Representation of the American Dream in F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man

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Abstract

The American Dream started as a Puritan dream that they brought with them to the New World and developed into the belief that material prosperity is the criterion for success. This master's thesis analyzes the representation of the American Dream in two modern American novels. The selected novels *The Great Gatsby* by Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1925) and *Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison depict the American Dream in different social and racial contexts. *The Great Gatsby* shows the period of the Roaring Twenties in New York and the consumerist society of that period. *Invisible Man,* on the other hand, depicts America in the 1930s and 1940s in which an African American narrator searches for his identity in a society that is ruled by white power structures. This thesis focuses on Fitzgerald's characterization and criticism of the consumerism of the Roaring Twenties and on the themes of invisibility and racism in *Invisible Man*.

Keywords: American Dream, *The Great Gatsby*, *Invisible Man*, consumerism, racism

Contents

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explain the concept of the American Dream and to demonstrate its representation in two literary works, *The Great Gatsby* and *Invisible Man*. The authors, Francis Scott Fitzgerald and Ralph Ellison, offered their view on the American Dream within a particular context in American history. Even though *The Great Gatsby* and *Invisible Man* take place in different periods of American history from the 1920s to the 1940s, they both show the protagonists' disillusionment in their search for their individual vision of the American Dream. The story of *The Great Gatsby* depicts the period of the Roaring Twenties in New York with its lavish parties, extravagant lifestyles, and decadence of the wealthy members of the society. The influence of materialism is accentuated through the exuberant flaunting of wealth and power accompanied by the decay of a society that lacks moral values and empathy for others, especially for those less privileged. The story of *Invisible Man* is set during the 1930s and 1940s in the Unites States and it depicts a nameless African American narrator in search of his identity in a society that is blinded by racism, stereotypes, and prejudices. He wants to be visible and recognized as an individual but society, ruled by white power structures, does not allow him to be truly seen or heard. Both novels demonstrate the struggles faced by individuals as they strive to develop their identities and achieve their vision of the American Dream.

The first chapter of the paper focuses on the meaning and development of the American Dream through history. It shows how the Dream changed from the spiritual idea of the Puritans to today's consumerism. The second chapter shows the historical context of the 1920s, giving a brief overview of the cultural context of the period, followed by the representation of the American Dream in the novel *The Great Gatsby* in chapter three. This chapter analyzes the main characters of the novel, Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan, the opposition of the East and West, and the symbolism of the Green Light. Thereafter, chapter four depicts the cultural context from the 1930s and 1940s, when the novel *Invisible Man* takes place, and chapter five examines the representation of the American Dream in Ellison's novel. This part of the paper shows the invisibility of the narrator, the racism he encounters, his dream and moving to New York as a way of starting over. In conclusion, chapter six is dedicated to the analyses of the failure of the American Dream in both novels.

1. The American Dream

The origin of the American Dream stems from the first settlers in the New World, the Puritans. They were a group of English Protestants that wanted changes in the Church of England, which they believed should be "reformed and purified" (Jillson 17). They left to "build holy commonwealth that could serve as an example and an encouragement until their coreligionists across Europe could transform and purify their own societies" (Jillson 17-18). They believed they were the chosen people to serve God and that God would offer them salvation and eternal life. In addition, they believed that if they worked hard, God would provide them material means. However, their work is supposed to be for the benefit of God, their families, and the whole community, but not themselves. Even though the myth of the chosen people was created long ago, it has remained fundamental to American sense of self. It is also an essential part of their identity and literature.

John Winthrop, one of the founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, gave a sermon "A Model of Cristian Charity" in which he addressed the Puritan mission in America. He begins: "God Almighty in his holy and wise providence hath so disposed the condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and duty, others mean and in subjection" (qtd. in Cullen 23). God created these communities of different people for the good of the whole community and expects Puritans to uphold this order. John Winthrop's idea of "a city upon a hill" presents an ideal community which should provide a model for the rest of the world (24). Additionally, Cullen connects the Puritan dream of constructing an ideal society of believers with the American Dream. For Cullen, "a belief that the world was a corrupt place, but one that could be reformed" is something that is clearly American and enduring (15). The Puritan dream relies on the belief that if people try hard enough, things could be better than they are. This dream is further connected to the Declaration of Independence. Cullen states that most people have "'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' wired into [their] consciousness as the source code of the American Dream" (36). The problem is whether these rights were really guaranteed to all people or only to some, as was the case with African Americans, who were slaves and thus could not even exercise these rights. Even though the American Dream should offer everyone an opportunity to succeed, it has always been less available to many groups of Americans that continue to be oppressed and marginalized.

From the initial meaning of the American Dream given by the Puritans, that was mostly tied to faith and spiritual needs, the American Dream changes in the nineteenth century, when interest shifted to stories of poor boys who managed to create financial empires with only their courage and

talent. These tales created the idea that anyone could succeed. An important "bootstrap-pulling figure is steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, whose regularly published capitalist sermons . . . are tiresome catalogs of implemented plans and surmounted challenges, all wrapped in a complacently moral tone" (Cullen 60). Another important author of "rags to riches" stories is Horatio Alger Jr. His stories encouraged Americans to believe that anyone can become successful and rich if they work hard. President Andrew Jackson promised that "government was to clear the field for competition and ensure that neither privilege nor prejudice affected the results as men pursued their dreams"; however, opportunities were still only offered to white men (Jillson 83).

The first literary reference to the American Dream can be found in James Truslow Adams' novel from 1931, *Epic of America*. The phrase "American Dream" is mentioned over thirty times in the novel. Adams described it as "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" (404). He further explains the possibilities for its achievement by stating:

> 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 motorcars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and 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. (404)

Adams emphasizes that the American dream is not just about attaining great wealth, but that emphasis should be placed on the possibility that each person, regardless of their origins or status, will be able to live up to their full potential through both a spiritual and material development. However, the question remains, how true this is in real life.

On the other hand, a different meaning of the Dream was expressed by Martin Luther King Jr., one of the important figures of the twentieth century who headed the African American civil rights movement. He highlighted the Dream of racial equality, and in one of his speeches, he referred to the American Dream as "a dream yet unfulfilled. A dream of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a land where men no longer argue that the color of a man's skin determines the content of his character" (qtd. in Cullen 126).

Another definition of the American Dream comes from Jennifer Hochschild. She defines it "as a set of tenets about achieving success" (15). Hochschild stated, that President Bill Clinton's words perfectly describe the American Dream: "if you work hard and play by the rules you should be given

a chance to go as far as your God-given ability will take you" (qtd. in Hochschild 18). All people, regardless of their background, are at liberty to go after the dream, with a "reasonable anticipation though not the promise, of success" (Hochschild 18). Furthermore, rocker Bruce Springsteen said in an interview: "I don't think the American Dream was that everyone was going to make . . . a billion dollars, but it was that everyone was going to have an opportunity and the chance to live a life with some decency and a chance for some self-respect" (qtd. in Jillson 6-7). What these views of the American Dream have in common is that people who work hard are not promised to become rich, but that they will have an opportunity to make something of themselves and fulfill their potential to the best of their ability.

When it comes to the American Dream today, the Dream is a secular one. It is the Dream of accumulating wealth fast, and it does not praise hard labor:

> This dream does not celebrate the idea of hard work, instead enshrining effortless attainment as the essence of its appeal. Which is not necessarily to say that applied intelligence and effort don't play a role. Very often they do, sometimes far more than these dreamers would like to acknowledge to themselves, let alone anyone else. But it's the rewards that are least strenuously earned that are the most savored. (Cullen 160)

The value of the effort invested in the business is not recognized, but what can be obtained faster and easier is valued more.

The above overview has shown that the meaning of the American Dream has changed through the years as the society changed. However, the problem of equal opportunity for everyone remains an issue. Jane Flex stated that "the normative American citizen has always been a white man, and though others have won rights, he remains so" (qtd. in Jillson 8). Since American society has mainly been hierarchical, white, Protestant property owners have always had an advantage. According to Jillson, "the American dream insists that this must, and must increasingly, be a country in which opportunity is available to all and honest hard work yields the chance to succeed and thrive" (5). Even though the original idea states that a person can achieve their version of success no matter where they come from, this has not always been true.

2. The Historical Context of the 1920s

The novel *The Great Gatsby* is set during the period of the 1920s or the Roaring Twenties. This period is considered as the start of the Modern period, and it was full of social and political change. Fitzgerald wrote that when "the uncertainties of 1919 were over–there seemed little doubt about what was going to happen–America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history and there was going to be plenty to tell about it. The whole golden boom was in the air–its splendid generosities, its outrageous corruptions and the tortuous death of the old America" (qtd. in Jillson 161). It seemed that this period generated immense wealth and offered opportunities to many.

As there were less people working on farms, this era was "dominated by business interests" ("Modern Period: 1910-1945" 844). Small businesses developed and made way for more corporate businesses and, as President Coolidge aptly put it, "the chief business of the American people is business. The man who builds a factory builds a temple. . . . The man who works there worships there" (qtd. in "Modern Period: 1910-1945" 845). Businessmen were seen as "creative, daring and public spirited" (Moore 106). Nevertheless, the welfare of the working people was not considered important by people in charge, and uniting workers into trade unions was not supported. As businesses expanded, the economy came before the interests of workers, and "the workplace had become increasingly impersonal" (107). Big businesses prospered during this period while, on the other hand, farmers felt losses compared to the past: "New methods of transporting, processing and storing food meant that wheat and corn prices dropped . . . the increasing mechanization of farming created worldwide markets–and worldwide competition" (106). This was also the era of alcohol prohibition. According to the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, "the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors" was banned ("The Roaring Twenties"). This ban, however, caused the development of the illegal alcohol industry, bootleggers, and organized crime: "Prohibition sponsored a culture all its own, as it produced or enhanced the visibility of speakeasies, bathtub gin, and organized crime" ("Modern Period: 1910-1945" 847). The root of this ban came from the temperance movement that began in the nineteenth century, trying to fight against alcoholism, family violence, and saloons (847). "Studies were done that pointed to liquor as the cause of high crime rates, divorce, child neglect, low productivity, public health problems, and declining church attendance" (Streissguth 28). In his novel *The Great Gatsby*, F. S. Fitzgerald illustrated how the economic and social changes impacted the social conventions, people's dreams, and their moral values.

The Roaring Twenties brought wealth to a large number of people and created a "consumer society" ("The Roaring Twenties"). Mass consumerism offered goods that were supposed to make everyday life easier, like ready-to-wear clothes, electric refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, etc. Another frequently bought appliance was the radio, which became a big hit during the 1920s. Additionally, one of the important consumer products was the car, more precisely Henry Ford's Model T, which was the beginning of the automobile industry and its economy ("The Roaring Twenties"). New commodities, like cinema, radio, and cars brought novelty to a large number of people. Simultaneously, jazz music and dancing became very popular, which is why the period is often referred to as the Jazz Age. F. Scott Fitzgerald is considered to be the one to introduce this term in his 1931 short story "Echoes of the Jazz Age." He was partly referring to the popularity of jazz music, but the term Jazz Age also had a deeper meaning for him: "the word jazz in its progress toward respectability has meant first sex, then dancing, then music. It is associated with a state of nervous stimulation, not unlike that of big cities behind the lines of a war" (qtd. in Shumway 132). According to Streissguth,

> African Americans had invented jazz, but white Americans began to take it up after the war for listening, for drinking, and for dancing. Jazz signified revolt against sweet-tempered parlor music and polite entertainment, and defiance against Prohibition and Puritanism of all kinds. The young, white middle class adopted black music as a badge of rebellion against the strictures of an earlier time, discredited now by the disastrous war and the corruption of European nations once held up as cultural models. (116)

Jazz music was important not only for African Americans but also for the whole community as it was a popular source of entertainment in jazz clubs.

Another important issue in the 1920s was the position of and possibilities for women. They were granted the right to vote in 1920 with the Nineteenth Amendment. This was a "culmination of a long struggle that had begun almost eighty years before" ("Modern Period: 1910-1945" 845). Their other concerns were also brought to attention:

> "[W]women's liberation" – whether the greater access to education or work, in the professions staffed by women since the late nineteenth century, would finally be translated into wider opportunities for self and sexual expression, and from the cycle of pregnancy, childbirth, and family rearing that continued to entrap many poor and working women. ("Modern Period: 1910-1945" 842)

Even though there were more women working than ever before, their wages were lower than those of men. Women worked as nurses, librarians, teachers, and social workers, but medicine and law, which were high-income jobs, were still offered only to men. "Women were barred from the skill trades . . . and . . . as many as forty percent of working women, especially blacks, were engaged in household labor" ("Modern Period: 1910-1945" 845). The new consumer goods, like vacuums and washing machines, did help in reducing the women's work burden but only with the aim of giving them more time for other household chores and childcare. Women were the target audience in the advertisement of these appliances, as well as advertisements for cosmetics and clothes. However, tradition was accompanied by change as "[b]irth control was becoming more widely available, at least for more privileged women, which helped limit family size and allowed women the freedom to explore their sexuality without facing the consequences of unwanted pregnancies" (Pruitt). Also, one of the prominent symbols of this period is certainly the flapper, a young, liberated woman with short hair who drinks and smokes. These women wore shorter skirts, loved to dance in jazz clubs, and presented an "embodiment of female sexuality" (846). Along with the changes in dressing and behavior, dating and marriage also changed during this period. Before, men who were interested in dating a woman had to first come to her house, meet her parents, and be subjected to a close examination of their behavior. "In the 1920s, the gentleman's house call was replaced by an evening date ('going out') – leaving the home, away from supervision, with enclosed cars transporting couples to restaurants, carnivals, private parties, dance halls, and darkened movie theaters" (Streissguth 43). Attitudes to marriage and divorce also changed; marriage lost its stability and the stigma of divorce disappeared as a result of newfound freedom and experimentation (43).

In addition to women, another group of people was also marginalized and discriminated against. These were the immigrants who were not well received in America. There were great numbers of people coming from around the world, but they were not welcomed by the government or other citizens. The vice president Calvin Coolidge declared that "America must be kept American" followed by laws limiting the number of immigrants from South-eastern Europe and forbidding immigration from Asian countries (qtd. in Moore 128). Immigrants also worked in poor conditions and received lower wages. According to Moore, the anxiety about outsiders "was given pseudo-scientific credence by a series of books and studies claiming to prove that certain 'races' were physically and mentally inferior to others" (123).

Besides the immigrants, with the revival of the Ku Klux Klan, African Americans were also not well accepted, as well as people who were not Protestants. Led by the movie *The Birth of a Nation* and advocating white supremacy, the Ku Klux Klan did everything they could to demonstrate their

intolerance: “local businesses were bribed to boycott Jews, blacks and Catholics; non-Klan homes and shops were burned; bootleggers, immigrants, blacks or even people sympathetic to them were flogged, acid-burned or occasionally killed” (141).

3. The Representation of the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*

The novel *The Great Gatsby* was written and published in 1925. When the novel first came out, it was not considered successful, as it was not sold in many copies, and it was not well received by critics either. It was only after the author's death that the novel experienced its success and has since been a part of high school curricula. The novel belongs to the period of modernism in American literature, depicting modernist elements like corruption of the American Dream, alienation and restlessness of the characters, as well as breaking society's rules. It is set in the Jazz Age, and it takes place near New York City. The representation of the American Dream in this novel is visible through the emphasis on the importance of wealth and social status, which is in line with Cullen's definition of accumulating wealth fast without appreciating hard work (Cullen 160). That can be seen through characters of Jay Gatsby, Daisy and Tom Buchanan, and the narrator, Nick Carraway. Divisions of society from East and West and the valley of ashes show that only those born into esteemed and wealthy families are accepted in high society, and those who newly acquired their wealth are denied equal social status. Moreover, the characters are fixed solely on material things, while good moral values and feelings are not valued. In addition, the green light, as it appears several times, serves as the symbol of the American Dream and the way it is just out of reach. Fitzgerald's criticism of the materialistic perspective of his characters is visible in the depiction of their unfortunate and sad lives as they are unable to feel happiness despite their material accomplishments. Characters like Tom and Daisy do not feel happy even though they have wealth and reputation; their possessions do not bring them the fulfillment in life as they both seek happiness in affairs and ignore each other's bad traits and behavior.

3.1 Jay Gatsby

To understand Gatsby's actions, we need to become familiar with his life principles, which are similar to those of the Puritans. He believes he is a "son of God" and the chosen one (Fitzgerald 76). He has been a very hardworking person, ever since he was a little boy. Gatsby's father shows Nick a book he had when he was a boy, in which his schedule is on the back cover:

Rise from bed … … … … … . 6.00 A.M.

Dumbbell exercise and wall-scaling … … 6.15-6.30”

Study electricity, etc … … … … 7.15-8.15”

Work … … … … … … … 8.30-4.30 P.M.

Baseball and sports … … … … . 4.30-5.00”

Practice elocution, poise and how to attain it 5.00-6.00”

Study needed inventions… … … . . 7.00-9.00” (Fitzgerald 173)

He is disciplined and persistent in his idea to improve himself and not afraid to put in the work. Since he followed the Puritan idea, he had a reasonable expectation of fulfilling the Dream.

He started as a poor young man working “the south shore of Lake Superior as a clam-digger and a salmon-fisher” (76), but his path to success begins when he begins to work for Dan Cody, a millionaire who teaches him everything he needed to know about being an aristocratic gentleman. James Gatz is very much impressed with Dan and his wealthy possessions; to James “resting on his oars and looking up at the railed deck, the yacht represented all the beauty and glamour in the world” (100). At this point, his American dream shifts from his Puritan nature and becomes primarily materialistic. He wants to distance himself from the old life and embrace his new Dream, so he changes his name to Jay Gatsby at the age of seventeen. He wants his name to fit his new lifestyle and to sound more aristocratic. His comfortable life with Cody lasts only five years, until Dan’s death. After that, Gatsby is left without money but with the knowledge gathered from Dan on how to be an aristocratic gentleman and with the habit of not enjoying alcohol, as “in the course of gay parties women used to rub champagne into his hair” (100).

When Gatsby purchases a mansion on West Egg, he throws parties every week. For a while, he is able to attract the upper-class society through the veil of mystery surrounding his origins and great wealth. According to Allen, Gatsby’s past is shadowed in myth; and the other characters endlessly speculate about him (105). Chase describes Gatsby as a “mythic figure” (163). There is a sense of mystery relating to the character of Gatsby, so guests at his party speculate about him: “somebody told me they thought he killed a man once . . . it’s more that he was a German spy during the war . . . it couldn’t be that, because he was in the American army during the war” (Fitzgerald 44). It is even suspected that “he’s a nephew or a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm’s. That’s where all his money

comes from" (Fitzgerald 32). Gatsby goes so far as to claim that he is an Oxford man, as a part of a family tradition. When Tom asks him about this, he says: "it was in nineteen-nineteen, I only stayed five months" (129). Although he does his best to make sure that people do not find out about his illegal ways of becoming rich, there are multiple situations where people speculate about him being a bootlegger, especially because of the fact that he was a newly rich person: "Who is this Gatsby anyhow? . . . Some big bootlegger?" (107). Gatsby desperately wants people to believe that he comes from a wealthy high society family because disclosure of his acquiring wealth through alcohol during Prohibition would ruin his chances of achieving his goal.

3.2 Daisy Buchanan as Jay Gatsby's Representation of the American Dream

Gatsby's dream includes winning Daisy over. When he initially meets Daisy, he becomes captivated by her beauty and her wealth. She was popular with the soldiers and relished in their attention. As a military officer Gatsby is temporarily accepted in Daisy's upper-class society and his Dream becomes associated with getting Daisy and her status. She is part of the "old money," born into a family of respected and wealthy members of the society. Even though Daisy does not wait for him and marries Tom, Gatsby is not discouraged from attempting to gain her favor and decides even more resolutely to get rich and win her back. He goes so far as to become her neighbor, Gatsby says: "I'm right across from you" (Fitzgerald 118). Gatsby feels that the only way he can compete with Tom Buchanan is by impressing Daisy with his wealthy possessions and lavish parties. His observation that "her voice is full of money" shows his awareness of her need to be with someone that can offer her financial stability (120). Tom is the one who gives her a pearl necklace, who can enable her to spend "a year in France for no particular reason" and then move to the East Egg or "wherever people played polo and were rich together" (6). Daisy represents the true American Dream for Jay Gatsby.

Daisy is the embodiment of the rich life Gatsby wants to obtain (Allen 102). He shows off his wealth with different possessions, for example, his shirts. While he throws countless shirts on a pile, Daisy is so moved by this display of wealth that she starts to cry: "It makes me sad because I've never seen such – such beautiful shirts before" (Fitzgerald 92). Moyer argues that Daisy is "moved not so much by the shirts themselves as by the intense emotion with which Gatsby has invested them" (221). Daisy's reaction shows how important wealth and stability are for her. She is easily impressed with nice things. She is also impressed with Gatsby's demonstration, his intense emotions and

movements while showing his home and possessions. He evaluates his house through Daisy's reactions; it is very important for him to see Daisy very impressed by extravagant things. This is supposed to persuade her that Gatsby is able to give her financial stability and the lifestyle she is used to.

Gatsby is unrealistic when it comes to his expectations with Daisy. He wants to have again what he had with Daisy five years ago:

> "Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!" . . .
>
> "I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before," he said, nodding determinedly. "She'll see."
>
> He talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was. (Fitzgerald 110)

Moyer states that "for Gatsby, the future has become simply an avenue leading back to the past – or, more specifically, leading back to the glittering possibilities the past once seemed to offer" (217). Gatsby not only wants to be with Daisy but also wants everything to be like it was when they first met and before she married Tom. He wants to go back to the magical time when Daisy was his and had not even met Tom nor married him. He is unrealistic in his belief that he can recapture their romantic past and does not fully accept the reality to which he cannot return. There is also a sense of security and acceptance he felt during the past that he now wants to regain. Moyer describes Gatsby's love for Daisy as "transcendental" and states: "it is not just Daisy Gatsby wants, but something beyond her: he wants that moment when life seemed equal to his extraordinary capacity for wonder, and that moment is indissolubly wedded to Daisy herself, to materiality" (218). Gatsby's plans for the future are centered around the idea that he can relive his memories with Daisy, and he completely ignores Daisy's present relationship with her husband, their baby, and everything else happening in their life and it is evident that Daisy's present life is completely irrelevant to him. He is consumed with his memories and idealistic expectations that he ignores everything else. Gatsby is idolizing Daisy and negating her sexual experience with Tom. "She dressed in white, and had a little white roadster" is a type of virginal description that is associated with Daisy (Fitzgerald 75). According to Posnock, she is also "inseparable from the objects that surround her."

Gatsby says to Tom: "'She never loved you, do you hear?' he cried. 'She only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me. It was a terrible mistake, but in her heart she never loved anyone except me!'" (Fitzgerald 100). In this attempt to hurt Tom and convince him that Daisy never loved him, Gatsby shows understanding of Daisy's desire to be with someone who is rich, but he does not see that the idea of the American Dream is very different for him and Daisy. Daisy's Dream has always been about material things, unlike Gatsby, who became rich to be able to offer her financial stability and win her love. Furthermore, the narrator, Nick Carraway, represents Daisy in a negative way, as a neglectful mother, a dishonest person, and someone who is easily impressed by shallow matters such as material possessions. This all makes evident that Daisy represents the corruption of the American Dream.

3.3 The Opposition between the East and the West

The narrator, Nick, represents the moral center of the book. He sticks to the advice he got from his father: "'Whenever you feel like criticizing any one,' he told me, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had'" (1). He is the one who offers recounts of characters' actions and describes the events. It is quite noticeable that he is more inclined to Gatsby than others. He considers Gatsby his friend, and he is the one who takes care of everything after Gatsby's death. Nick "decided to go East and learn the bond business" (3). He became a broker to make his life more interesting, because "the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe" (3). He is also the one who understood how corrupted the society really is. The narrator expresses his view of the differences between the East and the West: "I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all – Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life" (Fitzgerald 176). The East represents the excitement and decadent lifestyle which looked very appealing to Tom, Gatsby, Daisy, Jordan, and Nick. They are later disappointed when they realize that this was only an illusion of a good life.

In contrast to Nick, Tom Buchanan is wealthier but far less intelligent and moral. He is much more careless in his speech and basically a violent man with racial prejudice against people of color. He read a book that convinced him that he is of Nordic race and that his ancestors are responsible for all important achievements. Tom says: "It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these

other races will have control of things" (Fitzgerald 13). According to Habib et al., "the social class structure and dominance for Tom is a traditional birthright which he possesses and exudes in front of others" (35). He possesses hatred towards Gatsby even though he is of the same race. Gatsby, however, belongs to the group of people called the "new money," who were not born rich, but acquired their wealth. Tom feels threatened by them and does not consider them equals. He also confronts Gatsby about the illegal way he became rich. Tom believes being rich and belonging to the "old money" excuses his violent behavior, extramarital affair, and hatred towards other people.

Tom exemplifies the emphasis on the materialism of the society and its ability to become corrupt. This materialism is also visible in the characters of Daisy and Jordan. According to Possnock, "the moral, emotional, and spiritual chaos unleashed by money is at the center of *The Great Gatsby*" (204). Money plays an important role in this novel. Rule-Maxwell states that the novel's focus is on "American materialism that is not limited to Gatsby's character, but applicable to the larger culture of consumption developing across the United States that both derives from and makes possible America's superpower" (60). Many of the characters are driven by money and greed. According to Moyer, Daisy and Tom Buchanan "represent an historical dead end" (221). Their class is influenced by the materialistic ideas and ways of the East Egg that they are losing the spiritual ideas that once shaped the American Dream and the pursuit of money. Nick describes them as "a rotten crowd" and says to Gatsby: "You're worth the whole damn bunch put together" (Fitzgerald 154). The true indicator of Daisy's and Tom's character is visible in the fact that none of them show up at Gatsby's funeral. When Gatsby organized lavish parties, a lot of people came; however, only Nick proved to be his friend in the end.

Completely opposite from the glamour of the East Egg is "a valley of ashes — a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air" (Fitzgerald 23). This gray land between the West Egg and New York represents a decline of the American spirit. Nick foreshadows it at the very beginning: "it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men" (2). Corruptive materialism is once again visible, this time in form of the waste land in the middle of the American Dream. This foul dust also has an important role in the lives of George and Myrtle Wilson. As they live closely to the valley of ashes and George fixes old dusty cars, they represent "the resources of human energy and hope that are drained in order to feed the materialistic orgy which American transcendentalism has inevitably become" (Moyer 224). George Wilson spends his time

working on a “dust-covered wreck of a Ford” and “wiping his hands on a piece of waste” (Fitzgerald 25). His work revolves around keeping people like Tom Buchanan happy and meeting their needs to be able to sell them a car and keep the business going. It is, however, a car that later costs him the life of his wife, Myrtle. She attempts to stop the car but is run over by a member of the materialistic class, Daisy. Her death shows how human resources are wasted in pursuit of and exploited by materialism (Moyer 224).

3.4 The Green Light

Another symbol of the American Dream is the Green Light that Gatsby observes on Daisy’s dock. The narrator describes Gatsby’s actions as he looks at the light to feel a closeness to Daisy: “He stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward-and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock” (Fitzgerald 20-21).

This light gives him hope that he can be with Daisy again and achieve his dreams. However, the green light also represents his inability to reach the Dream. He is trying to reach and grab the light as he is trying to fulfill his Dream. Daisy is so close to him, as is the light on her dock, but still out of reach, just like the American Dream. The importance of the green light is stated when Gatsby is showing Daisy his mansion:

> “If it wasn't for the mist we could see your home across the bay,” said Gatsby. “You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock.”
>
> Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one. (Fitzgerald 92-93)

Gatsby begins to understand the “colossal” importance of the light as it fades away. Although he has Daisy so close to him physically, the light now may vanish. It appears he likes the fantasy of being with Daisy more than actually being with her in person. This shows his affinity for dreaming and

admiring objects from afar, and when he can touch them or possess them, it is not so appealing any more.

In the end, Nick thinks about how the first settlers must have felt when they first saw the New World. He compares Gatsby's fascination with having Daisy so close but still out of reach with the impressions and expectations of the settlers with the New World. The narrator understands that despite Gatsby's disappointment, he still believed in the endless possibilities the green light offers. However, Nick indicates the change in the American Dream. There are no such opportunities that are offered to everyone; hard work is not enough to be able to succeed and be respected. Nevertheless, he offers his final words of hope that the future will be better, as he says: "Gatsby believed in the green light, the organistic future that year by year recedes before us. It eludes us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther . . . And one fine morning — So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (Fitzgerald 180).

4. The Historical Context of the 1930s and 1940s

The beginning of 1930 was challenging for the citizens of America, with a large number of people unemployed after the stock market crash in 1929. This was the period of the Great Depression. The crisis hit everyone, so the gap between those who were poor and those who were middle class disappeared: "And where once . . . middle-class Americans might reflexively have considered lazy anyone who was unemployed . . . in the 1930s they increasingly saw the suffering millions among them as people much like themselves, who had worked to build the country that seemed now to be falling apart" (Rauchway 39).

This helped reduce differences between people and connect them in a common misfortune. This was a very difficult period since unemployment rose so much that in 1932 about 11.5 million Americans were out of work, and those people that were able to keep their jobs, often had their hours and pay reduced (39). Those employers that were hiring had a large number of potential workers to choose from so "they hired or kept on white men with work experience, leaving the young and old, the women, and the African Americans disproportionately represented among the unemployed" (44). Even though employers hired fewer married women, they still intensively looked for work so that they could support the family, especially if their husband did not work. When it comes to African Americans, they "had on average moved to cities less recently and had less opportunity to develop careers as skilled laborers than white Americans" but that was not the only reason why they were not hired as much (46). African Americans were the last to be hired but also the first to be fired and substituted with white workers.

This era was very important for the development and expansion of the media and entertainment. The radio was very popular as it was a distraction from everyday problems: "nearly every American family, however poor, owned at least a cheap set and had begun to receive news, listen to favorite commentators . . . hear popular music, grand opera, radio plays, and comedy acts" (Broooks et al. 1808). Listening to the radio was free and it was a good pastime for the listeners. Swing music was also important as it "encouraged people to cast aside their troubles and dance" ("The 1930s History"). The popularity of movies grew, and they became the main entertainment for the masses. Movies also became a means by which people were educated, "indirectly suggesting to the average American man or woman how a house should be furnished, how a meal should be served, how to make love; and introducing them to remote and exotic settings: the world of the gangster, the

movie star, the millionaire, the Hungarian countess; of Nero, the decadent Roman emperor, and Blackbeard the pirate" (1808).

With the new president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and his "New Deal" things started to change. His reforms made lives of Americans a bit easier, but they still did not end the Great Depression. However, Roosevelt introduced acts that were supposed to improve workers' rights and people's lives in general:

> The National Labor Relations Act (1935) . . . gave workers the right to form unions and bargain collectively for higher wages and fairer treatment. The Social Security Act (also 1935) guaranteed pensions to some older Americans, set up a system of unemployment insurance and stipulated that the federal government would help care for dependent children and the disabled. ("The 1930s History")

Finally, American engagement in World War II spurred industry and thus ended the Great Depression. Although life became easier for many people after the Great Depression, problems of African Americans still remained. They were free but segregated according to Jim Crow Laws: "segregated waiting rooms in bus and train stations were required, as well as water fountains, restrooms, building entrances, elevators, cemeteries, even amusement-park cashier windows" ("Jim Crow Laws History"). All of these forms of segregation limited opportunities for the African Americans, especially in the South, where these types of laws were rigorously implemented. In the North, these same laws were not implemented to the same extent as in the South, which led to the great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North in search of jobs and new opportunities. According to Haugen:

> After the war, the American economy thrived, and economic opportunities for African Americans increased with the new demand for industrial workers. Wages increased, and most worker's standards of living improved. The need for industrial workers in large cities such as Chicago, New York, and ST-Louis spurred the movement of blacks from their agricultural jobs in the South to the new opportunities in the North. (11)

Even though the North offered a better life for African Americans, they still experienced discrimination at their workplace or when buying a house. However, there was some progress so that while searching for new opportunities, African Americans also experienced a new sense of liberty in their life, which ultimately led to the development of the civil rights movement.

During this period, black culture became more visible; jazz and blues music became more popular. It was the golden age of African American literature, music, art, and stage performance. New York City's Harlem was still the center of African American culture that it became in the 1920s during the movement known as the Harlem Renaissance

5. The Representation of the American Dream in *Invisible Man*

Invisible Man is a novel by Ralph Ellison, published in 1952. This is the only published novel by Ellison, and it is recognized as one of the great novels of African American literature. Its importance is also in the fact that it gives a complete view of the African American experience during this period. The novel *Invisible Man* belongs to the Modern period of American literature and is often described as Bildungsroman as it depicts the self-development of the narrator during his search for identity and visibility in white America. It is written in first-person point of view and describes the events of a young African American man from the time that he graduates high school until he moves to New York and takes part in demonstrations in Harlem. This novel focuses on many of the social and psychological issues that African Americans encountered in the early twentieth century. The narrator's journey shows his search for identity, racism he encounters, and his attempt to find his place in society. The representation of the American Dream is visible through the narrator's search for identity and his struggle to find his place in society and fight invisibility, which is motivated by the idea that every person, regardless of gender, social status, or background, can realize their American Dream according to their ability or achievement (Adams 404). Nevertheless, the narrator encounters obstacles on the way because of his race. His dreams of being a leader to the black community and fighting for social equality encourage the narrator to continue in his aspirations and hope for a better society. Finally, he sees New York as a place to fulfill his American Dream.

5.1 Invisibility

At the center of *Invisible Man* is a nameless young African-American narrator who is in search of his identity. He says about people who he encounters: "when they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination-indeed, everything and anything except me" (Ellison 3). He appears invisible to people around him and describes them as being blind. The narrator explains that this is not a physical invisibility but the ignorance of the people to acknowledge him because of the color of his skin. According to Mohammad, "invisibility is indeed a metaphor of the black America" (182). The world works in such a way that it strips the narrator of any identity and leaves him invisible to others. The society reduces him almost to "a non-entity" and in such a way renounces his place in the community (182). A person's name is the first thing that gives someone

an identity; however, the narrator remains nameless throughout the story, accentuating the lack of identity. Lane stated his view of African Americans identity and being recognized as follows:

> Ellison's fundamental assumption in *Invisible Man* was that black people became recognizable only when they suppressed their real self and conformed to emasculating parodies of the white man's self- contradictory image of them. In their twisted psyches, white Americans had defined black men as violence-prone yet childlike, docile yet unpredictable, oppressed yet happy, impulsive yet stoic, primitive yet religious, and supermasculine yet impotent in contact with whites. (65-66)

African Americans are not recognized by other people if they do not adjust to the expectations of others. Their identity appears to be not something they deserve and have a right to, but something that is given to them by society.

The incident where the protagonist accidentally bumps into a man, who then insults him, proves to be another situation when he is invisible to others. This incident makes the narrator so angry that he pulls a knife on the man and demands that he apologize. He is so angry that he has to collect himself before he slits this man's throat. The next day, the narrator sees the story in Daily News, which describes the mugging this man apparently experienced. The newspaper article points out that the man was "mugged by an invisible man" (5). When he looks back on this, he regrets not taking action: "I should have used my knife to protect the higher interests of society. Some day that kind of foolishness will cause us tragic trouble" (14).

At the Liberty Paint factory, where the narrator works, he experiences the symbolism of whiteness and blackness. He is supposed to add black drops in the white paint, which become invisible, but he adds the wrong solution by mistake, so that the blackness stays visible. In this way, he "sabotages the national whitewash" (qtd. in Lieber). The blackness is supposed to dissolve in the whiteness in such a way that it is no longer visible, and the same is expected of the African Americans. Their traditions and cultures are not supposed be recognized and valued. On the contrary, they are expected to blend in the society and get lost in the crowd.

The narrator recognizes himself and his situation also in the music he listens to. While he is staying underground, he is listens to the music of Louis Armstrong:

> Sometimes now I listen to Louis while I have my favorite dessert of vanilla ice cream and sloe gin. I pour the red liquid over the white mound, watching it glisten and the vapor rising as Louis bends that military instrument into a beam of lyrical sound. Perhaps I like Louis

> Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he's unaware that he is invisible. And my own grasp of invisibility aids me to understand his music. (Ellison 8)

He appreciates Armstrong's music and recognizes invisibility, which is present in his music. He listens to the song "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue" quite often to fill the silence that surrounds him (8). He also thinks of the reasons for his invisibility, why the color of his skin is the way it is. During this time, the narrator rethinks his whole life and existence.

Ousby argues that the narrator "is invisible in that both blacks and whites ignore his individuality, fitting him into their stereotypes" (333). The narrator is denied any type of individuality he would have if people in fact recognized him and gave him a chance to introduce himself. However, he learns how to make the most of it. People mistakenly assume he is Rinehart, "the faceless man of many faces, lover, hipster, number man, and revivalist preacher, who moves through the undergrowth of the Harlem jungle, on his pointed toes, incarnating crime, imagination, a life of stealthy guises and possibilities" (Hassan 172). The narrator then understands the infinite opportunity of freedom and possibility he would get with being Rinehart and hiding in plain sight. He then decides to dress up to resemble him and adopt his identity. He takes on his whole persona and even thinks of ideas how Rinehart would solve a problem of getting information about intentions of the members of the Brotherhood and decides he would try to get close to one of the women connected to them. He enjoys taking on the role of Rinehart, even though he says he was forced to use methods that Rinehart would use (Ellison 501).

However, when the identity of Rinehart does not help him fight Ras and the dark plans of the Brotherhood, he flees to the underground, at the last moment escaping lynching. During his time underground, the narrator feels abandoned, hungry, loses any sense of time, and has terrible dreams. Feeling angry because of everything that happened and his current state, he takes a match and burns all contents of his briefcase, all his documents and other important things: "he burns his high-school diploma, Brother Tod Clifton's paper Sambo doll, the recommendation letters given by Dr. Bledsoe, and the slip of paper upon which his Brotherhood name was written by Brother Jack. He burns everything except himself and his invisibility" (Mohammad 182-183). With this burning of all of the things that had any meaning in his life, the narrator wants to "erase" his old self and start afresh. He is trying to get out of the disorganized situation he finds himself in to be able to start again.

The narrator is convinced that he is invisible because the world is full of blind people, and they are the ones who cannot see his true personality. Despite the fact that he is able to accept his

invisibility during the course of the story, later he abandons this tactic. The narrator realizes the reality of his life, all of the illusions he had about other people. He understands that he was used by dr. Bledsoe, Norton, the school superintendent, and others in achieving their goals and finally decides to make changes in his life and stop his hibernation:

> The hibernation is over . . . I'm shaking off the old skin and I'll leave it here in the hole. I'm coming out, no less invisible without it, but coming out nevertheless. And I suppose it's damn well time. Even hibernations can be overdone, come to think of it. Perhaps that's my greatest social crime, I've overstayed my hibernation, since there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play. (Ellison 567-68)

In his attempt to take on his "socially responsible role to play," he is trying to make other people recognize him and put their discriminatory assumptions about him aside (568).

5.2 Racism

Race relations have been an issue throughout America's history, and one of the most famous quotations in the novel addresses the topic in an unexpected way. It is unexpected because it came from "the meekest of men" who never made trouble and always seemed to know his place (Ellison 16). The narrator relates the uneasiness of the family as well as the deathbed message from his grandfather to his son and family members:

> Son, after I am gone, I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome'em with yeses, undermine'em with grins, agree'em to death and destruction, let'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open. . . . Learn it to the younguns (Ellison 16)

The grandfather warns his family of the need of them to have two identities. He believes that they have to behave in the manner that is expected while at the same time acknowledging the struggles of African Americans in the past and the present and make every effort to overcome obstacles and make the most of their present and future. According to the grandfather, this type of thinking should offer them a better life in a world that still does not accept black people as equals. The narrator is constantly under the influence of his grandfather's words that haunt him both in his daily actions as well as his

sleep as recurring nightmares. During one such nightmare, the narrator finds the engraving "'To Whom It May Concern' . . . "Keep This Nigger-Boy Running'" on a document in his briefcase (33). Although the words follow him as a curse through his life, he does not surrender and carries on the struggle to find his real self, his identity and place in the community. At the end of the novel, the narrator tries to sort out all that has happened to him and makes the final effort to come to an understanding of his grandfather's final words of advice. He then concludes:

> [H]e must have meant the principle, that we were to affirm the principle on which the country was built and not the men, or at least not the men who did the violence. Did he mean say "yes" because he knew that the principle was greater than the men, greater than the numbers and the vicious power and all the methods used to corrupt its name? (561)

What he means is that the citizens' rights recognized by the US Constitution are those principles that should be affirmed, the ideal the county was founded on, the original principles of social and political justice for all Americans.

However, the ideal is in great discrepancy with the reality. The reality is the victimization that African Americans have been and continue to be subjected. For example, the narrator's experience of racism when he ends up in hospital after an accident at work. As he temporarily experiences memory loss and loses the ability to speak, the doctors ask him questions about his ancestry over and over again and perform electroshock therapy. The narrator says: "I was sitting in a cold white rigid chair and a man was looking at me out of a bright third eye" (226). The doctor clearly demonstrates racist behavior towards his patient, the narrator, when he comments that blacks have rhythm after performing electric shocks and asks him about the rabbit song which is connected to African culture. With these remarks, the doctor wants to put emphasis on his ancestry and slavery and accentuate his position in the past but also in society of that time.

The narrator expresses his wish for the American society:

> Whence all this passion toward conformity anyway? -- diversity is the word. Let man keep his many parts and you'll have no tyrant states . . . America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them and let it so remain. It's "winner take nothing" that is the great truth of our country or of any country. Life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat. Our fate is to become one, and yet many -- This is not prophecy, but description. (563-64)

According to Stepto, the narrator declares his "faith in the ideal of cultural pluralism" (170). His ideal society does not expect people to integrate into society in the way in which they lose their identity or any other aspect that defines them. Likewise, he believes that people should not take the easy way out and just comply and live their lives according to other people's expectations but attempt to strive to remain true to themselves and fight despite obstacles. His idea is that people have common characteristics that unite them in being one nation, but they can still remain individuals who carry with them something that is only theirs.

To understand the true meaning of self-creation, one can consider Trimmer's solution of the riddle is Ellison's novel in his article "The Grandfather's Riddle in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*":

> It is a document that records and evaluates a man's struggle to create himself. The narrator has lived with his head in the lion's mouth and he has explored his own heart of darkness. As a result he has discovered that the solution to the riddle of self-creation begins with the affirmation of the self and the complex heritage of the self, the heritage of being a black American man. (50)

This view is in agreement with Ellison's own description of the novel as a "memoir of a man who has gone through experience and now comes back and brings his message to the world. It's a social act; it's not resignation from society but an attempt to be useful" (qtd. in Trimmer 50).

5.3 The Invisible Man's Dream

One of the Invisible Man's dreams is to be visible. However, he finds out later that the invisibility brings him freedom. His dreams are very much doomed to fail because of the color of his skin. One of his first dreams is to be like the Founder of the college where he studies. The Founder represents the American Dream for him. He is similar to Booker T. Washington, but the narrator does not mention his exact name. When the Brotherhood compares him to Booker T. Washington, he says: "I don't think he was as great as the Founder" (298). The narrator would rather be like the Founder; he claims, "in the first place, the Founder came before him, and did practically everything Booker T. Washington did and a lot more. And more people believed in him" (298). The Founder represents hope of an equal society for the Invisible Man. However, his statue makes him think about the position of the African Americans, "the cold Father symbol, his hands outstretched in the breathtaking gesture

of lifting a veil that flutters in hard, metallic folds above the face of a kneeling slave; and I am standing puzzled, unable to decide whether the veil is really being lifted or lowered more firmly in place" (Ellison 36). This stiff and cold portrayal of the Founder introduces the question of the opportunities for young African American college boys. The statue is supposed to be a symbol of their chance to get an education and thus greater opportunities in life, but they are also expected to accept the identity the rest of the society constructs to fit in and neglect their cultural heritage. This is what the narrator ultimately struggles with in his search for identity and visibility in a society which does not recognize African American citizens as equals. The importance of Booker T. Washington and his persona in the novel is stated in Sundquist's words: "[t]he chapters devoted to black college life are a means for Ellison to anatomize the racial and class hierarchy, assimilative pressure, disdain for folk culture, and personal aggrandizement that might also be found at a black college founded by Booker T. Washington" (18).

The protagonist's dream of social equality proves impossible to fulfil due to the society's racist attitudes towards African Americans and thus towards him. The narrator has great expectations of people in power and "because people like the trustees have so much material influence, the narrator attributes godlike authority to them" (Eichelberger 329). He is searching for their guidance, but Booker T. Washington, the Founder, and dr. Bledsoe do not offer him the opportunities he expected, only disappointment. For example, dr. Bledsoe, whom the narrator first considers a good role model and a leader, turns out to be the person who betrayed him by sending negative recommendation letters. This shows just how limited access to power and success is in reality for African Americans like the narrator. Obstacles and challenges coming from expected and unexpected sources makes the pursuit of the American Dream impossible.

As the narrator observes an elderly couple of African American decent being evicted in Harlem, he gives a speech and encourages the people around to resist the law enforcement. He is then spotted by a member of the Brotherhood and called to join their organization. The narrator believes that the Brotherhood can enable him to succeed: "The Brotherhood was a world within a world and I was determined to discover all its secrets and to advance as far as I could. I saw no limits; it was the one organization in the whole country in which I could reach the very top and I meant to get there. Even if it meant climbing a mountain of words" (Ellison 372).

Eichelberger states that, "even though the Brotherhood is nominally committed to socialist redistribution of power, the narrator understands the organization as a hierarchy where he must struggle for dominance" (35). With this idea, he commits to the organization, but the Brotherhood

offers him only the illusion that his dreams and wishes are being fulfilled. They admire him for his speaking skills, and he finally has an opportunity to use his talents and realize his ambitions. However, he is not chosen to speak about what he wanted, but about what others expect of him and about what complies with their ideology. He serves as a symbol of African Americans, not as a person who is essential to the organization and whose opinion and talent are valued. When he learns this, he becomes revengeful and violent.

5.4 Moving to New York

The narrator has great ideas when he is moving to New York, trying to improve his job possibilities and continue his education. Although his life in New York does not go as planned, this journey proves important for him. When it comes to the usual direction of demographic and spiritual expansion, Americans move from the East to the West, but the situation is different for the African Americans. Yarborough explains:

> [F]or the Afro-American the dominant direction has been from the South to the North. Since slave time, when the captives sang of stealing away not just to heaven, but to Phillyme-York, the North has symbolized a place of both refuge and promise. . . . The myth of the North was particularly reinforced during the black migration out of the South in the early part of this century. (49-50)

The Invisible Man moves to New York in pursuit of a job and money to finance his education. He thought New York was a promised land for young African Americans. The vet on the bus to NYC warns him that that might not be true: "That's not a place, it's a dream. When I was your age it was Chicago. Now all the little black boys run away to New York. Out of the fire into the melting pot" (Ellison 150). His encounter with "the vet" does not make him give up on his fantasy of returning to the South "full of New York culture" and being "the leading campus figure" (154). In addition to the narrator going to New York to make his American Dream come true, he also wants to experience freedom he could not enjoy while he was in the South.

The narrator later realizes that the veteran he met on the bus was right about his idea of New York: "The vet had been right: For me this was not a city of realities, but of dreams; perhaps because I had always thought of my life as being confined to the South" (157). All his ideas of fulfilling the

Dream, impressing his employer, and coming back to college show his naïve personality and how much he is invested in this idea of making it in New York. As Yarborough confirms, ‘‘Soon after his arrival in New York City, he also expresses a fascination with money and the power it represents. Characteristically, he defines his imaginary success in terms of the funds entrusted to him” (50). However, his obsession with money and power do not bring him any satisfaction as he is doomed to failure from the beginning (50). His Dreams in New York are mostly material but are also focused on building his character and finding his identity. Here he hopes to develop his identity as well as profit financially. New York is supposed to be the place where one can fulfill his dreams. When he joins the Brotherhood, he feels as if he were the leader of the black community in Harlem. Since he always wanted to be like the Founder, this was his chance to be make it happen.

6. Failure of the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby* and *Invisible Man*

The Great Gatsby offers a view of the materialistic society in New York during the Roaring Twenties. The characters of Daisy and Tom, the representatives of the "old money," are members of the elite society and are thus respected regardless of the fact that they have questionable morals. On the completely opposite side there are Myrtle and George Wilson, who have no real prospects of succeeding in life. Besides them, there is the narrator, Nick, a representative of the middle class and Gatsby's only true friend. He overlooks Jay Gatsby's illegal activities which led Gatsby to his wealth but respects his ingenuity and tenacity. As a man he has his faults but at least he has human compassion and attempts to live honestly in a corrupt world. Gatsby's story demonstrates that material possessions and wealth do not necessarily ensure happiness or fulfillment and questions the attainability of the American Dream. Gatsby's road from rags to riches was based on illegal means, not honest work and moral scruples. Fitzgerald's critique of the corruption of the American Dream shows that working hard, being persistent, and having strong moral values does not assure prosperity. The realization of the American Dream during this period depended on the status of the person and their connections and not on their integrity, which is not in accordance with the initial idea of America as the land of equal opportunity.

Invisible Man demonstrates how the American Dream can be obstructed because of racial limitations. The narrator is on a journey to find his identity; however, he lives in a society where white power structures determine his possibilities. He sees moving to New York as his opportunity to start over. Nevertheless, he comprehends that he and other African Americans are not recognized as individuals but are defined by the color of their skin and therefore not treated as individuals but as a group. After a series of disappointments, the narrator withdraws from other people and finds himself hibernating and rethinking his identity and his life. In the end, he comes to the conclusion that he should continue his fight as he is a free individual. The narrator does not want to be guided by the idea of fulfilling the American Dream according to the Founder or Booker T. Washington but instead tries to find his own way and not limit himself with other people's expectations.

In the end, the narrator understands and accepts the failure of his actions to attain his dream. After all of the disappointments, he sees his opportunity to reestablish his identity and pave his path to the future. According to Yarborough, the success story of the American Dream "is that of the individual who, with courage and imagination, uses the freedom of American society to define oneself

in terms other than those which have been used to justify past oppression or hardship" (53). He also sees that he was wrong to believe that by moving to New York he could escape his past and survive without adapting to his surroundings. When looking back on his life, the narrator understands that he had wrong expectations of the American Dream as he explains that he "started out with [his] share of optimism. I believed in hard work and progress and action" (Ellison 563). He sees the opportunism in his and other people's expectations of the American Dream. During his time underground, he realizes that he does not want to conform to the expectations and lose his opportunity to be a part of the diversity.

The search for the American Dream is visible through both Ellison's and Fitzgerald's protagonists. The narrator of the *Invisible Man* realizes the failure of his Dream but defines it in a different way and understands that he had wrong expectations. On the contrary, Jay Gatsby does not see that his way is wrong and that it can only end badly. His Dream is based on greed and short-term pleasure which corrupted the original idea of the Dream.

The different way of narration in the novels may offer an insight into the difference of the understanding of the failure of the American Dream. The narrator of Ellison's novel is also the protagonist, so he narrates his own story. On the other hand, Nick Carraway narrates the story in *The Great Gatsby*. As he is not the narrator, Gatsby does not have the opportunity to reflect on his actions and offer his view of the events, while the narrator in *Invisible Man* seizes that opportunity. Additionally, even if Nick had managed to see the way in which Gatsby was heading, he still would not have been able to influence his decisions and persuade him to change his life. The narrator in *Invisible Man* is given the opportunity to distance himself from the rest of the people and to influence his own destiny.

Conclusion

The American Dream has been a part of American history since the country's origins. This belief is supposed to ensure that everyone has a chance to have a better life. The meaning of the Dream changed through the history, offering different versions that corresponded to different periods and contexts. It started as a spiritual idea guiding the newcomers in building their society and evolved to the modern consumerism and affinity for material possessions. Today, however, the issue of the equality of opportunity for all still remains as there are still groups that are fighting for true social justice and equality of opportunity. In addition, the two novels show the corruption of the original idea of equal opportunity in pursuit of happiness. Fitzgerald offers criticism of the consumer society of his period and shows that a person cannot find a way to success just by working hard and being tenacious. The narrator of *Invisible Man*, on the other hand, depicts that racial limitations and a person's recognition in the society stand in the way of the realization of the American Dream. Both novels emphasize the search for identity and social recognition as an important part for the realization of the American Dream.

Ellison's and Fitzgerald's novels highlight the characters' search for their individual vision of the American Dream as well as their disillusionment. The protagonist of the *Invisible Man* realizes the failing promises of the American Dream and changes his perspective, and himself, before the end of the novel. Jay Gatsby, nevertheless, fails to see the doomed path of his Dream until it is too late.

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