

## Dreams and Disillusionment: A Critique of the American Dream in American Fiction

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### Abstract

*This study examines the vanity and consequences of the American Dream as depicted in four novels: Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. A socio-political analysis of these authors and their works exposes the hollow nature of the dream. *The Jungle* is discussed from a racial and economic perspective, highlighting the plight of Jurgis and his Lithuanian family who are disillusioned in their pursuit of success. *The Iron Heel* is examined politically, showcasing the struggle between the capitalist class and workers. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald presents a social satire, critiquing the death of American ideals sacrificed for materialism. *The Grapes of Wrath* analyzes the American Dream through the Joad family's migration and exploitation. This work studies and compares the representation of the American Dream in these novels, referencing texts, socio-economic contexts, and relevant critical works.*

**Keywords:** *American Dream, Sinclair's *The Jungle*, London's *The Iron Heel*, and Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.*

### Introduction

As Emerson suggests, America was one of the several names of a dream dreamt by Europeans (Geldard, 2010, p. 145). Immigrants came to America at the beginning of the twentieth century, motivated by the sparkle of the American dream (Del Cid, 2011, P.4). After the Potato famine deployed in most parts of Europe, Europeans boarded the steamships to cross the ocean to American shores ((Library of Congress, P. 4). The notion of providing a good life (Adams, 1933, p.21) and attaining a high social class through hard work was a common thing at that time (Kennedy, 2008, p. 69).

In this sense, the initial motivation behind the American Dream was a desire for both material and spiritual advancement (69). From one perspective, the material component of the dream was realized too quickly and readily (Mansour, Shdouh, & Banat, 2024, P. 532), surpassing the initial spiritual objectives and even erasing them in the long process (Daier & Ibrahim, 2017, P. 347). Thus, a condition of financial prosperity devoid of spiritual vitality or meaning arose (Kennedy, 2008, p. 69). However, the American Dream has completely fallen short of delivering any form of material or spiritual fulfillment (Hocenski, 2015, P. 3). Poverty, prejudice, corruption, and exploitation persist despite all of the advancements, affluence, and proclamations of democratic ideals (69).

The American Dream according to Steve Hargreaves means “through hard work [...] the poorest people can make it to middle class or above” (2013). Therefore, the paper examines the illusion of this dream through four significant American novels: Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Each novel explores a unique perspective that illuminates the nature of this dream. *The Jungle* exposes the exploitative nature of the American capitalist system experienced by immigrant laborers. *The Iron Heel* highlights the struggle between the working class and the capitalist. Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* reveals the marginalization of the immigrants. Finally, *The Great Gatsby* presents the pursuit of wealth leading to moral decay and ultimately questions its very foundation and viability.

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Moreover, this study explores how certain novels critique the American Dream, especially focusing on the perspectives of immigrants. It argues that the American Dream is often just an idea sold to attract hopeful immigrants, who end up being exploited as they chase after promises of economic success and personal freedom (Akeson, 2017, P. 11). The study will show that while this dream can be attainable for those who are educated, wealthy, or have certain skills, it often turns into a nightmare for immigrants who come with less (Tvengi, 2018, p. 117).

The American Dream, in this sense, becomes the last hope for many desperate immigrants (Cullen, 2003, p. 85). They are drawn to the idea of quick success and prosperity (Daier & Ibrahim, 2017, P. 345), and this involvement in the pursuit makes both the immigrants and the system that sells this dream complicit in creating what can be seen as an illusion (Samuel, 2012, p. 198). Interestingly, in the novels being analyzed, there seems to be only one character, Nick Carraway from *The Great Gatsby*, who doesn't fit this pattern (Hocenski, 2015, P. 6). Even though he's not wealthy (Akeson, 2017, P. 16), he manages to lead a decent life (Newman & De Zoysa, 1999, p. 61), which is quite different from the struggles of the other characters in the other three novels.

### *Losses in the Pursuit of the American Dream in Upton Sinclair's The Jungle*

Several critics consider the American dream as a trap to attract a larger labor force (Wang, 2020; Barlett & Steele, 2012; Hargreaves, 2013). As American capitalism strips people of their humanity and dignity. For instance, in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* sheds light on the falsity of the American Dream and the brutality of the American capitalist system. The reader realizes that "it's actually harder to move up [the economic class] in America" (Hargreaves, 2013).

Being the first successful socialist novel to portray the American working-class dream, Sinclair *The Jungle* (1906) criticizes the American dream for turning all people, white and black, into slaves and force them to work, day and night, just to survive. Sinclair novel reflects the real misery and suffering of immigrants in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as he worked covertly in the Chicago stockyards for seven weeks in 1904, gathering information for the socialist newspaper '*Appeal to Reason*.'

The novel narrates the unpleasant conditions, the absence of a social support system, and the sense of hopelessness among workers. Reviewer Jack London, who is a contemporary of Sinclair, referred to it as "the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of wage slavery" (Southern California Historical Society, 2012). The novel's most significant effect at the time, nevertheless, was to incite public outcry over sections that revealed hygienic conditions and health infractions in the early 20th-century American meat-packing business. This led to the passing of the Meat Inspection Act and other sanitation changes.

In the hope of achieving the American Dream, the Jirgus family moved from Lithuania to Chicago with their extended family. However, their native qualities were unsuitable in material America, and they took time to understand the great transition. Oscar Handlin illustrates that: "the qualities that were desirable [...] were not conducive to success in the transition." (Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: *The Jungle* 4). These values made it more difficult for them as America was more complicated and materialistic.

Abiding by the rules, the Jirgus family understood the nature of chasing the American Dream, which is the key to earning money. For immigrants in America, disobeying bosses means losing the dream. According to Ifran Rushdi, the American Dream was used "to influence the laborers to be submissive" (pp. 6-7). Thus, the system managed to control the immigrants and incorporate them into the system.

Although the American Dream was believed to be achievable through hard work, only a few people realized their dreams. In reality, hard work was not the primary means to this achievement. Lois Tyson explains, "The American dream, much like the state lotteries" (p. 58). Success was often merely a stroke of luck. Louis Althusser argued that the ruling class in America controlled immigrants and exploited them (Roshadi, p. 4). Similarly, Kennedy indicated that immigrants "often fell prey to native racketeers" (p. 69).

While the United States boasted a formal system of freedom of speech and democracy, this ideal was not fully realized in practice. The democratic process was dominated by two powerful parties, leaving little room for others to challenge their influence. This supposed freedom largely benefited the wealthy, excluding people like Jurgis and his family. The American Dream had convinced them to see this illusion as a reality, believing that freedom was equally available to all. In reality, the harsh socioeconomic system controlled their lives, reducing them to mere instruments in the hands of their employers rather than free citizens.

In many ways, American society resembled a Darwinian "survival of the fittest" (Darwin, 1869), but here, the 'fittest' were not the best individuals. Instead, they were often the most deceitful or morally compromised, as only they could thrive in such a ruthless environment. Workers were pitted against each other, each striving to appease their employers. This harsh social Darwinism led to tragic outcomes: half of Jurgis's family perished, Jurgis abandoned them after his wife Ona died in childbirth, and Maria was forced into prostitution to support the remaining family members. Michael J. Hui points out the dire consequences of this exploitative system: "Workers have no choice but to oblige or to be replaced" (p. 4).

The pursuit of an illusory dream turned the family members into inhabitants of an American jungle, where they were reduced to the status of wild animals. The family's destruction began when Jurgis discovered that Ona had been raped by her boss. This violation transformed Jurgis into a beast, as he was deeply wounded by the loss of his honor—something he considered the most valuable possession. In a fit of rage, he attacked the perpetrator, biting a piece of his face. Ona became the prey, and Jurgis saw her as a wounded animal, a symbol of the family's victimization. When Maria lost her first job, her despair made her appear almost animalistic, while Elzbieta, mourning the deaths of her children, seemed like a grieving hen yet remained resilient. Jason Pickavance observes, "One by one, members of Jurgis's family succumb to the degenerative forces of Packing town" (p. 94). Jurgis, who started as a kind and honest man, ultimately became a thief and corrupt boss in the factory before discovering socialism. The Jurgis family, along with other workers, faced numerous dangers in their pursuit of the American Dream. These hazards took a severe toll on their health. Beyond the harsh conditions of cold, darkness, and humidity, one of the most perilous tasks was the meat processing itself, which served as a grim metaphor for how America fed its citizens poison.

The packing town symbolized the miniature America at that time. In packing town, everyone is drained even the children. Stansilovas, Ona's step-brother, who did not exceed the age of fourteen, forged his birth document by the priest before he died in one of the pickles factories when they closed the factory and forgot him there so the rats ate him. He was a sample of the situation of the rest of the children at that time, and his brothers began from their childhood to sell newspapers in the streets and complete the expenses of the family. Morris Dickstein illustrated: "Children [...] quickly pick up the habits of the street and the values of the new society" (Bloom, *Modern Critical Interpretations: The Jungle* 54). Everyone was at the disposal of the packing machine. The killing packing machine had no mercy, and everything was exceeded, and the laws were penetrated for it.

The future of Stansilovas and his brothers was lost to satisfy the greed of the American capitalist system. Instead of completing their education at school and becoming educated persons to benefit their society in one of the scientific areas, they would become riotous men in the streets of Chicago. Stansilovas will spend his life in front of the machines in the dark and cold factories lacking a minimum health condition. When the manager saw him: "he set someone else at a different job" (Sinclair 88).

The family did not achieve their dream: they suffered all sorts of torment in their looking for the American Dream, but the result was the loss of their house that they paid for with effort, sweat, and blood, and they lost their jobs in the process. They suffered from hunger, cold weather, disease, and death. Therefore, they dive into dirty work like stealing and prostituting because sincere and hard work leads to success. R.N Mookerjee indicates that "these poor immigrants had come full of hope and aspiration" (Bloom, *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: The Jungle* 73).

In conclusion, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* critiques the American Dream by exposing immigrant workers' harsh realities in the early 20th-century capitalist society. The novel suggests that the promise of prosperity and freedom is an unattainable illusion for the working class. Sinclair's portrayal of the Jurgis family's struggles posits a reminder that the American Dream is a tool of control and manipulation over the vulnerable. Furthermore, the pursuit of this dream turns people into the worst versions of themselves, stripping away their morals and humanity as they are forced to adapt to an unforgiving and exploitative system.

*The Illusion of Democracy and the Capitalist Trap in Jack London's The Iron Heel*

In Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908), the American Dream is examined through the portrayal of socio-economic and political struggles, focusing on the corruption in the capitalist system. London presents a stark conflict between the working class and the ruling elite, exploring the manipulation and ultimate disillusionment of the American Dream. Like *The Jungle* which focused in its second half on the corruption and the methods that the capitalist system used in America, *The Iron Heel* stressed the political struggle between the working class and American capitalists which London describes as the oligarchy and the horrible future of that conflict. London illustrates that this oligarchy controlled the country. It was the luxurious oligarchy, businessmen, factory owners, and party heads.

Avis Everhard, the heroine, was living in her golden cage before knowing Ernest. She was like many who were deceived by the American dream. She thought the country was ruled by fair competition, and the best people were those who could achieve more on a materialistic level. The workers who lost their jobs because of mistakes at work cost them physical disabilities were responsible for their status because of their folly and carelessness at work. After she investigated Jackson's arm case, she knew that everything Earnest had told her was true; He said that her gown was stained with workers' blood: "the gown you wear is stained with blood. The food you eat is a bloody stew" (London 39).

London criticized in the novel the status of the labor unions at the beginning of the twentieth century, and how these unions were purchased by *The Iron heel* or the oligarchy. Their leaders became adjoined to the capitalists even if they were still considered from the labor class ostensibly. They were the skilled workers who were robbed through seducing them of the American Dream:

In the favored unions are the flower of the American workingmen. They are strong, efficient men. [...] The Oligarchy will encourage such ambition and the consequent competition. Thus will the strong bolster the Oligarchy (London 224).

London tried to explain the ways that capitalism followed to suppress the strikes and protests and to circumvent their grievances and their rightly demands. It put the troublemakers in their midst where they devastate the properties and assault on the police giving justification to the police and the security services to use the force to crush the protests and break up the strikes violently, and to arrest the opponents and revolutionaries. Then, the submission to arbitrary trials might reach execution like what happened in the strike of 1886 where some of labor leaders were executed under the pretext of throwing a bomb at the police through the strike. The media distorted the image of the strike as if who did it was a mob group that wanted to ruin the country away from the real objectives that the strike established for them.

American dream philosophy is based on the fact that the successful one at work should be the efficient person, and he who was not successful was a loser, they considered him a failure man without taking into account the conditions and the greed that dominated the American capitalist system. It was like a genetic characteristic (Mansoor and Paul 2022). Those people believed that they were the makers of the civilization and that they were highly qualified to rule the country. They justified everything they did from assault on the workers, the peasants, and other marginalized classes of the people "Wherever there is an ascendant class, a large portion of the morality emanates from its class interests and its class feelings of superiority" (London, P. 66).

America had the largest number of injuries in the workplace. Jackson and other workers like him did not attain stability and a decent life. Francis Shur argued how these workers were enslaved, and their manhood was robbed to become unproductive and unemployed. Their situation deteriorated as they became street sellers or even beggars in a society that were considered to secure a decent life in turn was one of the pillars of the American dream: "London's emphasis on Jackson's being reduced to a peddler and his attendant loss of income suggests not merely symbolic castration but an iconic representation of the loss of manhood" (Cassuto and Reesman, P. 81).

One may conclude from the novel the absurdity of elections, the American formal democracy, and the disability of making any real change through them. The aspiration to be able to achieve the targets by reformation through the representatives of the people was just an illusion to mislead the public opinion that he could achieve something in this way. One can say that this was the political side of the American dream. Davis Seed discusses:

In 'the scarlet livery' the scene shifts to congress to satirize the facade of formal democracy and the powerlessness of electoral reformism. [...] During defiant speech a bomb explodes, cueing the intervention of waiting federal troops to arrest fraction on charges of High Treason (Seed 167).

Through the novel *The Iron Heel*, London shows that the American dream is merely an illusion to deceive the working class that works to sustain the ruling elite's power. Through the experiences of Avis Everhard and the conflicts depicted in the novel, London illustrates that the American dream has been used as a false promise of economic prosperity for the working class, serving only to enslave and exploit the authoritarian regime. Hence, *The Iron Heel* provides a reminder to the reader that equality of opportunity is nothing but a big deception.

*The Illusion of the American Dream in John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath.*

*The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) shows a group of American simpletons and confused farmers in their fields. They spoke to the landowners to deliver their lands by orders from the Banks in the East, while their wives and their children awaited the situation carefully. While talking to the farmers, the landowners concentrated on mentioning the 'bank' word as a monster. It is a way for them to ease their doing of inhuman deeds toward others "We can't depend on it. The bank – the monster – has to have profits all the time. It can't wait. It'll die. No, taxes go on" (Steinbeck 35).

We can notice also the way of planting land with one crop to achieve more payoff and profit because that crop was in the most demand in the market. This led to soil ruining. The destruction of the land was not only caused by the natural conditions of the rainless weather but also because of the greed of the landowners to make a profit and money. One may see that the American dream to gain wealth, together with the new era of technology and complexity canceled the simplicity of living that the farmers lived once upon a time.

*The Grapes of Wrath* is renowned in many countries. It revolves around the life of the poor Joad family who emigrated from Oklahoma State to California "the promised land" because of the drought and economic crisis in their homeland. They searched for their American dream that they would have good jobs and salaries to begin a new life on the West Coast. It depicts the lives of the rural poor through the desperation era and their pain, misery, homelessness, and the miserable treatment of them by the capitalist farmers.

In Oklahoma, the land owners attracted them to go to California and asked them to go to the west where the plentiful agriculture and warm places in addition to the handbills that the landowners in California distributed to the Mid-West farmers and invited them to come where the fruits were waiting to be picked and did not find workers to pick them and promised them of an acceptable level of decent living.

This dream repeated itself in different forms as the Protestants and the English in general settled on the Eastern coast and the rest of the immigrants from all of Europe completed the expansion towards the west ending with California in the far west. Now, the banks came to get the land from the simpletons' farmers who would dream of owning a piece of land in the West, and the Californians in their turn would be

frightened of those newcomers that they might seize on their land. Cleo Beth Theron illustrates that “Some of the principles upon which the American Dream is based [...] there is always a little piece of land further west, are precisely the principles that destroyed the possibility of the Dream’s realization” (59).

The family in the novel, sold all its holdings to secure the traveling trip to California like other immigrant families despite being cheated when they accepted to sell all they owned as farming tools for less than what they deserved. They hoped that they would redeem this when arriving in California and achieve their dream of stability and decent living. They were not free, in the liberal homeland, America.

The negative overview and selfishness by the father to the strike when he refused to participate in it, reminded us of the behavior of the truck driver who destroyed the belongings of his neighbors. This reflected the situation of the immigrant class in that period. The single thinking killed them. The American dream persuaded them that individualism and selfishness were means to attain it. It was in opposite to the others who unified to exploit those immigrants. Edwen T. Bowden states: “The “others,” after all, have banded together, not out of a desire to serve their common humanity, but rather out of a selfish desire to exploit the unorganized” (Bloom, Bloom's Guides 72).

The status of the family before their coming to California was better. Despite the drought and famine that harmed them, they were still living on their land and with their folks who knew them. Stephanie Day clarified this idea: “The return to the desperate condition [...] has not brought the Joad family closer to the American dream.” (17). Some critics as Louis Owens has also emphasized that *The Grapes of Wrath* was not a story of an American poor family, but the story of a whole society. The reason for suffering to many of the society's members was that running to the dream seemed nearby. *The Grapes of Wrath* revealed the illusion of the American Dream to the marginalized and disadvantaged. The Joad family’s journey west to California embodies the pursuit of this mirage driven by the promise of a better life. However, their experience reveals the harsh reality of exploitation that not only destroys the dream of a decent life but also erodes their sense of humanity.

Through his novel, Steinbeck depicts the American Dream as bait used by the powerful to prey on the weak. Hence, the novel criticizes the capitalist system that has promoted this illusion, as it becomes clear that the capitalist system derives its strength and wealth from the suffering of the marginalized. Despite the hard work of the Joad family, like many others, they have not been able to achieve a decent life. Their journey sheds light on how the capitalist system crushes the dreams of ordinary people seeking the American Dream.

#### *Disillusionment and Idealism in Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby's American Dream*

This part of the study examines Fitzgerald's critique of Jay Gatsby's unique understanding of the American Dream in the 1920s; it appears that Fitzgerald is attacking the American Dream's corruption rather than the American Dream itself. The belief that someone may succeed regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or familial background if they work hard enough is the foundation of the American Dream. Many times, "success" is synonymous with the amount of money that the self-sufficient, independent person may acquire. Fitzgerald analyzes and dissects Jay Gatsby's unique interpretation of the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*. Even though Fitzgerald is linked to the excesses of the "Roaring Twenties," his novel does a better job of exposing society's failings than it does to glorify them.

The novel, which bills itself as a "tale of the West," tackles issues of America and the various manifestations of the American Dream. This is where *The Great Gatsby* may be considered that fabled work, the “Great American Novel”—tracing a lineage back to the 19th century American novel, through the novels of the first half of the 20th century. It is worth reading this book alongside the novels dealing with the American Dream like our three preceding ones, which examine the "hollowness" that lies beneath the surface of contemporary society because it has a lot to say about faith, belief, and illusion.

One could view Gatsby as the quintessential tragic figure, the pinnacle of idealism and innocence who seeks meaning, order, and purpose in an otherwise chaotic world. Early in the novel, when the violent Tom

Buchanan breaks out, "Civilization's going to pieces," (*Gatsby* 8) Fitzgerald establishes the concept of underlying chaos. Fitzgerald is vague about the specifics of Gatsby's quick ascent, but the reader is aware that he was a poor Midwesterner without inherited wealth or family connections who managed to acquire an ostentatious home in West Egg, where he throws extravagant parties for strangers. Being wealthy gives one the chance to change who they are, and this is mostly due to a "single green light, minute and far away" (14): this is the home of Daisy Fay Buchanan, the affluent former Belle of Louisville whom Gatsby had a romantic relationship with before to the war, but who marries Chicago's extraordinarily wealthy Tom Buchanan.

For Gatsby, regaining Daisy is the only thing that matters in the future. The past's lack of relevance is a key component of the American Dream's strength. A fake past might be just as beneficial as an authentic one. Gatsby therefore creates extravagant falsehoods that he doesn't even try to hide in the slightest bit of truth. For example, Gatsby teasingly reveals that he is the "son of some wealthy people in the Middle West" (40) as he tries to persuade Nick Carraway, the novel's narrator, that he isn't a 'nobody'. The reader discovers later in the novel that Gatsby's brief attendance at Oxford was a component of a program for American veterans after World War I, not that he attended as part of a family history (61).

What Fitzgerald believed to be the foundation of the American Character is defined in part by the idealism that permeates Gatsby's unwavering ambitions. Undoubtedly, Gatsby firmly believes in the American Dream of self-made prosperity. He has succeeded financially and, at least seemingly, socially, in addition to creating a whole new persona for himself. However, the Dream that allows Gatsby to "once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder" (69) compels him to ascend to a lonely location where he is cut off from the rest of society. Gatsby is "standing alone on the marble steps and looking from one group to another with approving eyes ... nothing sinister about him" (31) amid the inebriated partygoers. Gatsby will likewise be essentially by himself for his funeral at the book's conclusion. The main ideological flaw with Gatsby is that he makes Daisy Buchanan his only source of hope for the orgasmic future. Gatsby's preoccupation with Daisy overrides his earlier diversified objectives, as demonstrated by the book in which Gatsby's father, Nick, details his son's vows to better himself. When Gatsby kisses Daisy for the first time, he knew that his mind would never cavort like the mind of God again because he had "forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God" (69). Five years later, Gatsby and Daisy finally get back together. He shows her around his lavish estate and pitifully shows off his collection of shirts made in Britain. Interestingly, the greatly anticipated afternoon results in disappointment rather than happiness.

As the story progresses, Gatsby appears to understand that he has set a standard for Daisy to meet, just as he did with his own identity. Even after Myrtle Wilson was killed by her reckless driving, he still maintains a strong commitment to her. Gatsby's obsession with Daisy only ends when he dies needlessly at the hands of a disturbed Mr. Wilson (whom Tom Buchanan leads to believe that Gatsby killed Myrtle). Fitzgerald appears to be condemning the American Dream's corruption in *The Great Gatsby* rather than the American Dream per se. What previously served as a foundation of independence and diligence for statesmen such as Thomas Jefferson has evolved into what Nick Carraway refers to as "His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty" (61). The chase of power and pleasure has taken up the energy that could have been used to achieve lofty objectives and a highly ostentatious, ultimately meaningless, kind of achievement.

With its emphasis on people's innate goodness, freshness, energy, and generous openness to life itself, Gatsby's dream is recognizable as America. We saw the potential fate of America itself with Gatsby's demise. Fitzgerald indicated the following in a letter (1924) while writing *The Great Gatsby*: "That's the whole burden of this novel—the loss of those illusions that give such color to the world so that you don't care whether things are true or false" (Fitzgerald, 1924, as quoted in Bruccoli, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Life in Letters*).

To sum up, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is a powerful critique of the American Dream, exposing its inherent contradictions. On the one hand, the novel offers a critique of the corrupt means used to reach this dream, suggesting that the way to wealth and success is through crime and moral corruption. Characters

like Gatsby, who achieved their wealth through questionable means, represent this dark side of the American Dream.

On the other hand, *The Great Gatsby* is a critique of the naive immigrants who believe that just moving to America will enable them to achieve wealth and success. By this contrast, Fitzgerald critiques not only the American dream itself but also the naivety of those who believe in its possibility without understanding the sacrifices that they may make. Thus, the novel serves as a profound criticism of the nature of the American Dream and its impact on society.

## Conclusion

In summary, the novels examined in this study present different dimensions to critique the American Dream. *The Jungle* presents the American dream as a trap for immigrant laborers, dragging them into exploitation and despair. *The Iron Heel* comes across the political machinery that suppresses and controls the working class. *The Grapes of Wrath* exposes the marginalization and exploitation faced by displaced farmers in their quest for a better life. Finally, *The Great Gatsby* delves into the moral decay and the corruption in the pursuit of wealth, questioning the foundation of the American dream itself.

Collectively, these novels suggest that the American Dream, while promising opportunity and prosperity, often leads to disillusionment and suffering for those who dare to pursue it. They challenge the myth that success is attainable for all through hard work and integrity, revealing instead a society where systemic inequality and moral corruption thwart the aspirations of many.

This critique remains relevant today as we continue to grapple with issues of economic disparity and social justice. The enduring power of these literary works lies in their ability to provoke reflection on the values that drive the American Dream and the societal structures that sustain it. In doing so, they call for a re-examination of what it means to pursue a life of fulfillment and success, urging us to envision a more equitable and humane future.

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