

Sample argumentative essay on gran torino

[Art & Culture](#), [American Dream](#)



Clint Eastwood's *Gran Torino* is the story of a grizzled war veteran who tries to make peace with the changing world around him. On the surface, the film only appears to confront the racist follies of an old man, unwilling to let go of prejudices stemming from his time spent at war. However, the film is much deeper than that. Walt, the war veteran, had an American dream that was taken from him when he returned from war. *Gran Torino* is a delicate examination of that dream, and how Walt reconciles not only with the changing landscape of America, but with his own guilty conscience as he realizes the dream he once wished for can be had by his new friend Tao. On the surface, *Gran Torino* appears to be about racism, with Walt consistently scowling over his neighbors, and muttering racial slurs. The Hmong people, particularly a neighboring family and their gang of cousins, have Walt feeling edgy throughout the film. It would be easy to pass the film off as a racial piece, demonstrated by the fact that Walt also makes discriminatory remarks toward African Americans and the Irish, and is overheard telling jokes about other cultures in a bar. However, we see a pattern of hatred within Walt emerge as we notice that Walt does not only hate minorities, nor does he hate the people he was forced to fight against in the war. He hates everybody, save for his dog Daisy, and his recently deceased wife. He even looks upon his own children and grandchildren with disdain; it is evident that they appear lazy and entitled to Walt, which seems to anger him more than coming face to face with any minority. We begin to notice that Walt is a hardworking man who does not hate minorities, only nonsense. A pattern emerges, as he gives respect and kindness to those who earn it and, therefore, deserve it, suggesting that the age-old American

dream is still alive and well in Walt's mind. As he grows closer to his Hmong neighbor's especially Tao, the theme continues to take shape .

Walt is clearly disturbed by his time spent at war; it has affected his capacity to get along with others. The Hmong family living next to him is no exception. Walt even remarks on having killed people just like them back in the war . Nonetheless, as the viewer sees the relationship between Walt and young Tao grow, we see Walt soften towards the neighbors. His resolve to hate them is only limited towards his knowledge of how hard they work. The grandmother has worked hard to bring her children and grandchildren to this country. The older sister goes to school, and works to make her family proud, while Tao does everything in his power to avoid joining his cousin's gang. He attempts to stay in school and even tries to get a job, at Walt's urging . This, of course, is after Tao attempts to steal Walt's beloved Gran Torino. Walt is only persuaded into a friendship with Tao after he bequeaths himself as a servant for Walt's bidding. Rain or shine, Tao did as Walt asked, which was more than Walt's children and grandchildren would have done. Once again, Walt saw work ethic in another person, and a chance at a life that he thought was gone forever. The desire for the American dream began to rekindle in his chest. Unfortunately, due to the sins he believed he had committed during the war, Walt was slow to reconcile these feelings.

As far as the viewer knows, after the war Walt returned home to his wife to father two sons, and to keep quiet about his deeds in the war. They haunted him night and day, perhaps forcing him to be the angry old man who appeared on the screen . Nonetheless, we are never fully convinced by this act, there is always something bubbling just beneath the surface. As Walt

gives Tao tools for his job, takes him for his first haircut, teaches him how to fix things around his grandmother's home, and even attempts to help his sister from being hassled by local gangsters, we see that Walt is not a bad person. Essentially, he is the anti-hero, in search of redemption in any place he can find it. Because he has been denied real redemption all his life, it could be that he never thought he was worthy of the American dream. He sees worth in Tao and his family though, and in a culmination of violence against Tao's sister and the sibling's cousins, Walt knows the gang must be stopped if Tao is to have a chance at what Walt missed. The entire film he has denied the local Father, to whom his wife confessed all of her sins, the right to hear his confession. It is only with Tao that he finally feels he can confess. There is symbolism in this; he tells Tao of his sins so that he may cleanse his soul, but also so that Tao can understand why he cannot come with Walt to stop the gang. Walt desperately wants Tao to continue through life unsullied, living life fully. Walt wants Tao to have the American dream he was never able to experience. It his greatest act of reverence yet, Clint Eastwood's character offers himself as sacrifice to the local gang, allowing them to murder him and ensuring their imprisonment so Tao and his family can live in peace. As a final token, he leaves Tao the Gran Torino, all that is left of Walt's original American Dream.

In sum, on the surface Walt appears to be a racist war veteran home from the war and hell bent on keeping everybody at arm's length. As the story continues, and we see his resolve towards Tao and his Hmong neighbors soften, we realize whom he really despises are people who do not work hard and respect others, even his own children. The last remaining relic of this

American dream resides in Walt's Gran Torino. As he sees Tao and his family's honest chance at the American dream being stripped from them, he does the only thing he can: he sacrifices himself so that they may continue living their peaceful lives, knowing he gave up on his dream long ago. To solidify their bond, and the dream he wants for Tao, he lives him the Gran Torino.

References

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