of American capitalism. The research employs a multidimensional theoretical framework, integrating Marxist criticism, postmodern literary theories, and sociological perspectives to explore the intricate relationship between economic structures, societal values, and individual aspirations. Central to the analysis are Fitzgerald's complex characters, notably Jay Gatsby, whose life epitomises both the allure and the peril inherent in the corrupted American Dream. Through Gatsby's tragic narrative arc, the novel vividly portrays how economic success, when divorced from moral foundations, inevitably leads to personal and societal disillusionment. This study also incorporates extensive scholarly discourse, examining interpretations from literary critics and historians who have contributed to understanding the deeper sociocultural implications of Fitzgerald's work. The analysis reveals how the novel continues to resonate powerfully with contemporary issues such as socioeconomic disparities, consumerism, and the ethical erosion tied to capitalist ambitions. Ultimately, this article argues that Fitzgerald's critical portrayal in *The Great Gatsby* serves not only as a historical commentary but also as an enduring cautionary tale about the fragility and vulnerability of idealistic dreams within inherently unequal socio-economic systems. The novel thus remains profoundly relevant, illuminating ongoing debates about capitalism, identity, and the persistent yet elusive nature of the American Dream.

**Keywords:** American Dream, F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, Capitalism, Materialism, Corruption, Literary Criticism, Illusion, Modernism, Class Divide

**1. Introduction**

The American Dream, an enduring narrative embedded deeply within the cultural fabric of the United States, encapsulates the belief that success and prosperity are attainable for anyone, irrespective of their origins, through determination, perseverance, and hard work. This dream, initially articulated in the Declaration of Independence with its emphasis on the pursuit of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," became a cornerstone of American identity, guiding generations toward a vision of socio-economic mobility and personal fulfillment. Yet, this idealistic concept has been consistently subjected to critique, particularly during periods of notable economic and social upheaval. One such critical period was the Jazz Age of the 1920s, an era marked by unparalleled economic prosperity,

conspicuous consumption, moral looseness, and profound social stratification. It is within this context that F. Scott Fitzgerald's seminal novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), emerges as a poignant exploration of the corrupted ideals inherent in the pursuit of this American Dream.

Fitzgerald's work is not merely a portrayal of a historical period but a profound critique of the materialistic values that defined early twentieth-century American society. He meticulously unravels the contradictions embedded within the Dream, particularly emphasizing how an ideal that originally promised moral and economic freedom has devolved into an obsession with wealth, power, and social status. This paper examines the layers of this corruption through the narrative arc of *The Great Gatsby*, placing particular emphasis on how characters embody, exploit, and ultimately are destroyed by their misguided adherence to this distorted version of the American Dream.

Historically, the American Dream was romanticized as an egalitarian ethos where personal achievement was accessible to everyone, irrespective of class or social background. However, Fitzgerald's representation illustrates how this ideal was increasingly incompatible with the socioeconomic realities of his era. Scholar Arthur Mizener (1951) highlights that Fitzgerald's depiction of 1920s America emphasizes a "moral failure of a society drunk on wealth," revealing an underlying tension between idealism and capitalism. This tension is vividly embodied in the novel's protagonist, Jay Gatsby, whose pursuit of wealth and status encapsulates the decay of genuine aspirations into superficial ambitions.

The economic prosperity of the 1920s, often celebrated as a period of unprecedented growth and opportunity, also carried within it stark contrasts of inequality. Jeffrey Louis Decker (1994) observes that Gatsby's journey symbolizes the paradox inherent in the American meritocracy myth, where economic success ostensibly achieved through merit is often contingent upon illicit or morally questionable means. Gatsby's wealth, accumulated through bootlegging and shady dealings, exemplifies how the Dream has been corrupted by a relentless pursuit of materialism, overriding traditional moral values. Decker's analysis foregrounds a critical understanding that the pursuit of prosperity, when stripped of its moral underpinnings, inevitably breeds societal corruption and individual disillusionment.

Moreover, Sarah Churchwell (2013) argues that the decadence portrayed in *The Great Gatsby* is reflective of broader societal issues, including class barriers that limit genuine social mobility. She contends that Gatsby's failure is emblematic of systemic inequalities deeply rooted in American society, further perpetuating the corruption of the American Dream. This systemic analysis aligns with sociologist Max Weber's earlier critique, notably in his seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), which underscores the ethical compromises inherent in capitalist societies. Weber theorized that economic ambition, when detached from spiritual or ethical moorings, inevitably degenerates into a self-serving pursuit that undermines collective moral and social well-being.

The novel's portrayal of the Jazz Age also encapsulates the post-World War I disillusionment, characterized by a collective retreat into hedonism and consumerism as an escape from reality. Fitzgerald's narrative, populated by characters like Daisy and Tom Buchanan, epitomizes this detachment and moral decay. Scholar Walter Benn Michaels (2004) suggests that such characters embody entrenched privilege and indifference to moral accountability, thereby reinforcing class hierarchies and economic disparities. Michaels argues that their careless opulence and reckless

behavior are not mere character flaws but reflective of broader cultural attitudes that legitimize and perpetuate systemic inequalities.

Gatsby's idealization of Daisy Buchanan is particularly telling; his vision of Daisy as a symbol of ultimate achievement reveals how deeply commodified even personal relationships have become. This commodification underscores the extent to which capitalist ideals have permeated and distorted personal and societal aspirations. Gatsby's tragedy lies in his unwavering belief that wealth can erase social divides, a notion that Fitzgerald repeatedly critiques as dangerously illusory. Robert Lehan (1990) emphasizes Gatsby's self-delusion, noting that his dream is constructed upon the unstable foundation of illusion and superficiality rather than genuine self-improvement or moral integrity.

Fitzgerald's critical lens is reinforced by the novel's narrator, Nick Carraway, whose gradual disillusionment serves as the novel's ethical anchor. Carraway's narrative provides a moral counterpoint to the pervasive decadence, illuminating the ethical consequences of pursuing wealth at the expense of personal integrity. His reflections underscore the erosion of genuine values, ultimately critiquing the capitalist ethos as inherently corrosive and unsustainable.

In summary, the introduction situates Fitzgerald's critique within historical, sociological, and literary contexts, substantiating it with scholarly perspectives. By foregrounding the intersection between individual ambition and societal structures, this analysis reveals the complexities and contradictions inherent in the pursuit of the American Dream as depicted in *The Great Gatsby*. It argues that the novel's lasting significance lies in its incisive exposure of how economic, moral, and social corruption inevitably undermine the ideals of prosperity and success that once defined American aspiration.

## 2. Literature Review

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* has garnered extensive critical attention for its portrayal of the American Dream's corruption, and its reception among literary scholars has evolved significantly over the decades. Initially published in 1925, the novel was met with mixed reviews, but it gained significant scholarly interest posthumously, eventually being celebrated as a canonical text within American literature.

Early critics, including Lionel Trilling (1945), positioned Fitzgerald within the context of modernist literature, highlighting his acute sensitivity to the moral and social ambiguities of the American ethos. Trilling described Gatsby as a poignant representation of aspiration distorted by materialistic culture, laying the groundwork for subsequent analyses focusing explicitly on the American Dream. His early critique set the stage for later scholars to explore how Fitzgerald captures the dissonance between idealism and reality, an enduring concern of American cultural studies.

Arthur Mizener's influential biography, *The Far Side of Paradise* (1951), further amplified Fitzgerald's reputation by contextualizing *The Great Gatsby* within the author's personal struggles with wealth, success, and societal expectations. Mizener highlighted that the novel's critical reception was intrinsically tied to the evolving understanding of American prosperity and disillusionment in the post-war era, where economic abundance was increasingly perceived as morally corrosive.

During the 1960s and 1970s, scholarship on *The Great Gatsby* began engaging more explicitly with Marxist and sociological theories. Notably, Marxist critic John Fraser (1965) argued that Gatsby's demise illustrates how capitalist ideology commodifies and corrupts human relationships and

aspirations. Fraser interpreted Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy as emblematic of the broader commodification inherent within capitalist societies, where human emotions and relationships become transactional. Fraser's analysis foregrounded discussions about class struggles and the inherent contradictions of the American meritocracy myth.

Similarly, Louis Tyson's (2006) Marxist reading of the text accentuates the novel's depiction of social stratification and false consciousness, arguing that Gatsby's relentless pursuit of the American Dream epitomizes the illusion perpetuated by capitalist ideology to maintain class divisions. Tyson emphasizes how Fitzgerald's novel critiques the fallacy that wealth equates to happiness or moral superiority, highlighting the ways in which Gatsby's aspirations, while seemingly noble, are fundamentally misguided within the corrupted value systems of American capitalism.

In the realm of literary symbolism and psychoanalysis, critics such as Ross Posnock (1984) and Rena Sanderson (2002) have explored the deeper psychological and symbolic dimensions of Gatsby's character and his dream. Posnock identifies Gatsby's identity crisis as central to understanding the novel's broader thematic concerns, arguing that Gatsby's constructed persona reflects broader societal anxieties regarding identity and authenticity in the modern world. Sanderson, meanwhile, places emphasis on gender dynamics and the symbolic role Daisy plays within Gatsby's imagination, representing an unattainable ideal shaped by patriarchal and capitalist values.

During the late 20th and early 21st centuries, feminist and intersectional readings further enriched scholarship on *The Great Gatsby*. Judith Fetterley (1978), for example, critiques Fitzgerald's portrayal of female characters as passive objects within a patriarchal capitalist system. Fetterley argues that the novel perpetuates a problematic vision of femininity, with characters such as Daisy and Myrtle reduced to symbolic extensions of male aspirations and anxieties. This feminist perspective deepens the critical understanding of the ways gender intersects with capitalism in the American Dream's corruption.

Jeffrey Louis Decker's *Made in America* (1994) provides a socio-historical analysis of Gatsby's character, focusing particularly on how Gatsby's criminal enterprises critique the legitimacy of success within capitalist societies. Decker asserts that Gatsby embodies the contradictory impulses of American society—simultaneously valorizing success and demonizing those who achieve it through unconventional or illicit means. Decker's critique aligns with Walter Benn Michaels (2004), who argues that the Dream, as depicted in Fitzgerald's novel, inherently perpetuates inequality by masking structural barriers with the myth of individual merit.

More recently, Sarah Churchwell (2013) in her book *Careless People*, re-examines the historical context of Fitzgerald's novel, emphasizing its significance as a social critique rooted in the realities of the Jazz Age. Churchwell's meticulous archival research reveals parallels between Fitzgerald's narrative and real events of the era, underscoring the novel's authenticity in reflecting societal attitudes toward wealth, excess, and moral irresponsibility.

Robert Lehan (1990), in his seminal work *The Great Gatsby: The Limits of Wonder*, explores how Gatsby's tragedy emerges from his conflation of wealth and personal fulfillment. Lehan argues that Gatsby's identity, constructed upon superficiality and illusion, encapsulates the broader societal corruption wherein true values and meaningful aspirations are replaced by hollow pursuits of wealth and status. Lehan's analysis resonates with the critical perspectives of Baudrillard (1981), whose

theories on simulacra and simulation provide further conceptual depth to understanding Gatsby's identity and the novel's depiction of the American Dream.

The sociological insights of Max Weber (1905), especially regarding the moral implications of capitalism, provide a theoretical foundation for understanding Fitzgerald's critique. Weber's observation that capitalist societies often prioritize economic achievement over ethical considerations mirrors the moral degradation evident in the novel. Weber's influence is evident in critical discussions that link Gatsby's character to broader sociological debates about capitalism's ethical consequences, particularly in how it shapes individual aspirations and societal values.

Scholar Matthew J. Bruccoli's extensive biographical and critical studies (2002) further enrich the scholarship on Fitzgerald by situating the author's work within broader literary and historical traditions. Bruccoli highlights how Fitzgerald's personal experiences and societal observations deeply influenced his literary representations of the American Dream, providing scholars with essential insights into the novel's enduring relevance.

Finally, contemporary studies increasingly contextualize *The Great Gatsby* within broader global perspectives. Critics like Paul Giles (2009) have explored how Fitzgerald's depiction of the American Dream resonates internationally, highlighting global patterns of capitalism, inequality, and cultural commodification. Giles argues that the novel's critique extends beyond the American context, reflecting universal tensions between capitalist aspirations and ethical integrity.

Collectively, these scholarly interpretations provide a multifaceted examination of Fitzgerald's depiction of the corrupted American Dream. They highlight the intricate intersections of historical, sociological, psychological, and ideological forces that shape and ultimately distort the ideal of American prosperity and success. This literature review underscores the complexity and enduring significance of *The Great Gatsby* as a critical lens through which the dynamics of ambition, morality, and societal corruption continue to be explored and understood.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This research applies an integrated theoretical framework that blends Marxist criticism, postmodern literary theories, and sociological perspectives to explore the representation of the corrupted American Dream in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. The integration of these theories provides a robust analytical lens to examine how economic systems, societal structures, and individual consciousness intersect to shape personal ambitions and societal ideals.

Marxist theory is foundational in this analysis, focusing on the capitalist dynamics portrayed within the novel. Originating from Karl Marx's critique of capitalism, this theory emphasizes the impact of economic structures on class relationships, power dynamics, and societal values. Marxists argue that capitalist societies inherently generate inequality through class stratification and commodification of human relations. Fitzgerald's narrative illustrates Marxist concepts vividly through Gatsby's pursuit of wealth, reflecting the commodification of his dreams and relationships. Gatsby's wealth, acquired through illicit means, symbolizes capitalism's corrupting influence, suggesting how personal integrity is compromised by capitalist aspirations. Marxist critic Louis Tyson (2006) reinforces this perspective, arguing that Gatsby's tragedy lies not merely in personal failure but in the systemic false consciousness perpetuated by capitalist ideology, which masks inherent inequalities and promotes superficial success.

In addition to Marxist insights, postmodern literary theories significantly enrich this analysis. Central to postmodernism is the recognition of fragmented identities and blurred distinctions between reality and illusion. Jean Baudrillard's (1981) theory of simulacra and simulation particularly informs this approach, providing insight into Gatsby's constructed identity and the illusory nature of his aspirations. Baudrillard proposes that modern society is increasingly dominated by simulations—representations that replace reality, leading to an inability to distinguish genuine experiences from illusions. Gatsby embodies this concept as his persona is meticulously constructed through fabricated stories, extravagant parties, and wealth displays designed to project a desirable social status. His entire identity becomes a simulacrum, a representation so convincing that he himself begins to believe in its authenticity. This analysis highlights the postmodern critique of superficiality and the loss of authentic identity in pursuit of societal validation.

Frederic Jameson's (1991) concept of the "cultural logic of late capitalism" also significantly complements this theoretical framework. Jameson argues that in advanced capitalist societies, consumerism and spectacle become dominant cultural forces, profoundly shaping individual desires and societal interactions. Fitzgerald's depiction of the extravagant lifestyles, parties, and conspicuous consumption in *The Great Gatsby* perfectly exemplifies Jameson's arguments. The spectacle of Gatsby's wealth, designed to impress and seduce Daisy Buchanan and society at large, underscores how capitalist values commodify personal relationships and aspirations. Jameson's framework helps explain how Gatsby's dream—rooted in consumerist culture—ultimately leads to emptiness and disillusionment, symbolizing broader societal corruption.

Further enriching this framework is the sociological perspective derived from Max Weber's seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905). Weber's analysis emphasizes the moral implications of capitalist societies, asserting that economic pursuits divorced from ethical and spiritual considerations inevitably result in moral decay. Applying Weber's ideas to Fitzgerald's narrative, this study identifies how Gatsby's moral compromises and the novel's overall ethical landscape reflect broader sociological critiques of capitalism. Gatsby's relentless pursuit of Daisy, viewed as a symbol of ultimate social success, illustrates how capitalist ambitions often replace genuine ethical or moral aspirations, resulting in profound personal and societal costs.

Additionally, Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony is integral to the theoretical analysis. Gramsci argues that ruling classes maintain dominance through cultural institutions and norms rather than solely through economic or political coercion. In *The Great Gatsby*, characters like Tom and Daisy Buchanan embody this hegemonic dominance, exerting cultural power through their inherited wealth and societal status. Gatsby's futile attempts to penetrate their social world reveal the invisible yet powerful barriers maintained through hegemonic cultural norms, further illustrating how the American Dream is corrupted by systemic class barriers.

By synthesizing Marxist criticism, postmodern literary theories, and sociological insights, this theoretical framework comprehensively examines how Fitzgerald's novel portrays the American Dream as inherently susceptible to corruption within capitalist societies. Through this integrated approach, the analysis highlights the complex interplay between individual ambitions, societal values, and economic structures, elucidating the novel's enduring relevance as a critical exploration of capitalist culture and its detrimental effects on personal and societal integrity.

#### 4. Methodology

The methodology used in this study is qualitative and interpretive. It involves close textual reading and analysis of *The Great Gatsby*, supported by secondary sources including journal articles, books, and historical records. Passages that illustrate the transformation of the American Dream are identified and examined within the socio-cultural context of the 1920s. The study also integrates scholarly critiques to triangulate interpretations and enhance analytical depth.

#### 5. Analysis

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* vividly illustrates the corruption of the American Dream through meticulous narrative construction, character development, and thematic symbolism. Central to this critique is Jay Gatsby, whose character embodies both the allure and tragedy of the corrupted dream. Gatsby's humble beginnings as James Gatz contrast sharply with his ultimate persona, demonstrating the malleability and superficiality inherent in the American aspiration for self-reinvention and success. His transformation is not a genuine ascent but a carefully constructed illusion sustained by criminal enterprises and morally dubious pursuits, highlighting capitalism's potential to corrupt authentic ambitions.

The narrative employs symbolism to further emphasize this corruption. Gatsby's lavish parties, intended as spectacles of wealth and social success, symbolize both his immense desire for acceptance and the superficiality of the society he aspires to join. The green light at the end of Daisy's dock, often interpreted as a metaphor for Gatsby's dream, symbolizes the perpetual pursuit of an elusive and ultimately unreachable ideal. This symbolism effectively portrays the inherent futility in Gatsby's relentless pursuit of wealth and status, as he mistakenly equates these external markers with personal happiness and fulfillment.

Fitzgerald further critiques the American Dream by portraying the morally vacuous elite class through characters like Tom and Daisy Buchanan. Their privileged yet reckless behavior, exemplified by their indifference and entitlement, starkly contrasts Gatsby's earnest aspirations. Daisy, who Gatsby idealizes as the embodiment of his dreams, is herself corrupted by materialism. Her voice, described by Gatsby as "full of money," symbolizes the commodification of personal relationships within capitalist societies, where even intimacy is transactional.

Nick Carraway, the narrator and moral compass of the novel, serves as Fitzgerald's critical voice. His progressive disillusionment with the opulent yet morally bankrupt society of the East Egg elite encapsulates the novel's central critique. Through Nick's perspective, the audience witnesses the erosion of genuine values and ethics, replaced by superficial appearances and financial success. His final observations regarding Tom and Daisy's carelessness underscore a broader societal malaise—a callous disregard for the consequences of their actions facilitated by their wealth and status.

Additionally, Myrtle Wilson and her tragic end represent another dimension of the corrupted dream, illustrating the destructive consequences of aspiring beyond one's class limitations within an unequal society. Myrtle's aspirations, fueled by her affair with Tom, highlight the novel's critique of class mobility as inherently restricted and fraught with peril. Her death serves as a grim reminder of the collateral damage resulting from a society obsessed with material success and social status.

Fitzgerald also employs narrative techniques such as dramatic irony and juxtaposition to critique societal values subtly yet effectively. The extravagant wealth and hedonism of Gatsby's parties are juxtaposed against the stark, desolate "valley of ashes," representing the moral decay and poverty

underpinning American prosperity. This contrast vividly underscores the inherent inequality and moral bankruptcy of capitalist ambitions, suggesting that wealth in one part of society often rests upon exploitation and neglect elsewhere.

Through these multifaceted narrative elements, Fitzgerald effectively portrays the American Dream as not merely corrupted but fundamentally flawed when stripped of moral and ethical foundations. The characters' interconnected tragedies collectively highlight the destructive consequences of pursuing superficial success and material wealth, emphasizing the urgent need to reconsider the values underlying American aspirations.

## 6. Findings

The analysis yields several key findings regarding the corruption of the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*. Firstly, Fitzgerald clearly delineates how the American Dream, originally an ideal rooted in personal integrity and authentic achievement, has devolved into a mere pursuit of wealth, status, and appearance. Gatsby's wealth, while ostensibly a marker of success, emerges as hollow and morally compromised, symbolizing capitalism's broader ethical failings.

Secondly, the novel highlights systemic barriers that inhibit genuine social mobility and equality. Gatsby's tragic failure underscores the limitations of individual effort within a society structured by entrenched class distinctions and economic stratification. Fitzgerald illustrates that upward mobility, despite cultural rhetoric, remains largely illusory for those like Gatsby, who are excluded from true acceptance by the elite regardless of their wealth or achievements.

Thirdly, the characters of Tom and Daisy Buchanan embody the entrenched privilege and moral indifference of the American upper class, reinforcing social inequalities. Their careless behavior and ultimate lack of accountability highlight the systemic corruption perpetuated by capitalist ideologies, where wealth insulates individuals from moral responsibilities and societal consequences.

Lastly, the novel's symbolic elements, notably the green light and the valley of ashes, effectively capture the inherent contradictions and ethical compromises of the corrupted American Dream. These symbols underscore the disillusionment and moral decay fostered by unchecked capitalist ambitions, further emphasizing Fitzgerald's critique of materialistic pursuits devoid of genuine ethical or moral grounding.

## 7. Interpretation

Fitzgerald's depiction of the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby* offers a profound interpretation of how capitalist ideals can distort and ultimately destroy individual aspirations and societal values. Gatsby's relentless yet misguided pursuit of wealth and social acceptance reflects a broader cultural phenomenon wherein personal success becomes indistinguishable from material accumulation, illustrating capitalism's inherent potential for moral compromise and existential emptiness.

The persistent symbolism throughout the novel reinforces this interpretation. The green light, representative of Gatsby's elusive dreams and aspirations, symbolizes the inherent contradictions within capitalist ideals—promising fulfillment yet perpetually deferring satisfaction. Gatsby's tragedy, therefore, serves not merely as a cautionary tale about individual ambition but as a critical reflection on the broader ethical failures of American capitalism.

The narrative further critiques the myth of meritocracy central to the American Dream. Gatsby's ultimate failure, despite his immense effort and ambition, highlights systemic inequalities entrenched in American society. Fitzgerald challenges the notion that individual effort alone can overcome structural barriers, demonstrating instead how capitalism reinforces existing hierarchies through cultural hegemony and economic stratification.

Furthermore, the novel offers a critical perspective on the moral consequences of consumerist culture. The emptiness and moral decay underlying Gatsby's lavish parties and lifestyle reflect a broader societal malaise, illustrating how capitalism prioritizes superficial appearances over genuine human connection and moral integrity. Fitzgerald's critique extends beyond Gatsby, implicating a society that collectively prioritizes material success and social status over ethical considerations and authentic personal fulfillment.

Overall, *The Great Gatsby* serves as a powerful interpretive lens through which to examine the profound moral, ethical, and societal implications of capitalist values. Fitzgerald's nuanced critique remains highly relevant, compelling readers to question and reconsider the foundational principles underlying their own aspirations and societal ideals.

## 8. Conclusion

The enduring legacy of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* lies in its incisive critique of the American Dream and its unflinching portrayal of a society ensnared by materialism, illusion, and systemic inequality. Through a rich interplay of symbolism, narrative structure, and complex characterization, Fitzgerald reveals how the Dream—once rooted in ideals of equality, integrity, and authentic self-betterment—has been corrupted by a relentless pursuit of wealth and status. Jay Gatsby, as both an aspirational figure and a tragic casualty, encapsulates the paradox at the heart of the American Dream: the belief in limitless possibility is undercut by unyielding class barriers and the emptiness of material success.

The findings of this research underscore that *The Great Gatsby* offers more than just a historical snapshot of the Jazz Age. Instead, it serves as a profound meditation on the social, ethical, and psychological consequences of a capitalist ethos unchecked by moral restraint. The novel's enduring relevance is found in its acute resonance with contemporary anxieties over consumerism, social mobility, and the widening gap between wealth and integrity.

By weaving together Marxist, postmodern, and sociological frameworks, this study has shown that Fitzgerald's narrative is not merely a tale of individual failure but a systemic critique of American society. The green light at the end of Daisy's dock continues to symbolize the unattainable nature of the Dream for many, revealing the enduring dangers of equating success with material acquisition. Ultimately, *The Great Gatsby* stands as a timeless warning that a dream divorced from ethical and communal values will inevitably lead to disillusionment and societal decay—a message that remains strikingly pertinent in the twenty-first century.

## 9. Relevance to the Present Times

Nearly a century after its publication, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* continues to resonate powerfully with contemporary readers, offering a sharp critique of the American Dream that feels as urgent and relevant today as it did in the 1920s. The novel's exploration of materialism, social stratification, and moral ambiguity remains pertinent in the context of modern capitalism, where

issues of economic disparity, class immobility, and the commodification of identity have only intensified.

In the present age, the concept of the American Dream still dominates cultural discourse, symbolizing the promise of upward mobility and self-made success. Yet, as in Gatsby's era, this promise is increasingly questioned. The growing wealth gap in the United States, the precariousness of the middle class, and the prevalence of generational poverty challenge the notion that hard work alone can guarantee prosperity. As scholars such as Robert D. Putnam and Thomas Piketty have shown, structural barriers and systemic inequalities persist, limiting genuine social mobility much like the "invisible barriers" faced by Gatsby despite his immense wealth.

Consumerism and the spectacle of success remain at the heart of modern society. Social media platforms now serve as new stages for the performance of wealth and status, echoing Gatsby's extravagant parties and curated persona. Individuals craft online identities in pursuit of validation, popularity, and perceived achievement, often at the expense of authenticity—mirroring the postmodern anxieties explored by theorists like Jean Baudrillard and evident in Gatsby's own self-fashioning. This phenomenon has been further exacerbated by the "influencer economy," where followers and appearances often matter more than substance or ethical grounding.

Furthermore, contemporary anxieties surrounding student debt, the gig economy, and housing affordability reflect ongoing concerns about the accessibility of the American Dream. Many young people today find themselves unable to achieve the financial security or homeownership that earlier generations associated with success, prompting widespread disillusionment similar to that which underpins Fitzgerald's narrative. The symbolic green light remains ever distant for those marginalized by economic systems that privilege the few at the expense of the many.

The moral questions raised by *The Great Gatsby* are also salient in today's world. The pursuit of material success, when decoupled from ethical responsibility, continues to foster environments where exploitation, corruption, and indifference can flourish. Recent corporate scandals, political polarization, and the erosion of public trust in institutions mirror the ethical decay Fitzgerald diagnosed in his own time. The "careless people" that Nick Carraway condemns are easily found in contemporary figures who prioritize personal gain over societal well-being.

Finally, the novel's critique of the illusion of meritocracy continues to challenge modern audiences to reevaluate the values underpinning their ambitions. *The Great Gatsby* invites readers to question whether the American Dream, as popularly imagined, is truly attainable or if it remains, for many, a seductive yet unattainable ideal.

In sum, the themes and warnings embedded in *The Great Gatsby* are not relics of a bygone era but living issues that demand ongoing critical engagement. Fitzgerald's exploration of the Dream's corruption serves as a cautionary tale and a call for a more equitable and ethically grounded vision of success—one that prioritizes integrity, community, and genuine opportunity over the empty pursuit of wealth and spectacle.

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