



The Great Gatsby

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Historical Background

- In the U.S. the 1920's was known as the Jazz Age.
- It lasted from the end of World War I to the stock market crash in 1929.
- Financial prosperity and moral uncertainty.

Social Background

- Generation that reached maturity in those years were disillusioned by war and lost faith in old-age values.
- Questioned all morals and lived for the pleasures of the moment.

Industry in the 1920's

- A “boom” period economically – the ideal of hard work as necessary for success was discarded ... there were easy ways of making money.
- Prohibition laws – an amendment prohibiting the manufacture, sale or consumption of alcoholic beverages.
- Laws were openly flouted and the “bootlegger” who provided alcohol was regarded as merely “shady” not a vicious lawbreaker.

Setting

- 1920's
- Long Island, NY
- West Egg (new money)
- East Egg (old money)

Social Status

- Nouveau riche – newly rich
- “New” money was considered “dirty” money and its possessor an outsider.
- It takes generations for new money to lose its stigma and to become accepted.
- Irony: Gatsby was looked down upon and considered to be “vulgar” but Tom’s extravagance is accepted as part of his upper-class lifestyle.

Characters

- Nick Carraway: son of wealthy Midwestern family, rents home in Long Island colony of West Egg. Narrator of story and claims to be author of story (1st person point of view).
- Jay Gatsby: owns mansion next to Nick's house; rich, suspicious, mysterious background; lived in West Egg (nouveau riche area).

Characters Cont.

- Daisy: she is married to Tom Buchanan (football star from Yale). Daisy is Nick's rich cousin who lives in East Egg (more fashionable).
- Jordan Baker: guest of Tom and Daisy. Professional golfer who is very snobbish and looks down on Nick because of his social status.