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The Unattainable American Dream in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby" Essay Sample

A truly great work of literature would allow a reader to compare and/or contrast any of the book's characters—static or rounded—without much trouble. This is the case in *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The book's title character, Gatsby, is easily compared to Tom Buchanan. Their fruitless pursuance of the American Dream is what makes them most similar. The American Dream consists of having a large, elegant house, a family, a well paying job, and basically having the ability to have everything one desires when it's wanted. In the case of Tom, although the American Dream has already been attained, he is still looking for more beyond what he has now. In Gatsby's case, he more or less dreams of having the dream and looks for what he needs to attain it.

This shows the fact that after seeking and finding the American Dream, one finds them self in search of more—more power, more possessions, etcetera. One will never reach the American Dream because of the unquenchable thirst for more. This is the story of Tom Buchanan. In contrast, when one seeks to have the Dream, they find that what they want is either not available or is out of their reach. This is the story of Gatsby. Both sides, when put together, shows that, from either angle it's looked at, the American Dream is there, yet unavailable for one to grasp.

After reading, one will notice that Tom Buchanan has everything that the American Dream has to offer—a nice house, a family, and large amounts of money. " Their [Tom and wife, Daisy] house was even more elaborate than I

expected, a cheerful red and white Georgian Colonial mansion overlooking the bay." (11). It's even seen through the surrounding colors that he has the American Dream—" red", " white", and the blue " bay". The community he lives in is East Egg, known for its richness, extravagance, and prominence. This shows that he is indeed rich, prominent, and extravagant. In contrast, Gatsby is quite opposite. Gatsby is in search for the American Dream. His residence is in West Egg, known to be not as rich as East Egg. He is in pursuit of having what Tom has already accomplished. He is already there because of his current material possessions. Gatsby's own home is rather large, rich, well decorated and very flashy as well.

"...we wandered through Marie Antoinette music rooms and Restoration salons...through period bedrooms swathed in rose and lavender silk and vivid with new flowers, through dressing rooms and poolrooms, and bathrooms with sunken baths..." (96).

Like Tom, Gatsby's house is very rich in elegance and sophistication. However, not every single room in his house is so ornate. " His bedroom was the simplest of all..." (97). This shows that Gatsby doesn't seem to enjoy the rich and fashionable look. He'd rather live in simplicity while all the ostentatious decorations are just for show and allow him to fit in around the numbers of the rich.

In addition, Tom, although he has achieved the American Dream to its fullest, still wants more than what he already has. What he wants is to have more women, aside from his own loving wife, Daisy. As Jordan remarks, "

Tom's got some woman in New York." (19). Tom, in cheating on his wife with a mistress, exceeds the expectations of the American Dream and goes over the top. However, Gatsby is again the opposite. Although he has part of the American Dream, he doesn't have all of it. He is missing the family part of the Dream. It is interesting to find that the woman he is pursuing is Tom's wife, Daisy. In Gatsby's hopeful and realistic dream, we see, " His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own.

He knew that when he kissed this girl...his mind would never romp again like the mind of God." (117). His total infatuation with this girl, and the lack of communication between the two, causes Gatsby to dream up the perfect story between him and his first and only love. Gatsby lives in a dream world. Most dreams are attainable if it is available. However, in his desire for something unattainable, he will never have the American Dream. In a sense, a similarity between the two men is their associations with Daisy in which they both have her in their hearts.

Moreover, both men, as they try to achieve elevated superiority in their class, they fail because of their own inabilities. Tom intends to and tries to be or act intelligent. " The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be-will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved." (17). Not only his racism, but his inability to comprehend the facts that he is stating shows his arrogance and even his incompetence. On the bright side, because of his " old money" associations, he is on the popular side with all the other " old money" families of East Egg. Yet similarly, Gatsby has his own failures. Although he may possess intelligence, he believes he needs the popularity

that Tom has. During his parties, he remained away and aloof from his guests, most of whom weren't invited. " He doesn't want any trouble with anybody." (48). His anti-social attitudes can't get him the popularity he wants.

He throws the parties to be popular, but hardly attending or appearing causes that popularity to diminish. At his funeral, we see his unpopularity, " About five o'clock our procession of three cars reached the cemetery...Mr. Gatz and the minister and I in the limousine, and, a little later, four or five servants and the postman from West Egg in Gatsby's station wagon..." (182). No one but the father, the minister, Nick, servants, and a postman go to pay their respects. Later on, " Owl Eyes" states, " I couldn't get to the house...they [party-going people] used to go their by the hundreds." (183). Now, not even one person from the party came to acknowledge the man that hosted it. No matter how hard someone tries, it's not possible to have everything you want because of our own faults.

In the end, the American Dream was created for a perfect world. However, men do not live on a perfect world. Tom's and Gatsby's differences, more than their similarities, show that the American Dream is unattainable. Tom, for instance, had everything that the American Dream could offer. However, he went further than the Dream by wanting more, in this case, women. This, in a way, corrupts the American Dream as well because he is cheating on his wife. This can parallel with the fact that we don't live in a perfect world. The American Dream is not possible for Tom because whenever he reaches his goal, he sets a bar higher and isn't happy with everything that he has.

Gatsby, on the other hand, shows the unattainable Dream at the angle of one seeking to achieve it.

Gatsby lives in a dream. This dream is rendered impossible by the fact that the object he wants is currently out of reach and not available. The American Dream, for Gatsby, is unattainable because of his yearning for something that he can't have. One person can not simply have all the qualities of both. If one could place the two together, it would be possible for the dream to exist. However, due to human nature, one can not mix contradicting persons—stupidity doesn't go with intelligence, arrogance doesn't go with modesty, etcetera. Therefore, one can only be one of the two—therefore proving that the American Dream is nothing but a dream.

In conclusion, through F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, two characters, Tom and Gatsby, show, through their differences, that the American Dream is unattainable. Because of faults and this not being a perfect society, the American Dream can not be totally achieved. One either over does it or sets a dream to impossible to come true. With the inability to combine contrasting qualities, there can never be a person with the persona that will be able to reach the Dream and be happy with it. So, in all actuality, the pursuance of the American Dream can prove both fruitless and hopeless, contrary to the beliefs of those who believe that they can really accomplish the impossible.