

**Lifestyles during the roaring 20s of America in F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby****Muhammad Latif Busyeiri**[latifbusyeri259@gmail.com](mailto:latifbusyeri259@gmail.com)**Nasyafka Dinanti**[nasyafka@gmail.com](mailto:nasyafka@gmail.com)

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**Abstract**

*Literature is the result of human interaction and culture in which they reflect or imitate the condition of the era they were written in. Due to this reason, some literature is able to function as a way for modern-day readers to have an understanding on how life was like in the past. F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby is one such novel that contains similar condition during the roaring 20s of America. The novel contains different lifestyles of the American people during the time and revealed the harsh reality of those who were idolizing The American Dream. Using sociological approach, this study aims to learn about the social condition during the roaring 20s of America. Lifestyles during the roaring 20s of America in F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby is chosen as the title of the study to find out the lifestyle that existed during the roaring 20s of America as reflected in The Great Gatsby. The result of the study shows that different lifestyles that existed during the roaring 20s of America as shown in The Great Gatsby are wealthy lifestyle, modest lifestyle criminal lifestyle, hedonistic lifestyle, impoverished lifestyle. And surrounding factors such as different social class and social gap that existed during the time.*

**Keywords:** Lifestyle, roaring 20s, The Great Gatsby analysis, F. Scott Fitzgerald

**Introduction**

Literature is an imaginative work of art which focuses on the aesthetic side on things. Be it prose, poetry, or drama. Literature is also the result of human interactions and cultures. The existing society is the basis for the production of literature, which we see through a lens that the creator of said art has provided. It can also be said that literature is mimetic, "a technical term for works of art as meaning on the one hand the imitation of the abstract real through art, and on the other hand equally the representation of the phenomenal through art" (Trench 15). It is a known fact that when a person reads literature, they might feel like they are taken into another world; an adventure to a different universe which may or may not be similar to our own world. This happens due to the nature of literature being written using language that purposely aims to trigger an emotion or sensation in the readers. But no matter how different the different world in said literature is, it will always have similarities to the world we live in. Most, if not all literature are imitations; a copy of our world with minor or major differences depending on the creator. Due to the mimetic nature of literature, it can be argued that some literature function as social documentation. Many popular classics such as Oliver Twist, To Kill a Mockingbird, or Wuthering Heights are used by students to learn about the social, economic, and religious condition in a certain era. These literature helps the readers to understand the condition of society in a certain point of time.

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is one of, if not most famous novel of recent era. It also gives the reader a glimpse on how life was like during the roaring 20s in America. The story of *The Great Gatsby* is also interesting, which tells the story of obsession and hollowness of a person that may seem to have it all. The story also tells us on how the people during that era used to live like, when people were obsessed with gaining wealth and following the 'American Dream', Known as the belief that everyone has a right to achieve their dream and to have happiness and wealth using their skill and abilities to get a job (Citra 88). The embodiment of the American dream is represented in one of the main characters of the book, Jay Gatsby. A young man who came from a poor family but rose from poverty and became one of the richest people in New Egg. Gatsby lived a very hedonistic lifestyle, hosting luxurious party every week that's attended by anyone that knows about it. Similar to Gatsby, was Tom Buchanan who led a materialistic lifestyle due to him belonging to 'old money', unlike Gatsby who only recently became Rich.

On the other hand, Fitzgerald also depicted the lives of poor people who weren't able to compete in the harsh competition of the American Dream through the characters of George and Myrtle Wilson. Fitzgerald wanted to portray the social gap that existed during the roaring 20s, where the poor like George Wilson lived a very different lifestyle compared to the rich like Gatsby and Buchanan.

Fitzgerald lived during the time *The Great Gatsby* is set in wanted to reveal the truth of the American dream and the materialistic lifestyle that people sought after. On how no amount of wealth can make someone happy, instead it might leave you a hollow husk of a person who is stuck on chasing the unattainable. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald managed to describe clearly the different condition and kinds of people during the Roaring 20s. From the traditional type of woman who are supposed to act prim and proper like Daisy, to the 'new woman' type who was much wilder and different like Jordan. It seems that through *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald wanted to satirize and criticize the social condition during that time and the delusional goal that everyone wanted to achieve. Every character led a different lifestyle in the book, and most if not all of them did not achieve the happiness that they always long for living in the American dream.

The main purposes of the study are (1) to know what kind of lifestyle that existed in the 1920s as represented in *The Great Gatsby* and (2) to find out the surrounding factors of the lifestyle of 19th and 20th century America. USA in the 20th century is known as The Roaring Twenties, Jazz Era, or the Prohibition Era.

The Roaring Twenties was a period in the American history that was pushed into a dramatic social and political change, following the aftermath of World War I. Many events happened around this time, most of them can be contributed to the after-effect of The Great War. Many of the men that came back suffered Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) besides their physical injuries. With so many of them serving, killed in action, or returning disabled in body and mind, women had been needed in the work force, and they were reluctant to return to domestic situations, which served to strengthen the cause of women's suffrage and independence. This independence was evidenced by the adoption of less restrictive clothing and shorter skirts and the fad for shorter hair that was easier to manage, which also could've contributed the rise of young energetic young women who embrace freedom and a lifestyle viewed by many at the time as outrageous and unladylike, known as 'Flappers'. People were

understandably traumatized by their horrible experience, preferring to live a life doing what they want and enjoy the pleasure of the world.

The Jazz Age faced major breakthroughs to households' appliances that simply made life more comfortable to the battle-worn masses. Most of the inventions focused heavily on efficiency, comfort, and entertainment – sunglasses, radio broadcast, hair dryers, etc. Hollywood films boomed for a considerable amount and movies became one of the sources of entertainment again. Transportation was also made more affordable with Henry Ford creating the “people’s car”, The Model T Ford and A Ford in 1920 and 1927 respectively. In spite of that, in the 1920s automobiles were purchased mostly by the middle and upper classes. Still, by 1929 there were 23.1 million passenger cars in use in the United States, and the privacy and mobility offered by the car would transform the way Americans lived. Many of these things were also mass produced to the public.

Not only did it improve technological wise, but also economically. Before the stock crash, post-WWI prosperity allowed many people to live comfortably with cash to burn on consumer goods, and the retail market blossomed with gadgets. The people may have suffered due to the war, but it brought good things for American business. Factory productions had risen sharply in effort to catch up the high demands of the war. America managed to capture the markets attention, even when the war was over these countries still bought from America. The Republican governments also increased taxes on foreign goods, forcing Americans to buy things made from the USA. People were also introduced to the purchases, allowing them to buy on credit and pushed the consumerism lifestyle even farther. The change was so fast-paced that it was became one of the reasons for the stock market crash of 1929.also

The Roaring Twenties was also known for their Prohibition Era, this was caused by many religious organizations disagreeing to the allowance of alcohol, one of them is The Women’s Christian Temperance Union who was the leading advocates. The Eighteenth Amendment was ratified on January 16, 1919. After the it was instilled, organized criminal activities, bootlegging, or the illegal distillation and sale of alcoholic beverages, became widespread. One of the most notorious gangsters in this era is Al Capone who build is fortune on illegal distillation and sale of alcohol. Many of the law enforcement agencies lacked the resources to consistently enforce the prohibition.

*The Great Gatsby* is a fascinating novel which allows the reader a glimpse to the social condition during the roaring 20s of America. The usage of symbols, figurative language, and dramatic elements are combined in the novel to create an interesting story. The story is also written based on F. Scott Fitzgerald’s life before and during the roaring 20s. The backgrounds explained above are the reasons the authors decided to analyse lifestyles in America during the roaring 20s.

## **Methodology**

This study is concerned with the novel *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, which was written in 1925. The method used in this study is library research method which involves studying of articles, essays, web pages, and books which are relevant with the roaring 20s of America and the novel *The Great Gatsby* to analyse this novel. George stated that library research “involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or

personal/expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research method at some point” (qtd. in Keng et al 50).

The primary literary source used for this research is the novel *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, the authors found it interesting to describe the lifestyles that existed during the roaring 20s of America. As such the sociological approach was used during this study. Scott mentions that “Sociological approach starts with a conviction that art’s relations to society are vitally important, and that the investigation of these relationships may organize and deepen one’s aesthetic response to a work of art (qtd. in Hastuti 125)

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Lifestyle during the Roaring 20s of America**

This study will analyse about the characters of Jay Gatsby, Nick Carraway, Tom Buchanan, Daisy Buchanan, Jordan baker, Meyer Wolfsheim, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson to find out the lifestyles that existed in the roaring 20s of America. Each of the characters represents a lifestyle in the roaring 20s of America.

### **Jay Gatsby**

Jay Gatsby lives in a lavish lifestyle of new money, flaunting his riches to the people that see him and depicted himself as an aloof, charming, and mysterious person in the early chapters. It was only later on that readers realize what he’s actually like. He represents the broken soldiers coming home and refusing to let their life be like what it was before the war. Reinventing himself from James Gatz from North Dakota to Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island. His attempts to live a lavish and comfortable lifestyle was so astounding that the first thing that was described in the book was not his looks or personality, he wasn’t even introduced until later on, but the extravagant party that he did in his house.

*At least once a fortnight a corps of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas and enough coloured lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden. On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors-d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another. (Fitzgerald 43-44)*

The type of lifestyle that Gatsby lives in is quite shallow and superficial. Gatsby himself and Nick sees to understand the fakery of it to some extent. Gatsby was not beloved by most of the people he meets in his parties or social circles since most of them only cared about his wealth and his name, even Daisy who he loved dearly. This becomes glaringly obvious during his funeral, Nick Carraway having to call Gatsby’s acquaintances to come to his funeral due to the fact barely anyone came or seem to care about the deceased man.

It was also implied that Gatsby received his riches through nefarious means, by working and getting himself involved with Meyer Wolfsheim. During his fight with Gatsby, Tom stated how he heard Gatsby selling alcohol over the counters at drug stores in New York or Chicago,

something that was quite illegal but common in the Prohibition Era. Gatsby's vague response to Tom's accusation implied that this rumour was correct and he made the majority of his money from bootlegging.

*'I found out what your 'drug stores' were.' He turned to us and spoke rapidly. 'He and Wolfshiem bought up a lot of side-street drug stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter. That's one of his little stunts. I picked him for a bootlegger the first time I saw him and wasn't far wrong.'*

*'What about it?'* said Gatsby politely. (Fitzgerald 143)

### **Nick Carraway**

In the novel, Nick Carraway leads a rather modest lifestyle. Although Nick is a cousin to Daisy, who belongs to the old money, Nick's main family is not necessarily the rich. Nick's main family would probably belong to the middle or middle-upper class. But none of it mattered after Nick decided to go live alone to try and be successful in the bond business. Nick Carraway represented the majority of people during the roaring 20s, where bond business was booming and every young man in America went to wall street to find their success. With their grasp on the American Dream, young men like Nick Carraway mostly decided to live a modest life in the hopes of reaching the dream of attaining wealth. But as with many young men back then, Nick does not shy away from events or people who are richer than him in the hopes of someday becoming like them. Tom, Daisy, Jordan, and Gatsby being the main people that Nick frequents to be around with. His choice of a modest lifestyle can be proven early on in the story when he intended to rent a house together with someone. Even if it didn't end up happening, the intention made by Nick already shows his nature and preferred lifestyle.

*'The practical thing was to find rooms in the city but it was a warm season and I had just left a country of wide lawns and friendly trees, so when a young man at the office suggested that we take a house together in a commuting town it sounded like a great idea. He found the house, a weather beaten cardboard bungalow at eighty a month, but at the last minute the firm ordered him to Washington and I went out to the country alone'* (Fitzgerald 5).

### **Tom Buchanan**

In the story, Tom Buchanan leads a wealthy lifestyle. Tom comes from old money, meaning that his family is already rich even before he was born. Not only that Nick mentions that Tom was a star football player in college. During the era there were quite a few people who belonged to old money, these kinds of people rarely had to do any hard work to earn money, rather they usually spend their days doing activities that they may like such as football, riding, or reading. People who lead a wealthy lifestyle will spend a lot on things they like or find useful but still being mindful not to spend too much on anything useless, this is different from a hedonistic lifestyle in which people who live one will spend their resources for temporary pleasure and has little worry about the consequences it may bring. Tom's wealthy lifestyle is shown in the story the first time when he is introduced, when Nick first arrived in his home.

*'finally, when it reached the house drifting up the side in bright vines as though from the momentum of its run. The front was broken by a line of French windows, glowing now with reflected gold, and wide open to the warm windy afternoon, and Tom Buchanan in riding clothes was standing with his legs apart on the front porch'* (Fitzgerald 9).

### **Daisy Buchanan**

Daisy Buchanan represent a hedonistic lifestyle in which she seeks only pleasure and would discard anything else if it meant that she could live her life the way she wants it. Although her elegant and charming appearance may lead people to believe that she's a more traditional obedient sweetheart type of woman, in reality she is very much different from that. Her lavish lifestyle ever since she was young led her to become a materialistic person, only wanting to live in wealth and having others do her hard-work. This is proven by her refusing to do any work and telling others even her husband to do even the simplest task as making a drink for the guests.

*'Make us a cold drink,' cried Daisy* (Fitzgerald 123).

Her desire for wealth and popularity is also clear throughout the book. From her backstory the readers could acknowledge that Daisy only wants a life of richness and willing to discard her true love Gatsby when she was proposed by Tom Buchanan who was at that time wealthier than Gatsby. Her nature of hedonism is also shown throughout the book such as when Daisy mentioned the idea that they should hire five bathrooms and then a cold room to have an alcoholic beverage proving that she hates the idea of pain or minor displeasure such as discomfort or heat.

*The notion originated with Daisy's suggestion that we hire five bathrooms and take cold baths, and then assumed more tangible form as 'a place to have a mint julep.'* (Fitzgerald 134)

### **Jordan Baker**

Jordan Baker lives a New Woman lifestyle that went trending in the 1920s, described as a strong and independent woman who enjoyed their freedom to great extent. Jordan was described as a competitive golfer and a person that's somewhat both aloof and alluring. She was tan, angular, and physically athletic, something that traditional society would've been put-off with since she did not look quite lady-like.

*The younger of the two was a stranger to me. She was extended full length at her end of the divan, completely motionless and with her chin raised a little as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall. If she saw me out of the corner of her eyes she gave no hint of it—indeed, I was almost surprised into murmuring an apology for having disturbed her by coming in.* (Fitzgerald 11)

Jordan was also very quick-witted and observant, many of her lines show that she has no problems being straightforward with her words, the same as how she has no problem in cheating her way to the golf tournament. Her independent to speak her opinions and also be

careless as she wants contrast greatly with how Daisy is characterized. This can be blatantly seen during one of Nick and Jordan's conversation with each other.

*"You're a rotten driver," I protested. "Either you ought to be more careful or you oughtn't to drive at all."*

*"I am careful."*

*"No, you're not."*

*"Well other people are," she said lightly.*

*"What's that got to do with it?"*

*"They'll keep out of my way," she insisted. "It takes two to make an accident."*

*"Suppose you met somebody just as careless as yourself."*

*"I hope I never will," she answered. "I hate careless people. That's why I like you."*  
(Fitzgerald 64)

### **Meyer Wolfshiem**

Meyer Wolfshiem leads a mysterious and dangerous the Criminal Lifestyle. Not a lot is known about Meyer Wolfshiem throughout the story except the fact the he helped Gatsby amass his fortune before the events of the book takes place, this lack of information is due to his lifestyle. Because of his frequent acts of breaking the law, he must make sure to keep a low profile and only talk to those that he trusts. His lifestyle also led to him having dangerous and deadly moments such as the story he told when first meeting Nick.

*'Sure he went,'—Mr. Wolfshiem's nose flashed at me indignantly—'He turned around in the door and says, 'Don't let that waiter take away my coffee!' Then he went out on the sidewalk and they shot him three times in his full belly and drove away. 'Four of them were electrocuted,' I said, remembering. 'Five with Becker.' His nostrils turned to me in an interested way. 'I understand you're looking for a business gonnegtion.'* (Fitzgerald 76).

### **Mr. and Mrs. Wilson**

Mr. and Mrs. Wilson lives an impoverished lifestyle. While Mr. Wilson seems to love her wife very much, Mrs. Wilson on the other hand seems to yearn for a better life. A lifestyle like this was pretty common during the roaring 20s, the reason being not everyone was fortunate enough to find a well-paying job or come from a wealthy family to enjoy the new age. Most people in the lower class had no choice but to do what they can and oblige to the upper class just so they can earn enough money to continue living. This was also shown in the novel by how Mr. Wilson was practically desperate to buy Tom's car but couldn't do anything when Tom kept giving excuses.

*'Hello, Wilson, old man,' said Tom, slapping him jovially on the shoulder. 'How's business?' 'I can't complain,' answered Wilson unconvincingly. 'When are you going*

*to sell me that car?’ ‘Next week; I’ve got my man working on it now. ’ ‘Works pretty slow, don’t he?’ ‘No, he doesn’t,’ said Tom coldly. ‘And if you feel that way about it, maybe I’d better sell it somewhere else after all. ’ ‘I don’t mean that,’ explained Wilson quickly. ‘I just meant——’ (Fitzgerald 28).*

Mrs. Wilson was also pretty much the same as Mr. Wilson. Mrs. Wilson wanted a better life than what she was living, that’s why she decided to have an affair with Tom Buchanan. In exchange for her body, she could ask for things that she could never afford with Mr. Wilson. This kind of situation was not uncommon during the age. Wives or Husbands who were not happy with their partner but unwilling to divorce would just find another person they could use. Especially with people who lived a poor life and had little choice on what they could do.

*‘Terrible place, isn’t it,’ said Tom, exchanging a frown with Doctor Eckleburg. ‘Awful.’ ‘It does her good to get away.’ ‘Doesn’t her husband object?’ ‘Wilson? He thinks she goes to see her sister in New York. He’s so dumb he doesn’t know he’s alive.’ (Fitzgerald 29-30).*

### **Social Class and Social Gap**

The main reason why not everyone can live the same lifestyle is mainly due to them belonging in different social class. The different social class exists for many reasons. Perhaps they had different family backgrounds, one who was born rich and one who was born into poverty. Maybe they had different luck in finding a job that pays well. Whatever the reason may be, the social class you belong to will surely affect what lifestyle you live in. With roaring 20s starting not long after world war 1. Considering the roaring 20s starting not long after the end of world war 1 it would also seem clear why there was a major gap in the social class. During the war there were people who definitely benefited from the war, such as the families who are already rich and could invest in companies who makes weapons of war. While the poor are forced to enlist in the army to fight in the war and come back to the same poor life they left. This gap was then made even wider thanks to the technological advancements that happened during the roaring 20s. New technology such as automobiles or televisions means that jobs like carriage master starts to fade out. Not only that the new inventions make the rich more detached to the poor with them being preoccupied with their automobiles and televisions. The American dream was so popular during this time due to the conditions mentioned. Many people who were struggling clung to the idea of anyone being able to achieve happiness and wealth in the American dream. But in reality, the gap between the rich and poor were getting bigger and it was hard to move social class unless you were extremely lucky or dealt in illegal business, like Gatsby did. In the end the rich kept getting richer and poor kept becoming poorer.

### **Conclusion**

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* is a novel that portrays the roaring 20s of America. In the novel, Fitzgerald highlights the problem with The American Dream and the lifestyle the characters chose to live with. Through the explanations it was clear that the characters in the novel all led different lifestyles in their lives. Such as Meyer Wolfsheimer who lived a criminal lifestyle, Mr. Wilson who lived an impoverished lifestyle, and Daisy Buchanan who lived a

Hedonistic lifestyle. The different lifestyle existed due to them belonging from different social classes. Different economic background led to them choosing a different lifestyle that was open to them, which in turn shapes their personality and identity. The lifestyles represented in the novel also shows the existence of social gap in the society during the roaring 20s.

The authors of this study believe that F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* criticizes the social condition that existed during that time. The novel also serves as a reflection to the past for modern readers to learn about the social condition and lifestyle during the roaring 20s of America. It gives the readers valuable knowledge regarding the culture during the roaring 20s. From the different lifestyles, social gap, poverty, and other issues that existed during that time.

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