

# Jazz music in the great gatsby essay sample

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



In F. Scott Fitzgerald's, *The Great Gatsby*, the reader sees a common theme of corruption of the American Dream. In the 1920's, the times are changing in America and morals are becoming looser and the lifestyle of the wealthy is more careless. New fashion, attitude, and music is what nicknamed this era the "Jazz Age," greatly influencing Fitzgerald's writing. He created similarities between many things in pop culture and the journey his characters Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, and Myrtle are taking to achieve the American dream. Through the use of the lively, yet scandalous, jazz music from the 1920's, Fitzgerald reflects the attitudes of the characters in *The Great Gatsby* at the end of innocence and prevalence of carelessness within the elite of New York's society.

Jazz music was created by African Americans during the turn of the century in New Orleans. The new, upbeat music quickly became popular as it moved north to New York City. The music became especially popular with the young and wealthy, along with the "risqué" dances that went along with the new music. The jazz movement took off in the 1920s when big names like Louis Armstrong emerged, nicknaming this era the "Jazz Age." Jazz itself represented the American Dream. Poverty stricken and socially last African Americans started climbing the social ladder to fame, wealth, and respect from the white upper class. Just like the story of *The Great Gatsby*, this American Dream was also seen as corrupt.

Beyond the racial issue of white people listening to "black" music, activities associated with jazz were not respected by society. Jazz music was constantly associated with parties with went hand in hand with illegal drinking, shorter dresses, intimacy, and dancing. All of these things were

frequent at Gatsby's parties, but without his elaborate jazz band, the mood would not be set. When Nick Carraway is conveying the image of one of Gatsby's parties he describes, " A whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos, and low and high drums" (Fitzgerald 40). The jazz music of the 1920's is one example of the scandalous lives of the elite and their elaborate parties that broke barriers for the innovation of American culture.

The lyrics of jazz music also reflected the time of the care free lifestyle. Fitzgerald like to use these lyrics in certain moments of the novel to emphasize a moment. When Gatsby was showing Daisy around his house, he had Klipspringer play the piano. The song chosen was called Ain't We Got Fun. Lyrics Fitzgerald included in his novel were " One thing's sure and nothing's surer, The rich get richer and the poor get- children" (Fitzgerald 95). These lyrics are describing how the rich are free to live happily in their wealth without much concern for anybody else around them, while the lower classes have the responsibility of raising a family and not going out to party at night. It also shows the struggle of the middle and lower class. The wealthy are already established as so, and their wealth only continues to grow as time passes while the common man is faced with many obstacles that consume large amounts of his money such as a mortgage or their child's education. The lyrics of jazz can emphasis Fitzgerald's point of the corrupted American Dream.

Even though Jay Gatsby seemed to have everything in the American Dream such as a large house, an elaborate car, and a high social standing, he still

didn't have everything he wanted. His American Dream was to get the love of his life, Daisy to fall back in love with him after she refused her proposal because of his social class and amount of money. Through corrupt ways such as bootlegging, he attained large sums of money and started hosting elaborate parties in hopes of getting Daisy's attention. At one of his parties, he plays a song that Fitzgerald made up entitled "Jazz History of the World." When it was finished playing, the music had such an effect on people, the men and women were falling back on each other for affection. When it came to Gatsby though, Fitzgerald wrote, "No one swooned backward on Gatsby, and no French bob touched Gatsby's shoulder, and no singing quartets were formed with Gatsby's head for one link." (Fitzgerald 50). Even though Gatsby was surrounded by people in his own home, nobody was concerned enough with him to become close to him. Gatsby may have all the material items he needed, but he was still incredibly lonely and just needed the affection of Daisy.

The rise of upbeat tempo of jazz music was a big change from the subtle classical music that use to be popular and the lives of the wealthy also greatly changed in the 1920s. The rise of the music reflected the American Dream of achieving financial success and happiness but the corrupt associations with drinking, dancing, and other questionable behavior shows how questionable the intentions of the character's American Dreams are. It may seem like it is all just a good time to the wealthy because of their disregard to other people's lives, but the Fitzgerald proves the American Dream can end innocence and shows it with jazz music.

## Works Cited

Pearsons, Roger L.. " Gatsby: False Prophet of the American Dream." JSTOR. ITHAKA, n. d. Web. 29 Oct. 2012. .

" The Great Gatsby: Music." The Great Gatsby. Blogger, n. d. Web. 29 Oct. 2012. .