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American Literature
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Great Gatsby Outline

I. Introduction

A. *Great Gatsby*

- i. Written by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- ii. Heavily influenced by his life
- iii. A thinly-veiled critique of the reckless lifestyle of the 1920s

B. Thesis

- i. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald makes many thinly veiled comments about the ultimate futility of the American Dream; the once true, yet still oft held-high promise of America is the inviting hook out of the sea of the word into the eventual air of a destroyed life.

II. Body Paragraph One

A. What is the American dream, and why did Fitzgerald hint at the fact that it was not real?

i. American Dream

- a) “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.” (Adams 214-215)

b) This quote shows how people

- c) The ability to be able to do what you want in life no matter what your initial stature is

ii. Critique

a) Reckless, bad lifestyle

- Many people try and achieve the American dream, but what they get is far worse than what they were aiming for
- Happy-go-lucky sort of lifestyle
- Constantly chasing down bigger and bigger goals for the future
 - There is no stopping point, so the dream eventually will consume everyone who dedicates their life to achieving it
- The people in the book do not live happy, comfortable lives
 - Tom and Daisy

- Failed marriage
- No real attraction – both cheat, and are held together solely by the bond of affluence
- They have no care for how their own lives affect others
- The pursuit of the American dream has jaded them to reality
- Gatsby
 - He has a failed love life
 - He is very rich, but the girl of his dreams is as well
 - They are fundamentally separated by the polarity of the *nouveau riche* and the old money
 - He has lived a fake life in order to try and get Daisy
 - He has a library full of books, but they have never been opened
 - (Metaphor for his life – a book never opened)

b) Causes many problems in society

- Gatsby is ultimately killed due to it
 - Daisy was driving when she hit Myrtle
 - Gatsby took the blame because he would do anything for Daisy
 - Tom sold out Gatsby to Wilson
 - Wilson killed Gatsby
- Tom and Daisy did not do anything to rectify the situation
 - Their interpretation of the American dream told them to run and avoid all the responsibility so that they would not have to deal with what they had done or why it was wrong
 - They simply hightailed it and left for somewhere else so that they would not have to deal with the responsibilities that they had to fix all of their problems
- No one really cared about Gatsby – he had estranged the world through his relentless pursuit
 - There were very few people at his funeral
 - Only the drunkard (Owl-Eyes), his father, Nick, and his servants were there
- The American Dream led people to utilize one another for their own purposes
 - When Gatsby was murdered, no one really bothered to try and help his legacy or achieve justice for what had happened
 - Everyone at his parties just wanted the parties and the money and the extravagance
 - They wanted no part in his personal life

c) Ultimately worthless

- In the end, it really meant nothing to all of the people in the book because they were all either dead or gone
- Gatsby, Wilson, and Myrtle were all dead
- Tom, Daisy, and Jordan were all gone because they did not really genuinely care for any of the people who they had to deal with

III. Body Paragraph 2

A. Fitzgerald's View of Love and Life

- i. What is it
 - a) He believed that love was ultimately futile and did not really help with life
 - b) Marriage did not mean anything anymore
 - c) Since traditional values had been rejected, the value of marriage was also rejected
 - It was simply a partnership maintained by a common factor
 - In the case of the novel, it was money
 - d) Life became a game of trying to have as much fun as possible
 - True feelings and important things no longer matter

B. Historical Context

- i. The 1920s were a time of rapid change
 - a) Lots of important societal changes went by
 - b) Traditional values were cast away by people in favor of more radical and newer ideals
 - c) People would tear down the barriers of class, race, and wealth in order to come together at speakeasies and drink
 - d) The GDP of America grew by \$30 billion
 - e) Life became complicated and confusing
 - People would become entangled in one another
 - The simple lifestyle of older America was gone
 - f) Relationships as a whole loosened up, and marriage was now considered more of an afterthought than a necessity
 - We see this in the theme of adultery and unfaithfulness that is so rampant in the story
 - Daisy cheats on Tom with Gatsby, while Tom is cheating on Daisy with Myrtle
 - They solely architect two relationships, and destroy them as well
 - Fitzgerald brings in his personal experience when he is talking about marriage
 - He was a poor and penniless person from an unknown family
 - This is a parallel to the story of Gatsby
 - He only was able to marry Zelda after he made his early fortune as a writer
 - She was “born royalty”, whereas Fitzgerald was *nouveau riche*, so there was a fundamental disconnect that ultimately led to them splitting up
 - Zelda also went crazy and was sent to a mental asylum
 - Fitzgerald moved to Europe and died due to excessive alcoholism

- g) People of the time no longer wanted to put time, effort, or authenticity into doing what they wanted to do
- People were more interested in immediate salvation
 - Many people decided to pursue unsavory tracts of work rather than try to do legitimate work

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