
Embodiment Of The American Dream In The Great Gatsby

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald is set in a wealthy suburb of New York City during the 1920s, an era of great economic success. The economic boom of the 1920s was seen as a clear example of the American dream, the idea that anyone could become wealthy and live a better life in America if they worked hard enough for it. But F. Scott Fitzgerald presents the reader with a different perspective of the American dream, one that explores how the American dream is flawed. Fitzgerald does so by portraying the main character, Jay Gatsby, as a man who gets caught up in the American dream and becomes unable to distinguish his falsified persona from reality. Overall, Fitzgerald explores how humanity's greedy desires for wealth and power undermine the fundamental principles of the American dream through character, Jay Gatsby.

Jay Gatsby is the perfect embodiment of the American dream since he had to earn all of his money on his own. To the average person, it would seem that Gatsby fulfills the American dream by gaining riches and high social status. But instead of being satisfied with his wealth, Gatsby believes that he can become the 'Platonic conception of himself... a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that...' (89). The American dream has many different aspects, but Gatsby is only focused on the idea that he must become wealthy, unable to see that he can better his character through hard work as well. The understanding that the American dream is improving oneself to achieve a higher social status sadly leads people like Gatsby to believe that they can achieve social superiority by flaunting their money, but this idea leads them to never truly find happiness. Gatsby believes that the 'unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded in the wing of a fairy' (89). This means Gatsby interprets what he believes as the truth, helping him find comfort in the false reality he created for himself. The pleasure Gatsby seeks from material items dulls Gatsby's perception of true happiness. For Gatsby, like many upper-class Americans, he does not realize that the American dream is not just about financial success, but also the satisfaction of living, a perk that Gatsby never achieves.

Instead of pursuing happiness, Gatsby uses his vast amount of wealth to bring satisfaction to an otherwise sad and lonely life. Gatsby's financial prosperity only serves the purpose of bettering his image and not for his own personal pleasures. An example of this is on page 153 when Gatsby states, "You know, old sport, I've never used that pool all summer?" leaving the reader to imply that the sole purpose of the pool was to please his guests. To obtain his wealth, Gatsby engaged bootlegging which is selling alcohol illegally during the prohibition era of the United States. The true essence of the American dream is lost in Gatsby since he earned his money in an unethical way. The indecent ways Jay Gatsby rose up to be part of the wealthy elite represents the corruption taking place in America during the '20s as well as the flaws of the American dream. Gatsby's dream 'must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him,' (180), meaning Gatsby continued to seek the satisfaction of increasing his social status without realizing he had already achieved this goal. Unable to see beyond the false reality he created for himself, he tries to purchase any object that might satisfy his desires. But unable to find happiness through his material objects, Gatsby turns to the past, a time when riches were no more than a dream and not a harsh reality.

Furthermore, Gatsby shows off his wealth in order to gain the attention of Daisy Buchanan and eventually win her back, without recognizing that this is impossible. Years before, Gatsby was denied the right to date Daisy due to his family being poor. Although it seems that he might have the possibility of winning Daisy back, his plan is hindered by her greater attraction to the secure life she already has with her husband Tom. Although Gatsby is aware of the '... youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves,' (150), his inability to sacrifice his wealth and embrace a simplistic life shatter his dream. Gatsby thus '... paid a high price for living too long with a single dream,' (161), for he now has nothing to strive for. But instead of trying to recover from his misfortune, Gatsby takes it with indifference, wishing only to live on his now pointless life. Hereafter, Gatsby becomes 'a boat against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past,' (180). Gatsby struggled to separate his unachievable dream from reality until it was too late.

If one does not achieve happiness, life will appear meaningless and empty, as was the fate of Jay Gatsby, a man who was destroyed by the same wealth he so very desired. But Gatsby does not merely represent the flawed American dream but serves as a metaphor that money cannot buy happiness. In the end, Fitzgerald uses Gatsby as a symbol of the ugliness that is a product of the American dream.