

Rough Draft

Student's Name

Institutional Affiliation

4-4 Project Part One: Rough Draft

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.

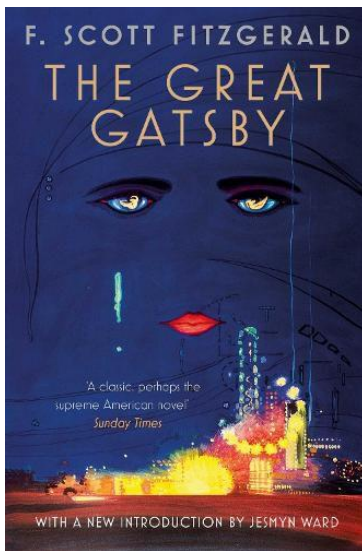
The second artifact is the film *Forrest Gump*, directed by Robert Zemeckis and released in 1994 (Britannica, 2024b). Unlike *The Great Gatsby*, *Forrest Gump* presents a more optimistic and resilient view of the American Dream. Through the protagonist's journey across historical American moments, the 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 have 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.

Profession

Exploring the American Dream through "*The Great Gatsby*" and "*Forrest Gump*" reveals its profound impact on education, particularly in American studies and social history. Educators can enhance curriculum development by using these artifacts to teach the evolution of the

American Dream, contrasting the 1920s disillusionment depicted in "The Great Gatsby" with the optimistic outlook in "Forrest Gump." This analysis helps students understand how societal values and historical contexts shape national ethos. A humanities-based approach also fosters critical thinking and empathy, encouraging students to consider the American Dream's implications on contemporary issues like social inequality. Ultimately, this theme is a vital tool in education for deepening understanding of American cultural and historical identity.

Humanities Resources

In researching the theme of the American Dream as it is portrayed in "The Great Gatsby" and "Forrest Gump," I utilized various humanities resources that provided a comprehensive exploration of this concept through different historical lenses.

- "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald, 1925)
- F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby: Variations on Forms and Themes* by R. LACEB (2018)
- "Forrest Gump" directed by Robert Zemeckis (1994)

Research: Historical Context

These resources included primary and secondary sources directly related to the artifacts and the theme, prioritizing materials with historical depth and critical analysis. The selection process involved using academic databases and library catalogs to find sources frequently cited or written by American literature and history experts. Despite the abundant available resources, careful consideration was given to choosing the most relevant and authoritative texts, ensuring a robust analysis of the American Dream.

"The Great Gatsby" mirrors the 1920s' affluence and disillusionment, revealing the era's obsession with wealth against deep-seated class issues. Conversely, "Forrest Gump," from the 1950s to the 1980s, showcases an evolving America where the Dream is seen as achievable and positive, reflecting changes in societal attitudes and historical events and influenced by Forrest's straightforward, optimistic approach to life's challenges and opportunities.

Research: Similarities and Differences

In "The Great Gatsby," the green light symbolizes the unattainable American Dream, reflecting its elusive and tragic nature. (1925). Contrastingly, "Forrest Gump" uses a floating feather to represent destiny and hope, suggesting an accessible and optimistic interpretation of the Dream. (Zemeckis, 1994). While Fitzgerald emphasizes the disillusionment and materialism that often accompanies the pursuit of the Dream, Zemeckis highlights its potential for redemption and personal success. These symbols effectively illustrate the different perspectives on the American Dream, showcasing how it can inspire optimism and a sense of unfulfillment depending on the societal context and individual experiences.

Research: Medium

Relationship between Cultural Artifacts and Historical Context

"The Great Gatsby" depicts the 1920s' extravagant yet disillusioning American Dream, highlighting materialism and social disparity. (LACEB, 2018). "Forrest Gump" spans the 1950s to 1980s, portraying an accessible, optimistic Dream influenced by historical shifts and Forrest's innocent perspective. (Britannica, 2024b).

Similarities and Differences in Symbolism and Theme

In "The Great Gatsby," the elusive green light symbolizes an unattainable American Dream, while "Forrest Gump's" floating feather suggests destiny and optimism. These symbols

reflect contrasting views of the Dream's accessibility and optimism versus Fitzgerald's portrayal of its unfulfillment. (Britannica, 2024b).

Analysis of the Medium and Its Contribution to the Artifacts' Meanings

Literature allows "The Great Gatsby" to symbolically explore deep character psychology and disillusionment. "Forrest Gump" employs visual storytelling, using historical footage to make the American Dream tangible and relatable, illustrating how different mediums influence the portrayal and perception of the American Dream.

Thesis Statement

"While 'The Great Gatsby' and 'Forrest Gump' explore the American Dream. They present contrasting visions."

Fitzgerald's novel depicts it as an elusive and ultimately destructive pursuit shaped by 1920s materialism. (Awal, 2023) Zemeckis's film portrays it as an attainable and optimistic reality, influenced by historical changes and individual integrity.

Audience

The ideal audience for analyzing the American Dream as depicted in "The Great Gatsby" and "Forrest Gump" would be students and scholars of American Studies, Cultural Studies, and History, particularly those focusing on the evolution of national identity and cultural values over time. Additionally, educators designing curricula on American history and literature would benefit from this comparative insight to enhance classroom discussions. This audience will appreciate the depth of historical and cultural analysis, helping them to understand and teach the complexities of the American Dream across different eras.

Message

To effectively communicate the analysis of the American Dream in "The Great Gatsby" and "Forrest Gump" to an audience of American Studies scholars, educators, and students, I will use academic language and terminology familiar to humanities scholars. This approach will involve detailed references to literary and film analysis techniques, historical contexts, and thematic interpretations. To aid understanding, I will include examples from the texts and films, such as direct quotes and scene analyses, ensuring the content is accessible and relatable.

References

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