

**Outline:**

**How and why is a social group represented in a particular way?**

**Thesis:** In his novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid characterizes the American upper class as both driven by opportunity, and blinded by the corporate mentality, illustrating the dualism of capitalism as an agent of both progression and repression.

- I. In Changez's initial descriptions of the elite culture of Princeton, Hamid uses sexual imagery to present Princeton as seductive, ultimately criticizing the moral decadence of capitalism.
  - A. "Every fall, Princeton raised her skirt for the corporate recruiters who came onto campus and—as you say in America—showed them some skin...good skin, of course—young, eloquent, and clever as can be" (2).
    1. 'raised her skirt', 'good skin', and 'young and eloquent' = sexual imagery which is used to characterize Princeton elite as 'whores' who sell out to capitalism
      - a) Creates shock within the historically puritanical American reader
    2. Presents capitalism in a seductive manner to show how it promotes individual success at the expense of the upholding of moral values.
    3. Objectifies America to convey that success in America is an object of desire that can be achieved
- II. Moreover, Hamid uses regal imagery to characterize the illustrious corporate world of Princeton, highlighting the role of capitalism as a tool of socio-economic progression.
  - A. "Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible. I have access to this beautiful campus, I thought, to professors who are titans in their fields and fellow students who are philosopher-kings in the making (2).
    1. 'star', 'titan' and 'kings' = the regal connotations convey a sense of powerful individualism and success
      - a) Present a romanticized American dream in which anyone can achieve 'rags to riches'
      - b) Emphasizes incredible potential and opportunity that capitalism produces

- B. “At Princeton, I conducted myself in public like a young prince, generous and carefree. But I also, as quietly as I could, held down three on-campus jobs—in infrequently visited locations (5)
1. simile of the ‘young prince’ acting ‘generous and carefree’ highlights the opportunity and ease of upper class capitalism
  2. ‘quietly’ and ‘infrequently’ present Changez as isolated, and convey that his confidence is a facade held up by his success in the corporate world
    - a) Also have secretive and shameful connotations
  3. Hamid uses the juxtaposition of these two presentations to critique Americans’ desire to appeal to the upper class mentality
    - a) Changez is able to achieve success in his assimilation to the corporate upper class, but is never able to truly become an American
- III. Hamid further invokes regal imagery, along with situational irony, to characterize Changez’s upper class colleagues as arrogant, exemplifying the abusive nature of global capitalism
- A. “The ease with which they parted with money...thinking nothing of the occasional...Or their self righteousness in dealing with those whom they had paid for a service. ‘But you told us,’ they would say to Greeks twice their age, before insisting things be done their way” (Hamid, 9)
1. The words ‘ease’ and ‘thinking nothing of the occasion’, characterize the upper class Princetonians as thoughtless and shallow,
    - a) Do not value the gift that is their wealth.
  2. His colleagues are also not self-made elitists, but rather “were traveling courtesy of gifts from their parents” (Hamid, 7),
    - a) situationally ironic and exposes their superficial sense of status
  3. With ‘self righteous’ and insistent that “things be done their way” Hamid characterizes the Princetonians as having a regal-like sense of self importance.
    - a) Those with cultural backgrounds that stress deference to figures of seniority, feel a sense of contempt for this rejection of authority,
      - (1) illustrates the moral and cultural decadence that pervades the capitalist mindset.

## **How and why is a social group represented in a particular way?**

Success is an abstract concept that is nearly as difficult to define as it is to achieve (Bill Connolly). In Mohsin Hamid's novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the protagonist, Changez, is constantly forced to reevaluate his perception of success as he becomes immersed in, and eventually disillusioned with, American capitalism. In Changez's reflections, Hamid characterizes the American upper class capitalists of Princeton as both driven by opportunism, and blinded by the corporate mentality, illustrating the dualistic nature of capitalism as an agent of both progression and repression.

In Changez's initial descriptions of the elite culture of Princeton, Hamid uses sexual and regal imagery to present the duality of Princeton, criticizing its seductive nature while recognizing the consequent opportunity this provides. Reflecting on his early years at Princeton, Changez states, "Every fall, Princeton raised her skirt for the corporate recruiters...and—as you say in America—showed them some skin...good skin, of course" (Mohsin Hamid, 2). While the sexual imagery invoked through 'raised her skirt' and 'good skin', has added shock value to the historically puritanical American reader, Hamid's main purpose is to characterize the elite of capitalist America as prostitute-like sellouts whose material desire and servility to capitalism ultimately degrades their moral standards, and in turn, Changez's. By describing Princeton and its upper class circles as whores raising their skirts, Hamid presents America as an object of desire that, in time, can be universally achieved through the capitalist world.

Despite recognizing the flaws and promiscuous nature of the American elite, Changez, self-described as a "perfect breast" (Hamid, 2), is initially an incredible fit to the system, and aspires to join it. Further describing his thoughts on Princeton, Changez recalls: "Princeton

inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible. I have access...to professors who are titans in their fields and fellow students who are philosopher-kings in the making (Hamid, 2). Hamid's use of words like 'star', 'titan' and 'kings', the regal connotations of which create a sense of powerful individualism and success, convey an incredibly romanticized image of Princeton and America, and associates capitalism with immeasurable wealth and esteem. Changez's metaphor comparing immersion into the American capitalist world with being the star of a film further emphasizes this point, and highlights to the reader the opportunity that can be found in America, and the sense of individual importance capitalism grants. For Changez, this opportunity comes through his newfound ability to drag his high-class family out of economic fall-out in Pakistan.

As Changez continues, he reflects on his day to day life, narrating that, "At Princeton, I conducted myself in public like a young prince, generous and carefree. But I also, as quietly as I could, held down three on-campus jobs—in infrequently visited locations (Hamid, 5). With the words 'public' 'prince', 'quietly' and 'infrequently', Hamid creates a stark comparison between Changez's desired appearance and the reality he faces. The simile of the 'young prince' further indicates the innate opportunity and ease of upper class capitalism, and emphasizes how wealth has allowed Changez to immerse himself in America's elite; conversely, 'quietly' and 'infrequently' present Changez as isolated, and convey that, although he carries himself comfortably, his air of confidence is merely a facade held up by his success in the corporate world. In reality, he feels shameful, and attempts to reject his background to fit in. Hamid uses this striking juxtaposition of Changez's outward appearance and internal conflict to critique both Americans' sycophantic desire to appeal to the upper class mentality and the pressures of upper

class Americans that propagate the repression of individual identity as a means of assimilation into the capitalist world. In the end, while this repression enables Changez to achieve success in the corporate world, it is ultimately at the expense of him only ever feeling like a New Yorker, and “never an American” (Hamid, 14).

After his graduation, Changez and members of the elite eating club Ivy travel to Greece on vacation; during this trip, Hamid further invokes regal imagery, along with situational irony, to characterize Changez’s upper class colleagues as arrogant, exemplifying the abuse of power in global capitalism. On the trip, Changez is greatly disturbed by the manner in which his rich friends act, describing with aversion “...[t]he ease with which they parted with money...thinking nothing of the occasional...[and] their self righteousness in dealing with those whom they had paid for a service. ‘But you told us,’ they would say to Greeks twice their age, before insisting things be done their way” (Hamid, 9). The words ‘ease’ and ‘thinking nothing of the occasion’, characterize the upper class Princetonians as thoughtless and shallow, thinking not of the wealth they possess as something to value. The fact that these prodigal spenders are not even self-made elitists, but rather “were traveling courtesy of gifts from their parents” (Hamid, 7), is situationally ironic and exposes their superficial sense of status, adding an extra layer of criticism to the aristocratic nature of the American elite, and the careless mentality it breeds. Moreover, by describing the Princetonians as self righteous and insistent that “things be done their way”, Hamid characterizes them as having an exaggerated, regal-like sense of self importance. Changez and the reader, particularly those with cultural backgrounds that stress deference to figures of seniority, feel a sense of disdain for this rejection of authority, which further illustrates

the moral and cultural decadence that pervades the capitalist mindset, as well as the repressive manner in which the American upper class use finance to exercise their power (Hamid, 65).

With Princeton as a representation of upper class capitalism and the corporate mentality, Hamid uses sexual and regal imagery to create an allegorical discourse on global capitalism with America at its core. Ultimately, Changez is left to grapple with the dichotomy between eastern and western cultures prior to 9/11, and in spite of his negative sentiment towards his colleagues, continues to desire a progressive relationship with American corporate life more than with Pakistan, forcing him to repress his cultural values to conform to the upper class.

**Word Count: 1000**

## Works Cited

Hamid, M. (2008). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. 1st ed. New York: A Harvest Book Harcourt, Inc, pp.1- 184.

Connolly, Bill. "The 9 Principles That People Who Feel Successful Say They Live By (Infographic)." *Entrepreneur*, 26 Oct. 2015, [www.entrepreneur.com/article/251918](http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/251918).