

# Wealth, Class, and Social Hierarchy in "The Great Gatsby"

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This essay examines how "The Great Gatsby" explores these themes and their enduring relevance in contemporary society.

## Wealth as a Symbol of Success

In "The Great Gatsby," wealth is depicted as a symbol of success and social status. The character of Jay Gatsby, a self-made millionaire, exemplifies the American Dream of achieving financial prosperity. Gatsby's extravagant mansion, lavish parties, and expensive possessions are outward manifestations of his success, designed to win back the love of his life, Daisy Buchanan.

Tom Buchanan, on the other hand, represents the old money aristocracy. He comes from a wealthy family and enjoys a life of privilege and entitlement. Tom's arrogance and condescension towards others stem from his belief in the permanence of his social status, which he associates with his inherited wealth.

## The Illusion of Social Mobility

While Gatsby's rise from humble beginnings to wealth may appear to be a story of social mobility, the novel ultimately suggests that the American Dream can be an illusion. Despite his riches, Gatsby remains an outsider in the upper echelons of society. His efforts to assimilate into the world of old money are met with resistance and disdain.

Daisy Buchanan's character illustrates the fragility of social mobility. Despite her beauty and charm,

she is trapped in a loveless marriage to Tom because of societal expectations and the constraints of her social class. Her longing for both love and security highlights the limitations placed on women in a society that prioritizes wealth and status.

## The Social Hierarchy and Moral Decay

The novel also explores the social hierarchy and the moral decay that can accompany wealth and privilege. The opulent parties hosted by Gatsby serve as a microcosm of this hierarchy, where social status is determined by one's proximity to wealth and power. Attendees of these parties engage in superficial and hedonistic pursuits, emphasizing the emptiness of their lives.

The character of Myrtle Wilson, Tom Buchanan's mistress, provides another perspective on the consequences of the pursuit of wealth. Myrtle's desire to escape her working-class life leads her into a destructive affair with Tom. Her tragic end reflects the moral decay that can result from the relentless pursuit of social ascent.

## Contemporary Relevance

The themes of wealth, class, and social hierarchy explored in "The Great Gatsby" continue to resonate in contemporary society. The allure of wealth as a symbol of success remains a powerful force, and the pursuit of social mobility remains a central aspect of the American Dream.

Moreover, the moral questions raised in the novel about the consequences of pursuing wealth at any cost remain relevant today. Issues of income inequality, social stratification, and the impact of wealth on individual values continue to be subjects of debate and concern.

In conclusion, "The Great Gatsby" provides a timeless exploration of wealth, class, and the social hierarchy. Through its characters and their experiences, the novel highlights the complexities and moral dilemmas associated with the pursuit of success and social mobility. Its enduring relevance serves as a reminder of the enduring fascination with and challenges of navigating the world of wealth and privilege.