

F. Scott Fitzgerald's, *The Great Gatsby*, was a very prolific and insightful novel about the "American Dream." There are key lessons etched into the fiber of this book that left me entranced with their significance. As I turned the pages, it seemed that I was viewing an instant replay of history. During the Roaring Twenties, many people felt achieving the "American Dream" was simultaneous with attaining wealth. However, money is not the only, nor the best, indicator of success. Fitzgerald alluded to the decline of American values throughout his novel and subtly implied that money and materialism are impediments to a fulfilling and happy life.

The Roaring Twenties was clearly a time of over consumption and waste. The wealthy lived a precarious lifestyle with wanton disregard for human dignity. It was a time of tremendous growth and prosperity. The Harding and Coolidge administrations gave way to great financial gain for the wealthy upper class while the blue-collar workers struggled to make ends meet. With the passage of the 18th amendment came Prohibition that opened a new avenue for greed and corruption. A sense of white supremacy accompanied by racial overtures started to prevail. The era was riddled with indulgent behavior and free living.

The Great Gatsby was the fictional "rags-to-riches" story of James Gatz, a poor Midwestern youth who transformed himself into Jay Gatsby, a "self-made" man who made his money in dealings with organized crime and bootlegging during Prohibition. He acquired wealth and prominence in society and lived a leisurely life of extravagance and fantasy. Even though Gatsby could afford all the luxuries of the elite, he was not held with the same esteem as the rich who had "old money."

Jay Gatsby's zest for material acquisitions was not based on greed or envy. Gatsby was not trying to elevate his social stature or mingle with the affluent when he threw lavish parties at his mansion. His sole motive was to entice Daisy into a chance meeting so he could lure her back into his life. This elusive dream had developed into a mania that swallowed him up —body and soul. His passion for Daisy was constant and unyielding, and for this reason, it was refreshingly pure.

Tom Buchanan was the epitome of a shallow and superficial man who obsessed over his privileged life. He was judgmental and discriminated against people based on class and race. He wanted it all—money, unchecked power, prestige, and physical gratification without accountability. He was mean-spirited and selfish and resented another man's success. Buchanan was not only lewd and promiscuous, but also outwardly proud of his affairs. Daisy was well aware of his vices but she was too conditioned to the exorbitant lifestyle that Tom provided to rebel. Daisy sold her soul to the devil and enjoyed her spoils. She was a mirage. She was unprincipled and had no depth of character.

Jay Gatsby achieved the American dream in a sense. He raised himself out of the impoverished world he inherited through his own resourcefulness and hard work. He was an eternal romantic who fell deeply in love with Daisy Fay. He found her beautiful and mesmerizing and perceived her as being pure and innocent. In life, reality is sobering and memories are often tangled and distorted by imagination and fantasy.

Gatsby changed his whole identity to engage Daisy. Even as Gatsby's dream was disintegrating in front of him, he clung desperately to the hope that his love would prevail and Daisy would return. Ironically, his death occurred due to mistaken identity. Daisy's demon finally emerges when she ruthlessly murdered her husband's lover, allowed Gatsby to assume responsibility for her sin, and showed no remorse over Gatsby's death.

"They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back to 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..." commented Nick Caraway, a narrator throughout the book.

Black Tuesday, October 29, 1929, was that day that dealt the final blow to the Roaring 20s. The stock market crashed and America was thrust into the Great Depression. The affluent tycoons who invested recklessly out of greed found themselves indigent. Their lives suddenly became as worthless as their stock. The only things they idolized, riches and glamor, evaporated in front of them.

The sudden loss of confidence in the economic future of America, which was a prelude to the crash, seems uncannily analogous to today. High consumer debt, ill-regulated markets, cutbacks in foreign trade, and growing wealth inequality all interacted to create a downward economic spiral of reduced spending and production. President Herbert Hoover's response to the crisis was pathetically inadequate.

In 1933, after years of incompetence from the Hoover administration, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was elected the 32nd President of the United States. FDR's New Deal helped improve the lives of people suffering from the events of the depression and set a precedent for the federal government to play a key role in the economic and social affairs of the nation.

Fitzgerald, through his book, stresses the point of living a good life. Through the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleberg, he emulates God's constant intercession and the significance of being accountable for your actions. He gives credence to the fact that happiness and achieving your dream does not require money or vast material wealth but rather through virtue and spirituality will you find happiness and contentment in the simple pleasures of life. My parents instilled this belief in me as a child and I have clung to it throughout my life. Above all, to yourself be true so you can rest easy at night and awake refreshed.

Fitzgerald's novel reinforced my belief that happiness is the key to success and the ability to attain it is achieving the "American Dream." Even though the book was published over 80 years ago, I found it very enlightening reading and reflective of our country's current plight.