

100 Years of the American Dream

100 Years of the American Dream:

*Representations and
Conceptions in American
Literature, 1919-2019*

Edited by

Michael Kearney

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INTRODUCTION

The Conception of the Book

At the end of October 2019, I received an email from Rebecca Gladders of Cambridge Scholars Publishing offering me the opportunity to be a guest editor of a collection in my field of expertise. What attracted me to this offer was that I would be free to conceive of my own concept for the book. I started contemplating the possibilities: Wow, so many! As I thought about my options, I, of course, like everybody else, went about my daily life. An aspect of that daily life was the constant state of being bombarded, via media and conversations, with the state of strife enveloping the United States. Then one day, while lazing in front of the TV watching the news, the thought that the American Dream was dying popped into my head. However, this was immediately followed by a stream of notions: Whose American Dream? A wealthy white male? A woman of color? An undocumented immigrant? Was not the American Dream different for different people? And wait, what makes it so American? Did not people in other nations have the same hopes, the same dreams?

Even though the phrase the American Dream was not coined until 1931, by James Truslow Adams in *The Epic of America*, it can be argued that the key concepts at the phrase's core have been attached to the Americas since Europeans first began colonizing what many have called the New World. I posit here that these two key concepts are liberty and opportunity. Liberty meaning that one is free to do what they like. Opportunity being the state where individuals are able to sustain, and perhaps even enhance, the conditions of their existence. Moreover, I hold that these are concepts which have existed throughout the span of human history, concepts that existed in all human societies regardless of whether they were or were not attained by the populous.

Nevertheless, the concept of the American Dream is linked to the United States of America. I have never heard of a Canadian Dream, nor an Argentinian Dream, even though both countries are in the Americas and the majority of their populations have genetic links to non-indigenous peoples. With these thoughts in mind, I came up with the idea of a collection examining the concept of the American Dream in literature. Next was to impose parameters, for that is what we humans do; we develop systems,

categories, classifications, boundaries, borders: here, think of Jorge Luis Borges's "Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge," of the creation of parameters out of arbitrariness. I decided to set the time period for the collection at one hundred years: a nice round number. Counting back from the moment of conception would mean from 1919 to 2019: from the end of the Great War (the one to end all wars) to the eighteenth year of the Global War on Terror. A pretty poignant time period to consider, at least for those of us that are in existence at this point in time. Then, since we would be analyzing representations and conceptions of the American Dream in literature, why not limit the scope to American Literature.

A few of the ideas proposed for chapters would cause me to consider, to reconsider, to challenge the method of classifying a work as American Literature: each of these proposals was accepted for the collection and the book is better for including them. After reading each contribution and finalizing the list of works that would comprise the book, the task of ordering them rose its ugly head. Could I find thematic connections between different chapters and order the book that way? Yes, there were certainly a few options available. However, I thought this would be me imposing an order. Rather than do that, and with a head full of concepts of equality for all, I decided the fairest way to order the contributions would be to place them in alphabetical order based on the author's family name.

The Chapters

As proposals arrived, I was surprised by the content. I had expected to receive numerous proposals on F. Scott Fitzgerald but only one came in: Setsuko Adachi's piece analyzing *Gatsby* in relation to Etsu Inagaki Sugimoto's *A Daughter of the Samurai*, a chapter which focuses on notions of American aristocracy. Could Sugimoto be considered American Literature? Well, she was an immigrant in a country vastly populated by immigrants, so into the collection she must be let.

I had hoped to receive proposals on Black writers from the United States, grossly underrepresented and underappreciated in our schools, libraries, and publishing houses. Michael S. Begnal's contribution to this book poignantly cuts to the core of the inequality between the races in the United States though his informed and innovative reading of Amiri Baraka's work in relation to the concept of nationalism, the capitalist system, and baseball.

From Brian Coates, I received another surprise proposal: a chapter on T. S. Eliot, the Nobel Prize winning literary giant of Modernist poetry who renounced his United States citizenship and became a British citizen. While I do love Eliot's work, and while I was fully aware that he was born and

raised in the United States, I had not really associated him with what is generally considered American Literature, nor I surmise would Eliot. Coates posits that Eliot's dream emerges from a sense of "irreparable loss embedded in" Eliot's ancestors' emigrating from England to New England in the 1660s. Eliot's American Dream is to go in reverse to "regain" a British identity that was lost over two hundred years before his birth.

Jeremy Fernando has contributed a challenging chapter for the book. Fernando's examination is Barthesian in that it utilizes a technique of analysis that places the concept of "The American Dream alongside professional wrestling." Fernando's writing style is highly unique for an academic piece. At the very beginning, the style gave me concern; however, given that the core concepts the collection focuses upon are liberty and opportunity, it would be very un-American and very un-literary to exclude the piece based on its pushing stylist boundaries. Thankfully, Fernando provides us readers with a map to his musings in the form of an Abstract at the beginning of his chapter.

My own contribution to the book is on Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Perhaps it was a result of being the editor of this collection and getting to read so many different contributors' analyses of various writers' representations and concepts of the American Dream that led me toward the idea of inclusiveness, toward the idea of a Human Dream rather than an American one. Perhaps not, I fathom that I was already heading that way. Regardless, I believe Ferlinghetti, as a didactic, insurgent poet, intended to lead me, to lead his readers, to that realm of "higher consciousness."

Maria Kranidis, with her chapter "Powerful Silences: Examining the New Woman's Femininity and Relationships in Silent Films," challenged me to contemplate whether silent film works could/should be included in a consideration of literature. Why not? Literature and silent film share the same elements: narrative, plot, characters, conflict ...; while their modes of communication may differ, they both communicate stories. The first human literatures were oral rather than written. Writing initially developed as a form of recording thoughts, ideas, and information, so that they could be remembered. It also allowed them to be disseminated across distances, to those out of earshot. The recording technologies, audio and visual, available to humans since the mid-nineteenth century serve these purposes of archiving and distribution. Moreover, we are all aware that Bob Dylan, a recording-artist, won a Nobel Prize for Literature. Welcome aboard Maria.

One of the opportunities that should be available to all inhabitants of the United States, regardless of citizenship, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and/or economic status is the right to an education. In his contribution to this book, Jeffrey S. Markovitz provides a keen and important analysis of

university education through his examination of “the literary genre of campus novels.” Markovitz’s piece brings insight into twentieth century “ideological and economic shifts” that “propagate[] inequit[y]” in the United States.

Kei Saito, in his chapter “The Beat Movement and Its Asian Influence as an Alternative to the American Dream,” details how Beat writers “such as Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg” utilized Asian culture and religion, particularly Zen, as a way of revitalizing the American Dream. Saito posits that their aim was not to rebel against the United States, but to provide a means of “rediscovering lost American values.”

In her chapter, Gisele Giandoni Wolkoff utilizes a poststructural approach, which posits that “identities are mutable, non-fixed, and a subjective concept,” in her close reading of the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop and Eavan Boland. Wolkoff demonstrates that in our “postmodern space” individuals experiencing “geographical dislocations ... who have been part of migratory movements” ranging “from refuge to exile of choice and diaspora” form identities that can be thought of as “mutable geographies.” Wolkoff’s work brings great insight into how identities form and function in our postmodern existence, for a nation populated mostly by immigrants and the descendants of immigrants, understanding these processes is vital.

This collection offers examinations of the concept of the American Dream across a broad and diverse range of works. The analytical methods utilized by the authors, who are all clearly extremely knowledgeable experts in their fields, are as unique as the content they examine is varied. Each chapter offers innovative insights, which while founded in literary critique, transcend the field of literature and touch upon issues related to economics, education, gender, immigration, psychology, race, and religion, to name a few. I hope you get as much from reading the authors’ contributions as I did.

THE AMERICAN DREAM FASCINATION
WITH ARISTOCRACY:
*THE GREAT GATSBY AND A DAUGHTER
OF THE SAMURAI*

SETSUKO ADACHI

**The Readers' Appetite for *The Great Gatsby*:
The Contemporary American Dream
and Pre-American Dream**

The Great Gatsby is an American classic. It is a work that today in the USA “even those who have not read it believe that they have,” and they “take for granted that they know about its main character and theme of the American Dream.”¹ Readers typically see, in the plot composed by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940), pessimistic renditions of the American Dream. The hero, Jay Gatsby started his life at the bottom. He was the son of “shiftless and unsuccessful farm people,”² who, with his strong determination, worked upward and attained “colossal”, to use the narrator, Nick Carraway’s word, materialistic prosperity. The problem was the American Dream promise was not fulfilled. Gatsby was not rewarded with happiness. Instead, he was falsely accused and murdered. This outcome often leads readers to contemplate the world they live in and reevaluate the American Dream. Jay Gatsby is a relatable character almost a century after the publication of Fitzgerald’s novel.

Back in 1925, however, Gatsby and the book did not do well. “What has never been alive cannot very well go on living; so this is a book for the season only,”³ wrote Isabel Paterson in a book review. Throughout

¹ William E. Cain, “American Dreaming: Really Reading *The Great Gatsby*.” *Society*, 1-18. 2 Sep. 2020.

² F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, London: Penguin Books, 2000, 95.

³ Isabel Paterson, “Up to the Minute,” *The New York Herald Tribune*, April 19, 1925.

Fitzgerald's lifetime, *The Great Gatsby* remained a commercial failure. Rather, readers found a book on "[h]ow a daughter of feudal Japan, living hundreds of years in one generation, became a modern American"⁴ savorer. Etsu Inagaki Sugimoto's (1872? -1950) *A Daughter of the Samurai* was published the same year as *The Great Gatsby*, and by 1932 it was "the most continuously successful book of non-fiction on the Doubleday, Doran list."⁵

The term, American Dream did not circulate until 1931. It was coined by James Truslow Adams (1878-1949), and he used it in *The Epic of America*. Yet, when the term American Dream became popular, it did not bring *Gatsby* fame as a contemporary tragic American Dream hero or enlist *The Great Gatsby* as a Great American Novel. Readers had a different taste. It was impacted by *gentility*—the pursuit of refinement initially modeled after the European aristocracy, which by the mid-19th century "thoroughly entrenched" the American middle class.⁶ *Gatsby* was a late bloomer. His time did not arrive until post-WWII.

To explore transformations in taste and appetite regarding the American Dream and its fascination with the aristocracy, *The Great Gatsby*, *A Daughter of the Samurai*, and *The Epic of America*, are considered. The comparative method is used to elicit the undercurrent of the American fascination with the aristocracy in the pre-American Dream days as the run-up to Adams' concept of the American Dream and the contemporary American Dream. Lastly, Amanda Gorman and her poem, "The Hill We Climb," will be covered to bring readers' attention to how American fascination for the aristocracy has been incorporated as part of the American Dream success today.

The American Gentility and Pre-American Dream

A familiar pattern for the contemporary American Dream, as an Iranian immigrant father told his daughter and family, would be that in the USA, "[A]nyone, no matter how humble his background, could become an important person."⁷ The hero of the Dream would often be from the lower class. The contemporary American Dream narrative also asserts a moral:

⁴ Printed on the inside cover.

⁵ "Etsu Sugimoto, 76, A Japanese Author," *New York Times*, June 22, 1950. Reprinted in Teruyo Ueki Ed., *Collected English Works of Etsu Inagaki Sugimoto* Vol. 5 (Tokyo: Edition Synapse, 2013).

⁶ Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, New York: Vintage, 1993, xiii.

⁷ Firoozeh Dumas, *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America*, New York: Random House, 2004, 3-4.

equal opportunity must be given to those at the bottom. It is a moral promoted in a popular indoctrination phrase like, “In America, anybody can be president, if they want.”

This moral perspective enabled Elaine Kim to see the issue of the aristocratic upper class. Examining two early Asian immigrant writers, Sugimoto and Lin Yutang, Kim stated that they were “characterized by the extent to which they ignore the harsh realities of both American and Asian life” and specified they did not represent “the general population” of Asian Americans. Sugimoto was “a member of the aristocratic upper classes of feudal Japan,”⁸ who “refrain[ed] from discussing the problems of racial discrimination or their effects.” Kim noted that a year before the publication of *A Daughter of the Samurai*, the laws prohibiting Japanese immigration to the United States became effective. Sugimoto avoided mentioning the issues and allowed “[n]othing harsh or disagreeable” to intrude into the narrative.⁹

The disinterest toward the low class was also an inherent issue within the middle-class and upper-class American gentility, which Sugimoto adopted. According to Richard Bushman, who delineated the workings of gentility ideals in the USA between 1700 and 1850 in *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, Americans remodeled houses, modes of speech, dress, body carriage, and manners copying the European courts to be civil, fashionable, and urbane first as a colony, then as a republic. Bushman’s work also illuminated that the American gentility pursuers focused on internal life—mental, moral, intellectual, and spiritual. They stressed the self-governing effort to “cultivate” their minds and “refine” themselves. Internal and external beauty was interconnected, and they were externalized and materialized in persons, houses, and cities. Bushman called it a “beautification campaign”:

Everything from houses to barns to village streets was to be made beautiful; every scene was to be turned into a picture.¹⁰

The American gentility was not interested in the unrefined—the lower class. Thus, when Sugimoto brought them into her stories, in the form of maids and servants, they appeared not educated but loyal, kind, and happy.

The American aspiration for gentility had the same pattern as the contemporary American Dream. Bushman wrote the allure “refinement”

⁸ Elaine H. Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*, Philadelphia: Temple University, 1982, 26.

⁹ Kim, 26-27.

¹⁰ Bushman, xiv.

held out was “the hope of elevation from ordinary existence into an exalted society of superior beings.”¹¹ It held the tension of something that was not-yet-being-realized, but it could be if one worked hard at it, and when one achieved it, one would be reaching a better, higher, and more gratifying state. American gentility was the pre-American Dream—a precursor to the American Dream.

The Ideal American and the Ideal USA

The USA is a nation that takes great pride in and is founded on the refusal by “the unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America” to be governed by the absolute tyranny of the King of Great Britain. The so-called founding fathers declared independence in 1776 and stated that all people were equal and had the right to “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Unfortunately, as Bushman stated, the nation’s founding cause and the nation builders’ behavioral ideal contradicted:

Republicanism cut off the top of American society by forbidding an American aristocracy. Aristocratic bloodlines, traditionally the bearers of the highest culture, could not be tolerated. In republican society, the absence of an aristocracy was a blessing; in genteel society, it was a grave loss. It meant that the best people and the best circles, the models for the others to follow, were always elsewhere.¹²

Thomas Jefferson epitomized a typical pre-American Dreamer dreaming of creating a superior democratic nation but conducting himself after the aristocratic model. The ironic reality was Thomas Jefferson, known for implementing “all men are equal” as “the self-evident truth” in the Declaration of Independence, died as a slave owner in Virginia. Bushman speculated:

They were fixed in colonial mentality as periphery and center.... They could not break the colonial and provincial habit of looking upward and outward for leadership.¹³

This psychology nourished the desire for the appearance of the Great American Novel too. Literature was regarded as a crystallization of internal life, both individual and collective. Thus, it had a significant role in

¹¹ Bushman, xix.

¹² Bushman, 413.

¹³ Bushman, 414.

understanding the greatness level of a nation's internal development. Traditionally, in the literature hierarchy, poetry was posited higher than the novel:

A national literature is an essential element in the formation of national character. It is not merely the record of a country's mental progress: it is the expression of its intellectual life, the bond of national unity, and the guide of national energy. ... On the other hand, it is easy to show, that, in the older countries of the world, the names of distinguished poets, enshrined in the national heart, are the watchwords of national union ...¹⁴

In 1868, John William DeForest gauging the American national internal progress, wrote:

... We may be confident that the Great American Poem will not be written, no matter what genius attempts it, until democracy, the idea of our day and nation and race, has agonized and conquered through centuries, and made its work secure.

But the Great American Novel—the picture of the ordinary emotions and manners of American existence ... will, we suppose, be possible earlier.¹⁵

The peripheral inferiority was also combined with the Social Darwinism discourse that gained power as scientific truth, which compared the newer countries to a child. For example, in 1899, Rudyard Kipling, who was English, sent his famous poem “The White Man's Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands” to Theodore Roosevelt and the Americans with the message to “[t]ake up the White Man's burden.” In short, it was a message spoken from a mature adult to a young adult to be a responsible adult (Stop behaving like a child!), to help the lesser evolved races evolve and reach a higher state of civilization; they needed to be guided.

The pre-American Dreamers yearned for the coming of Great American literature, proof that they and their nation had elevated into a beautiful autonomous existence.

¹⁴ Edward Hartley Dewart, *Selections from Canadian Poets*, 1864, ix. Quoted in Cynthia Conchita Sugars Ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015.

¹⁵ John William DeForest, “The Great American Novel,” *The Nation*, New York, January 9, 1868.

A Daughter of the Samurai: The Democracy's Conquest of Aristocracy

A Daughter of the Samurai was savory for the American readers because it represented the democracy's conquest of the aristocracy. *A Daughter of the Samurai* was a narrative of evolution combined with a Cinderella story. Etsu Sugimoto was a samurai's daughter (Cinderella was an aristocrat, too) born into an impoverished but high-ranked samurai family. Her brother, who was the head of the house, arranged for her, when she was fourteen, to marry down to Matsunosuke Sugimoto as a token of gratitude for saving his life.¹⁶ Her betrothed was living in Cincinnati, a mid-western city, in the USA. In 1898, she crossed the Pacific and took the transcontinental railroad from San Francisco to marry a man she had never met. Sugimoto married in June that year. In Cincinnati, all the hardships were rewarded. The White Woman's burden was taken up willingly, guiding and supporting Sugimoto's growth, and thus, Sugimoto's happy evolution began. First, she was welcomed by a wealthy, aristocratic, genteel American couple. Then, she and her husband settled into the home of a loving and kind middle-class aristocratic American family. In this aristocracy fascinated genteel neighborhood, Sugimoto adopted the European aristocratic custom of the double surname in Cincinnati.

Her writing of *A Daughter of the Samurai* served as the proof of Sugimoto's mind's progress and refinement. Sugimoto's description of the Wilsons that welcomed her is as follows:

Our friend, Mrs. Wilson, was always kind to me, and I have been a happy and grateful guest in her beautiful home many, many times; but my permanent home was in an adjoining suburb, in a large, old-fashioned frame house set on a hill in the midst of big trees and lawns cut with winding gravel paths. The mistress of this house was a widowed relative of Mrs. Wilson, a woman in whom was united the stern, high-principled stock of New England with the gentle Virginia aristocracy. She invited us for a visit at first, because she loved Japan. But we were all so happy together that we decided not to separate; so for many years our home was there with "Mother," as we learned to call her. Close to my own mother in my heart stands my American mother—one of the noblest, sweetest women that God ever made.¹⁷

¹⁶ See Etsu Inagaki Sugimoto, *A Daughter of the Samurai*, University Press of Hawaii: Hawaii, 2001, 64-65.

¹⁷ Sugimoto, 159.

The first Mrs. Wilson mentioned in the above was Amanda Landrum Wilson (1832-1926). She and her husband, Obed J. Wilson, were listed on *Mrs. Devereux's Blue Book of Cincinnati Society* (1894). The second Mrs. Wilson, Sugimoto's American mother, was Mrs. Sarah R. Mills Wilson (? - 1907). She, her daughter, Florence, and the Sugimotos were not listed.

Furthermore, this distinction of being on the social register or not serves as a significant class division marker in discussing the two pieces of pre-American Dream literature. It will be beneficial to clarify the three classes the paper will be using at this point: those listed on the regional social register are classified as the Gold-Hatted aristocracy. The term "gold-hatted" is taken from the epitaph in *The Great Gatsby*. Those who are wealthy but not qualified to be listed are called the middle class. The lower class, then, would be the rest of the people. They were often called the masses or the common people. Thus, this would place Mr. and Mrs. Obed J. Wilson with the Gold-Hatted aristocracy; and Mrs. Sarah R. Mills Wilson, Florence Wilson, and the Sugimotos in the middle class.

Sugimoto's adaption to gentility's internal refinement practices was clear in her depictions of her mental advancement. Sugimoto wrote, "one of the most interesting mysteries of my life here [in the USA] is my own gradual but inevitable *mental evolution*."¹⁸ Sugimoto knew the discourse:

... I realized more and more that my love of freedom and my belief in my right to grow toward it meant more than freedom to act, to talk, to think. Freedom also claimed a *spiritual* right to grow.

... As I read, and thought, and felt, my soul reached out into the unknown; and gradually, easily, almost unconsciously, I drifted out of a faith of philosophy, mysticism, and resignation [of old Japan] into one of high ideals, freedom, cheerfulness, and hope.¹⁹

Sugimoto's choice of her permanent home, favoring the middle class, was symbolic; she posited democracy above her aristocratic origin. Once that was done, her nobility only added pleasant weight to the American democracy for the pre-American Dream readers. For instance, Christopher Morley (1890-1957), whose mission "was to help bring beauty and great literature to those people alive in America during his own lifetime,"²⁰

¹⁸ Sugimoto, 155.

¹⁹ Sugimoto, 145.

²⁰ Mark J. Wallach and Jon Bracker, *Christopher Morley*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1976, 120.

records the following that evoked the courtly image in the New York newspaper office:

One of my pleasantest memories is of a time when Mrs. Sugimoto, in her Japanese costume, accompanied as a great lady should be by her daughter and a loved companion, ... to visit me in the New York newspaper office. ... I have never forgotten it: her gay little figure, charming as a bird or flower in her vivid robe, brightening for a few minutes ...²¹

What Sugimoto accomplished made her a great teacher. Morley wrote:

She has given us here a unique picture of the exquisite complexity and beauty of all human life. She is a great teacher, and I would not willingly even tread on her shadow.²²

As Kim sensed, Sugimoto did not include the unrefined. Sugimoto used her experiences as material and polished them in her literary endeavor for the American genteel sensibility; Morley supported it because of her mastery of the beautification practice in the American democratic context. Sugimoto did not mention the threats the pre-American Dreamers were facing either; that survival of the middle-class American gentility, and the genteel aristocrats, like Mr. and Mrs. Obed J. Wilsons, depended on whether they could succeed as the Gold-Hatted. *A Daughter of the Samurai's* world was set in a stable autonomous genteel USA—the pre-American Dreamers' ideal.

Fitzgerald's attitude was contrastive to Sugimoto's. Fitzgerald, directly and indirectly, reflected the significant changes that negatively influenced gentility in *The Great Gatsby*. It was an unstable time. The 1920s was "modern," a new era "fundamentally different, in pace and texture, from what went on before."²³ The USA was experiencing unprecedented economic growth. Consumerism flowered, and technological innovations, such as telephones and automobiles, altered lives. The financial overachievers, the "industrialists," Henry Ford, Andrew Carnegie, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jay Gould, and John D. Rockefeller, who rose to power in the Gilded Age had established the Gold-Hatted American aristocracy. They were called robber barons and tycoons because they were regarded as selfish, greedy, ruthless, and inhumane. Their daughters were

²¹ Sugimoto, xiv- xv.

²² Sugimoto, xv.

²³ Paul V. Murphy, *The New Era: American Thought and Culture in the 1920s*, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016, 1.

busy marrying European aristocrats.²⁴ When prohibition, no manufacturing, importing, transporting, or selling of alcohol, became effective in 1920, the bootlegging business flourished. This banning of “intoxicating liquors” continued until 1933.

American Aristocracy and the *Social Register*

Bushman’s American gentility study ended in the mid-nineteenth century because gentility in America started declining around then. The USA went through the Civil War (1861-1865) and then into the Gilded Age, establishing the Gold-Hatted aristocracy. The Gold-Hatted aristocrats were the pre-American Dream killers; pre-American Dreamers dreamed of being ultimately democratic; the Gold-Hatted had no interest in it.

The Gold-Hatted aristocracy played a non-democratic game on the international stage, mainly with European aristocrats. It featured in being exclusive and invisible. Sugimoto mentioned the invisibility of Tuxedo Park, which was the first gated community in the USA. According to Sugimoto, it was a residential area where “fairy tale like huge-castle mansions” stood. “To find such an aristocratic sphere in the USA,” Sugimoto commented, “which always takes pride in being democratic makes me think that humans’ feelings are ... not that different.”²⁵ Tuxedo Park was a part of the European-American aristocratic society circuit, where the daughters of the aristocrats had made “group debuts” since 1886; and for some, it was the place where their autumn ball marked the beginning of the season.²⁶

1886 was also the year when Louis Keller started the *Social Register* business. He compiled the *Social Register* for the New York society, “a simple list of members of society, chosen only by him.”²⁷ It was a huge success. The list informed members of the whereabouts of the people on the list. The side effect was it quickly served the function of accreditation to being an American aristocrat. It still does. Today it proves to be more

²⁴ Kristen Richardson, *The Season: A Social History of the Debutante*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2020.

²⁵ 杉本鉞子「“武士の娘”の見たアメリカ(3)」『婦人之友』三月号 (1940), 166-167. In a separate volume by Teruyo Ueki on *Collected English Works of Etsu Inagaki Sugimoto*, Edition Synapse, Tokyo, 2013. Translations from Japanese to English are by the author unless noted otherwise.

²⁶ Richardson, 165.

²⁷ Dick Brown, “Louis Keller, Founder: Baltusrol’s Founding Father,” Baltusrol Golf Club. Viewed May 26, 2021.

exclusive. The number of people it lists has not changed since 1934, as of 2014²⁸, but the American population has increased.

Jack Smith in “Socially Active,” an article sponsored by the Social Register Association was explicit on who is qualified to be a member:

The preferred way is to be born in, which leaves no doubt about your bona fides. ... A second avenue to membership, popular among impoverished European nobles and assorted fortune hunters, is marriage, which automatically bestows membership on the lesser-pedigreed spouse and eventually their children. The third is to be sponsored, which requires the applicant to assemble as many as five letters from current members praising their friend’s philanthropy, unflagging taste, and discretion.²⁹

To put it simply, the best ways to enter the list are by birth or marriage. The contemporary American Dream’s moral to ascertain equal opportunity for the bottom did not stand much chance.

Nick Carraway: A Genteel Snob

If *A Daughter of the Samurai* were a Cinderella story, *The Great Gatsby* would be a detective story, a mystery, where the solution would be to demystify Gatsby. The promotion on the back cover of the first Charles Scribner’s Sons edition said:

It is a story of this Jay Gatsby who came so mysteriously to West Egg, of his sumptuous entertainments, and of his love for Daisy Buchanan—a story that ranges from pure lyrical beauty to sheer brutal realism, and is infused with a sense of strangeness of human circumstance in a heedless universe.

It is a magical, living book, blended of irony, romance, and mysticism.

The key to reading *The Great Gatsby* as pre-American Dream literature is to premise Nick Carraway, the detective, as bred in the mid-western genteel culture; his moral was that of the pre-American Dreamers, perhaps similar to the one Sugimoto adopted. Gatsby’s story was told through Nick’s observations and contemplations. Nick stated the riddles he faced at the beginning, in the fourth paragraph into the story to be exact:

And, after boasting this way of my tolerance, I come to the admission that it has a limit. Conduct may be founded on the hard rock or the wet marshes

²⁸ Jack Smith, “Socially Active,” *Robb Report*, January 2018.

²⁹ Smith.

but after a certain point I don't care what it's founded on. When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; ... Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. ... No—Gatsby turned out all right at the end; 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.³⁰

Nick was in moral turmoil after Gatsby's death in the East, in New York. He went back to the Midwest. Nick needed to straighten things out, including his reaction to Gatsby, the singular person Nick exempted from calling out on moral degeneration, yet who represented everything for which he had unaffected scorn.

Nick opened the mystery of Gatsby's case, and began his literary endeavor, with his father's advice from his young days, advice that still bothered him:

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.

"Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."³¹

Nick's foundation of conduct came from his father. At the end of the next paragraph, Nick emphasized his adherence to his father:

Reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope. I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth.³²

Nick's father talked to his son about the "advantages" of being a bona fide, of the "advantages" of being well-bred in aristocratic gentility. Nick had no problem with the pre-American Dreamers' morals, but when he moved to the East and socialized with Tom, Daisy, and Gatsby on Long Island, he discovered it was antiquated.

³⁰ Fitzgerald, 7-8.

³¹ Fitzgerald, 14.

³² Fitzgerald, 7.

Tom and Daisy Buchanan and Nick were all bona fides of the Midwest, and they were relatives. They and their families followed the mode of aristocratic routine. For example, Tom went to Yale. So did Nick. Yale, along with Harvard and Princeton, was where the sons of American aristocrats were sent. The Buchanans were among the Gold-Hatted American aristocrats, and Tom was an inheritor. Daisy was Nick's "second cousin once removed."³³ Daisy Fay married up successfully to Tom Buchanan, socially advancing the Fay family. The Carraways did not make the Gold-Hatted aristocracy. Nick was demoted to the middle class. It made him look like a snob to the outsiders. His manners and the family wealth did not match any longer. He was aware of the mismatch; Nick repeatedly used "snobbishly" in the above. The divide between Nick and the Buchanans, thus, seemed economic.

The three started spending time together socializing on Long Island when Nick moved to West Egg. Tom and Daisy resided in East Egg, the fashionable area, where "the white palaces ... glittered along the water."³⁴ West Egg was where the "less fashionable," the newly rich resided. Nick's next-door neighbor was Gatsby. Gatsby was Gold-Hatted but not an aristocrat. He lived in a mansion, whereas Nick lived in an eye-sore, "a weather-beaten cardboard bungalow at eighty a month."³⁵

Nick scorned everything Gatsby represented. This made sense, for Nick was refined. Gatsby was not. Gatsby was a "platonic conception of" James Gatz, who was at the service of his God, which was "vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty."³⁶ Gatsby did not possess the right personality. Worse, Gatsby wanted to marry Daisy. Gatsby acted as if he knew Thomas Parke D'Invilliers'³⁷ poem that was inserted as an epitaph:

Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;
If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,
Till she cry [sic] "Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover,
I must have you!"³⁸

From Nick's point of view, Gatsby lacked the common sense of a bona fide. Daisy would have affairs but would never say, "I must *marry* you!"

³³ Fitzgerald, 11.

³⁴ Fitzgerald, 11.

³⁵ Fitzgerald, 9.

³⁶ Fitzgerald, 95.

³⁷ A fictional Princeton freshman poet that first appeared in Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (1922).

³⁸ Fitzgerald, 5.

Marrying down was unrealistic. Nick was polite to Gatsby and did not let on what he thought of Gatsby. Nick was behaving well, acting well within his father's teachings. On the morning Gatsby confided in Nick, which was the last time Nick saw him alive, Nick complimented Gatsby. Nick was emphatic that it was the only compliment "he ever gave" because he "disapproved of him [Gatsby] from beginning to end."³⁹ Nick learned Gatsby was willing to sacrifice his life for Daisy, to die to save her.

After Gatsby was found dead, things went wrong. Nick could not reserve judgment. It came as an empirical fact. Tom and Daisy were evil. Tom and Daisy created the cause for Gatsby's death, yet they showed no sign of caring. They were brutally shallow.

They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made. . . ."

The periphery-center reversal of the East and the Midwest began for Nick. It became definitive when Nick saw Tom as a child:

I shook hands with him; it seemed silly not to, for I felt suddenly as though I were talking to a child. Then he went into the jewelry store to buy a pearl necklace—or perhaps only a pair of cuff buttons—rid of my provincial squeamishness forever.⁴⁰

Nick went back to the Midwest, where hope, decency was. There, Nick concluded, as quoted earlier, that Gatsby "turned out all right" at the end. Nick must have demystified Gatsby, for he praised Gatsby's personality open-heartedly. Gatsby's inner life, Nick found, was strong and beautiful:

If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. . . .—it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again.

Gatsby was like a sensitive, intricate machine. However, what it was, the source of beauty, that Gatsby was registering, Nick preferred not to clarify, and it would have to be left at that. It took Nick more than two

³⁹ Fitzgerald, 146-147.

⁴⁰ Fitzgerald, 170.

years after Gatsby's murder to narrate the story, and when he did, it had "pure lyrical beauty," unfortunately, not so much for Fitzgerald's contemporary readers.

Adams' American Dream

Six years later, when *The Epic of America* was published in 1931, it was on a list of bestselling books for months.⁴¹ The pre-American Dream identity holders shared the sense of crisis with Adams that America had "slipped a long way backwards" in the 1910s and 1920s.⁴² Adams wrote the "epic" to reaffirm the noble cause of the pre-American Dream—the cultured one represented in and by Thomas Jefferson. The idea was there, vaguely floating like a ghost, and Adams captured it with the term "American dream."⁴³

The problem, in short, was the rise of the Gold-Hatted moral that Nick became aware of. Adams' battle was with "the lower quality of thought,"⁴⁴ the degenerated morals. Adams quoted Henry Ford who said, "anything which is economically right is also morally right."⁴⁵

Adams' method to rectify the situation, which was outside the scope of Sugimoto and Fitzgerald, was to present to the lower class that the American Dream was the opportunity for them to be refined, a chance which had been systematically denied to them in older civilizations:

No, the American dream that has lured tens of millions of all nations to our shores in the past century has not been a dream of material plenty, though that has doubtless counted heavily. It has been much more than that. It has been a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as man and woman, unhampered by the barriers which had slowly been erected in older civilizations, unrepressed by social orders which had developed for the benefit of classes rather than for the simple human of any and every class.

⁴¹ Solon J. Buck, "The Epic of America. By James Truslow Adams. (Boston, Little, Brown, and Company, 1931. viii, 433p. Illustrations.) originally appeared in *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*. Reprinted in *Book Review*, pp. 338-341. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<https://journals.psu.edu/wph/article/view/1607>

⁴² James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America*, Florida: Simon Publications, 2001, 416.

⁴³ Adams used the lower case "d" for "dream." The author used the upper case "American Dream," to indicate that the terminology is established today in the American discourse.

⁴⁴ Adams, 410.

⁴⁵ Adams, 400.

And that dream has been realized more fully in actual life here than anywhere else, though very imperfectly even among ourselves.

It has been a great epic and a great dream. What, now, of the future?⁴⁶

If one works to cultivate and elevate one's mind, great democracy will be achieved, and that is the objective of Adams' American Dream:

If it [the American dream] is to come true, those on top, financially, intellectually, or otherwise, have got to devote themselves to the "Great Society," and those who are below in the scale have got to strive to rise, not merely economically, but culturally.⁴⁷

The Great American Novel and An American Dream Player Poet

The middle and low classes ceased to be peripheral to Europe after WWII. In 1950, Walt Disney produced *Cinderella*, and it was a hit. They no longer saw meanings in *Cinderella* as an aristocrat's daughter. They identified with her as a lower class person. Disneyland, a symbol of the American conquest of the European court-centrism, materialized in California in 1955. For example, the castles built in Disneyland are modeled after European castles such as Neuschwanstein Castle in Germany. However, both the *Cinderella Castle* and the *Sleeping Beauty Castle* did not represent European aristocracy. They represented Disneyland; they were icons of American popular culture. The castles—European court centrism were there solely to be consumed as American mass entertainment. It was the time when the contemporary American Dream concept of if one worked hard, one could rise to prosperity had come true for many because the American economy was strong and booming. Thus, it was no coincidence when the post-WWII reading of *Gatsby*, against the above backdrop, saw *Gatsby* as a character that reflected the contemporary American Dream.

When, in 1960, Arthur Mizener declared that *The Great Gatsby* was "a classic of twentieth-century American fiction,"⁴⁸ his explanation echoed DeForest's definition of the Great American Novel. Mizener wrote:

[a]lmost for the first time Fitzgerald created with that voice an image of The Good American of our time in all his complexity of human sympathy, firm

⁴⁶ Adams, 405.

⁴⁷ Adams, 411.

⁴⁸ Arthur Mizener, "Gatsby, 35 Years Later," *New York Times*, April 24, 1960.

moral judgment and ironic self-possession. ... there remain few doubts of the greatness of “Gatsby” or of its imaginative relevance to American experience.⁴⁹

The USA possessed its national character within. It needed no more influence of the upward and outward from the European aristocratic-genteel leadership and model.

The appearance of a Great American Poem, on the other hand, per DeForest’s theory, might still be farther ahead. Nevertheless, in 2021, a poet emerged that embodied the integration of the pre-American Dream, Adams’ American Dream, and the contemporary concept of the American Dream. Therefore, the chapter will end with the poet Amanda Gorman.

When the pro-Donald Trump mob broke into the Capitol building on January 6, 2021, with the intent of challenging the presidential election results, the media reported the “death” of democracy. Two weeks later, Amanda Gorman, a young—twenty-two-year-old female black poet, at the inauguration of president-elect Joe Biden, revived and energized democracy. Her performance of “The Hill We Climb” from January 20 can be found on the Internet.

Gorman stood on the podium, smiling to the masked and social-distanced audience—the impact of the coronavirus pandemic—in her bright yellow Prada trench coat. The fashion magazines loved her. She was refined. The weather and the sun were working on her side. She was picturesque. When Gorman opened her mouth, the audience could hear she had good manners and was polite. She was well-educated—a graduate of Harvard. Gorman let it be known what made her, that which Gatsby hid, a contemporary American dream hero:

We, the successors of a country and a time
Where a skinny Black girl,
Descended from slaves and raised by a single mother,
Can dream of becoming president,
Only to find herself reciting for one.⁵⁰

Thomas Jefferson’s issue was fixed. Gorman’s performance uplifted the audience’s hope for democracy. She “wowed” the audience reported *The Guardian*⁵¹:

⁴⁹ Mizener.

⁵⁰ Amanda Gorman, *The Hill We Climb*, New York: Viking, 2021, 14.

⁵¹ “The Hill We Climb: the Amanda Gorman poem that stole the inauguration show,” *The Guardian*, January 20, 2021.

We are striving to forge our union with purpose,
 To compose a country committed
 To all cultures, colors, characters,
 And conditions of man.
 And so we lift our gazes not
 To what stands between us,
 But what stands before us.⁵²

Gorman publicly spoke of her aspiration to run for the Presidency in 2036.⁵³

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⁵² Gorman, 15-16.

⁵³ Lauren Wellbank, "Amanda Gorman Basically Just Launched Her 2036 Presidential Run on Ellen [DeGeneres]," January 27, 2021.

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“TOMORROW IS NOW”: AMIRI BARAKA’S NATION DREAMS

MICHAEL S. BEGNAL

The American Dream, of course, is a kind of myth. If one way that that myth is reflected is through cultural institutions like baseball—where in an idealized space each individual player carries within himself the potential to be the hero of the game—then Baraka’s comments on the “national pastime” reveal much about his attitude toward American society itself, and especially the intersections of capitalism and race therein. In his *Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (1984), Baraka celebrates Negro League baseball and laments its collapse after Jackie Robinson integrated Major League baseball in joining the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947:

I don want to get political and talk bad about ‘integration.’ Like what a straight-out trick it was. To rip off what you had in the name of what you ain’t never gonna get. So the destruction of the Negro National League. . . . So that we could sit next to drunken racists by and by. And watch our heroes put down by slimy cocksuckers who are so stupid they would uphold Henry and his Ford and be put in chains by both while helping to tighten ours. (45)

Here Baraka mourns the loss of what Black people had in the Negro Leagues and rejects integration as a desirable outcome, when it means subsumption into a racist and exploitative society (where Black baseball fans were now forced into racist spaces in order to continue following the careers of their favorite players). He explicitly attacks the American Dream as expressed through bootstrap capitalism (symbolized by Henry Ford), and suggests the ways in which it pits the white and Black working classes against each other.

As opposed to the individualism and white supremacy of the American Dream, Baraka sees in Negro League baseball a vision of communality. He values it not merely because it is Black, but rather because

There was a sense of completion in all that. The black men (and the women) sitting there all participated in those games at a much higher level than

anything else I knew. In the sense that they were not excluded from either identification with or knowledge of what the [Newark] Eagles did and were. It was like we all communicated with each other and possessed ourselves at a more human level than was usually possible out in cold whitey land. (43)

If baseball is also, as commonly described, a “field of dreams,” then for Baraka, Black baseball represents a vastly different kind of dream than that of the dominant culture.¹ At first glance, it might seem a contradiction to on one hand argue for a kind of separatism, the preservation of the Negro Leagues instead of integration into the so-called majors, and on the other to assert it as an affirmation of the collective. However, it's also clear that it would be impossible to engage in a collective project with “drunken racists [who] would uphold Henry and his Ford and be put in chains by both while helping to tighten ours.” And so, as Baraka rejected the white American Dream and began to forge an alternative vision of nationhood in his poetry and other writings, what has often been seen as a limited form of cultural nationalism could instead be read as affirmative and, like his memory of Negro League baseball, a place where Black people “all communicate with each other” in ways that would not be possible in the “cold whitey land” of Fordist mass production and consumption.

Accordingly, this essay analyzes Baraka's exploration of his shadow dreams of nation, particularly engaging with the poetry of his Black Nationalist Period (which spanned roughly 1965-74, during which he was one of the prime movers of the Black Arts Movement). A salient feature of Baraka's career is his evolution as an artist and thinker, and while he would eventually pivot away from Black nationalism and enter his Third-World Marxist Period, he did not completely dispense with nationalist-connected ideas. As Aldon Nielsen observes, “Baraka remained a champion of forms of Black Nationalism even after his rejection of cultural nationalism and his move to Marx” (“Nation Times” 7). Paralleling the analogy of baseball as both American Dream and a counter American Dream, I argue that Baraka in his nationalist period limned a social and political vision of collectivity that he opposed to the prevailing myths of the United States and which remain relevant today. Given the continual need to complicate—if not outright reject—the myths that justify a system of capitalism that exploits the downtrodden (including, whether they acknowledge it or not, the white working class), returning to some of Baraka's most controversial political poetry reminds us anew of the other nation that could yet be.

¹ For an in-depth analysis of Baraka on race in sports, see Emily R. Rutter's essay “‘Legitimate Black Heroes’: Amiri Baraka's Prescient Views on the Politics of Sports” (2021).