

Artifacts and Theme Selection

Student's Name

Institutional Affiliation

2-6 Project Part One: Artifacts and Theme Selection

For my project, I have selected two significant American cultural artifacts that embody the theme of the American Dream, created over fifty years apart, highlighting its evolving perception through time.

The first artifact is the novel *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, published in 1925 (Britannica, 2024a). This literary work delves into the complexities of the American Dream during the Roaring Twenties, capturing the era's opulence, disillusionment, and stark inequalities. Fitzgerald's narrative revolves around the life and ambitions of Jay Gatsby, a man whose relentless pursuit of wealth and status mirrors the societal obsession with material success.

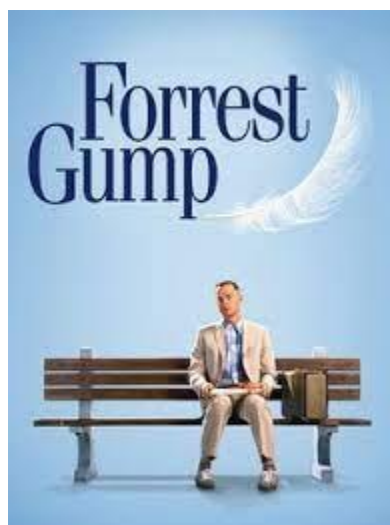
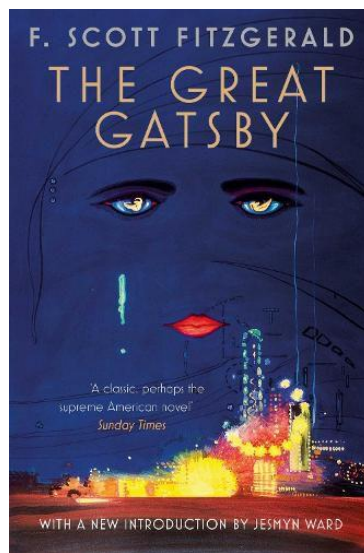
The second artifact is the film *Forrest Gump*, directed by Robert Zemeckis and released in 1994 (Britannica, 2024b). Unlike *The Great Gatsby*, *Forrest Gump* presents a more optimistic and resilient view of the American Dream. Through the protagonist's journey across historical American moments, the film explores themes of destiny, innocence, and the possibility of achieving greatness regardless of background. These artifacts represent distinct artistic mediums and offer contrasting perspectives on a central theme pivotal to American culture, providing a rich basis for comparative analysis.

Describing the Artifacts

The Great Gatsby, written by F. Scott Fitzgerald, was published in 1925. It is set in the prosperous Roaring Twenties on Long Island and New York City, reflecting the era's decadence and the disillusionment following World War I. The novel explores themes of the American Dream, class struggle, and the pursuit of happiness, capturing the spirit and challenges of its time.

Forrest Gump, released in 1994 and directed by Robert Zemeckis, spans several decades, following the titular character from the 1950s through the late 20th century in the United States. The film uses critical historical events to frame Forrest's journey, providing a backdrop that explores themes of destiny, innocence, and the impact of the individual on a changing American society.

Both artifacts stand as cultural icons within their respective periods and offer rich narratives that engage with fundamental American ideals and societal reflections.



Theme

In analyzing *The Great Gatsby* and *Forrest Gump*, a common theme is the pursuit of the American Dream. This theme is intricately woven through the narrative arcs and character developments within both artifacts, albeit presented with distinct perspectives reflective of their different historical contexts.

In *The Great Gatsby*, the American Dream is explored through Jay Gatsby's relentless pursuit of wealth and social status, which he believes are essential for reclaiming his lost love, Daisy Buchanan. Fitzgerald employs symbolism extensively, such as Gatsby's opulent parties and his elusive green light at the end of Daisy's dock, to depict the dream's hollowness and, ultimately, unattainability. The novel portrays the dream as corrupted by materialism and the socio-economic realities of 1920s America, illustrating the disillusionment felt by many during the era.

Contrastingly, *Forrest Gump* presents a more optimistic depiction of the American Dream. Forrest, a man with a low IQ, inadvertently influences significant cultural and historical events in America, achieving personal and financial success despite his limitations. The narrative style, combining humor and pathos, along with the film's use of historical footage, underscores the idea that the American Dream is accessible to all, regardless of one's background or abilities. The film suggests that integrity and perseverance are crucial to realizing the dream, presenting a redemptive perspective on American values.

Thus, both artifacts offer rich, albeit contrasting, explorations of the American Dream, providing a multifaceted understanding of this enduring theme within American culture.

Personal Connection

Reflecting on the theme of the American Dream as portrayed in *The Great Gatsby* and *Forrest Gump*, I find a personal connection to the narratives of aspiration and the varied

outcomes of pursuing one's dreams. The theme resonates with my life through my family's history and experiences, echoing the broader narrative of seeking success and fulfillment in America.

Much like that of *Forrest Gump*, my family's journey is characterized by humble beginnings and the belief that hard work and integrity can lead to achieving one's dreams, regardless of initial disadvantages; my grandparents migrated to the United States with little to their names, driven by the hope of a better life. Their stories, filled with challenges and triumphs, mirror Forrest's serendipitous journey through American history, where his straightforward and honest approach to life brings him unexpected success.

On the other hand, *The Great Gatsby* reflects the more exemplary aspects of the American Dream. (LACEB, 2018) I have observed—how ambition can become tainted by materialism and how pursuing an idealized goal can lead to disillusionment. In my community, I have seen many who, like Gatsby, strive for what they perceive as the pinnacle of success, often losing sight of their original values and relationships along the way.

These artifacts highlight the dual nature of the American Dream, and in studying them, I've gained a deeper understanding of its complexities and contradictions. This theme's exploration helps contextualize my family's experiences within the broader narrative of American aspiration and caution, enriching my perspective on what it truly means to achieve the American Dream.

References

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