

THE GOLD COAST

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Discussion Questions:

1. *The Gold Coast* is in many ways an heir to F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel *The Great Gatsby*. How are Frank Bellarosa and Jay Gatsby alike? How do DeMille's and Fitzgerald's depictions of American society differ? How are they similar?
2. Toward the beginning of the novel, Frank Bellarosa says to John, "In this country, I see the kids getting more interested in the old ways...At first they don't want to be Italian, then they get more Italian when they get older...people are looking for something. Because maybe American culture doesn't have some things that people need." What do you think Bellarosa means by this? What might American culture lack?
3. Toward the middle of the novel, Susan asks John, "So, how will we treat Mr. Bellarosa? As a crass, unprincipled interloper, or as an American success story?" How do Susan and John end up treating Bellarosa? What is your opinion of him?
4. DeMille has said that he believes there is "great affinity, duality between the demise of the 'old' Mafia and the old-money WASP world." Do you agree? Are there parallels between John Sutter's and Frank Bellarosa's seemingly opposed worlds?

5. After John and Susan make love on the beach, John muses about F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby and says, "I'm not sure what that green light meant to Jay Gatsby nor what it symbolized beyond the orgiastic future...The green light that I see at the end of Daisy's vanished pier is not the future; it is the past, and it is the only comforting omen I have ever seen." What does the "green light" represent to John and why is it important to him? How is John's "green light" different from Gatsby's?

6. While sailing with his family around the north coast of Long Island, John says, "I couldn't help but reflect on the ancient idea that land is security and sustenance, that land should never be sold or divided. But even if that were true today, it were true only as an ideal, not a practicality." Why is the "ancient idea" of land ownership so important to John? What does he fear will happen after all the Gold Coast land has been sold and divided?

7. After John gets in trouble with the IRS, he says, "It was then, I suppose, that a strange thing began to happen to me: I started to lose faith in the system." Does this moment in the novel constitute a turning point for John? How do John's notions about law, society, and justice begin to shift here?

8. Bellarosa quotes Machiavelli many times throughout the course of the novel and he seems to believe that most people are driven by their desire for power. Do you agree? Who has power in this novel and what gives them this power – is it money, respectability, force?

9. Bellarosa is in many ways a hard-edged criminal, but both John and Susan admit to being seduced by him. What is seductive about him and why are both John and Susan so taken with him?

10. John makes a surprising choice during Bellarosa's murder trial. Reflecting on his decision, he says, "The history of the world is filled with dead martyrs who would not compromise. I used to admire them. Now I think that most of them were probably very foolish." Do you think John made a smart decision during Bellarosa's trial or do you think he could have or should have acted differently?

11. What do you make of Susan Sutter? How do you understand her actions at the end of the novel?

12. At the end of the novel, John says: "There is an ebb and flow in all human events, there is a building up and a tearing down, there are brief enchanted moments in history and in the short lives of men and women, there is wonder and there is cynicism, there are dreams that can come true, and dreams that can't." What do you make of the ending of the novel? Does DeMille leave us with a bleak or hopeful vision for the future?

13. *The Gold Coast* was written in 1990 – almost twenty years ago. Do you think this novel's depiction of American society is still relevant today?