
Unifying Character of the American Dream

Through many generations of American immigrants, there is a common theme of people trying to achieve their American Dreams. When this event occurs, one finds the need to ask themselves, what, in fact is the American dream? At first glance one may think of a white suburban family that is content upon mediocrity, but upon further inspection, one will see that the American dream is centered around people from all walks of life just trying to be happy. Happiness is generally acquired through the people (or perhaps material possessions) that one chooses to surround themselves with. People's expectations, as far as quality of life, have shot through the roof due to technology and the media portraying the American Dream as a lavish Hollywood lifestyle. Some people will sacrifice anything for their dream, while others feel that they are already living it. The American Dream, while being desired by many, is actually achieved by very few people due to social and economic adversity that many Americans must overcome.

Jay Gatsby, a character from Fitzgerald's book, *The Great Gatsby*, is a prime example of someone who would sacrifice anything for their American Dream. Gatsby sacrificed his old life and created an entirely new persona for himself for the sole purpose of being with a girl, "He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it." (Fitzgerald, 180). Although Gatsby overcame poverty and had become the wealthy socialite that many people consider the pinnacle of success, still, he could not fully reach his dream. Gatsby perfectly fits the profile of an American whose standards are so astronomically high that to reach his dreams would be nothing short of a miracle. Another character in *The Great Gatsby* is Daisy Buchanan. Daisy, unlike Gatsby, values money more than she values happiness. Because Daisy is both wealthy and materialistic, she very easily accomplishes her "dream"- she will sacrifice anything, including love, for money which can be seen when she won't even come to Gatsby's funeral, "Both she and Tom had gone away early that afternoon, and had taken their baggage with them." (Fitzgerald, 164). People like Daisy bring up the question, if you start with wealth, where do you go from there? Does your dream then become simply keeping your wealth?, "every person's vision is different... The American Dream is owning a home." (Bean). *The Great Gatsby*, written in the 1920s showed how difficult it was for people to rise above the class they were born into; even Gatsby, who rose from poverty, was unable to overcome adversity, and moreover, the gap between social classes hindered him from ultimately achieving his American Dream.

Freedom and prosperity are primary reasons why people seek the American Dream. One hopes that simply by coming to America, one will achieve everything they've ever hoped for, "Like millions of others/ I too come to this island/ Nine decades the answerer/ Of dreams" (Bruchac,

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9). Many people believe that when they come to America, they will somehow be blessed with unlimited wealth, but in fact, many find that money may not be the key to their American dream. American immigrants come from many countries where they have nothing, and often hope that if they have material possessions, they will find happiness, "He that is of the opinion that money will do everything may well be suspected of doing anything for money." (Franklin, 23). However, one may find that even in America, you can work your entire life, and still end where you started. People that are born into poverty rarely rise above their social class, "I was born on this mountain, this mountain's my home/ She holds me and keeps me from worry and woe/ Well, they took everything that she gave, now they're gone/ But I'll die on this mountain, this mountain's my home" (Earle, 63). Although one may have the perception that with the move to America comes unlimited opportunity, he or she may find that success is not defined by money but by happiness. If you start with nothing, it is rather difficult to make something of yourself.

A more modern view on the American Dream suggests that people these days are more demanding and seek happiness through material possessions, opposed to meaningful human interaction. Happiness used to be found in the little joys of everyday life. Dr. Heather Bean and Craig Dahl, two people who grew up during simpler times, offer valuable insight on how people's rising demands hinder their ability to achieve their dreams. Nowadays, people feel that the American dream means having millions of dollars and being on the front of Stars magazine, "People used to be happy with talking to people; sitting on the front porch... technology has you doing a million things at once. it makes it harder to achieve your dream." (Dahl). The idea of being content with a middle-class life has all but vanished, and although we live in a time where there is far less adversity, "I have a firm belief that it's easier" (Dahl) things still aren't perfect, "It's not easy, but it's easier" (Dahl). Modern technology is changing people; no matter how much one consumes, he or she cannot be satisfied. When one communicates with people from sunrise to sunset, it's easy to lose sight of what a real conversation is like, "In South Dakota, people value in-depth interaction with each other" (Dahl). While everyone is texting each other and updating their Facebook statuses, it's easy for people to hop in and out of each other's lives, instead of focusing on one person and giving them their undivided attention. People are always plugged into some type of electronic, and they never have face to face conversations with each other, "You get lulled into having this sense of getting used to superficial interactions with people" (Bean). People value quality human interaction far less than they used to, and have begun to turn to technology as a source of happiness. This change in the demands of society has radically altered the ability to achieve an American Dream.

These days, the American Dream is quite hard to achieve. While there is far less difficulty in achieving your dream now than 100 years ago, people still have to overcome great social and economic hurdles. People come to America hoping that they will somehow be blessed with unlimited wealth and good fortune, but often they find that it requires hard work and opportunity. As a society, Americans are told that our happiness is composed of material possessions, but in

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fact the essence of the American Dream is living comfortably in the middle class. Technology and the media sway us into thinking we need a lavish life with less human interaction. Because of Americans' unattainably high demands, they feel that they will never reach their American Dream when in fact, they are living it.

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