
The American Dreams of the Main Characters in Lorraine Hansberry's Play *A Raisin in the Sun* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's Novel *The Great Gatsby*

The American Dream is the idea that everyone living in the US has a uniform chance to attain their dream through perseverance, hard work, and aspiration. Some personalized dreams could be earning success, obtaining money, or winning the love of your life. This is a theme in many books in American literature. While both Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* main characters, Walter Lee Younger and Jay Gatsby, have similar dreams, the differences are the time frames that motivate their American Dream.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby's goal is to become rich in order to get Daisy. They had a relationship during World War 1, but because Gatsby was from a poor family, Daisy disapproved of him and married another guy. When Gatsby later became wealthy through illegal work, he sets his eyes on Daisy, but she had already moved on with her life. When he meets Daisy after a long time, he forgets about everything around him and sees only her. It was observed by Nick, the narrator of the story. "He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes. Sometimes, too, he stared around at his possessions in a dazed way, as though in her actual and astounding presence none of it was any longer real. Once he nearly toppled down a flight of stairs" (5.91). The quote demonstrates his reaction after seeing Daisy and how he forgot everything around him. He is fixated on her and that shows how events in the past influenced his American Dream. Another example is when Jordan gossips about Gatsby with Nick. Jordan mentions how Gatsby is obsessed with Daisy that he has to live close to her. "Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay" (4.78). Gatsby's obsession is so extreme that everyone knows about it. Throughout the book, it seems like Gatsby sees Daisy as his prized possession. Although it is apparent that he persevered to have Daisy, it was not achieved because Daisy goes back to her husband and Gatsby dies at the end of the story.

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Walter Lee Younger's dream is to escape poverty and provide a better future for his son. It is clearly seen when he passionately speaks to Travis, his son, about his dreams. "Just tell me where you want to go to school and you'll go. Just tell me, what it is you want to be – and you'll be it...Whatever you want to be – Yessir! (He holds his arms open for TRAVIS) You just name it, son...(TRAVIS leaps into them) and I hand you the world!" (2.2.109). He feels awful that his son has to live in poor conditions because Walter does not have a good job, lives in a poor area, and cast out onto the margins of society because of their color. Even

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though he shows affection towards his son, his family does not think that he cares about them. It is evident when Walter talks about what he wants to do with the \$10,000 check they received from the insurance company. "Yeah. You see, this little liquor store we got in mind cost seventy-five thousand and we figured the initial investment on the place be 'bout thirty thousand, see. That be ten thousand each." (1.1.35) Every member of his family needs the money to achieve their own dream, but he is using all the money to do something his family never approved of. Although he does not entirely escape from poverty at the end of the story, his family moves into their own house and he is confident that he can provide a good life for his son when he grows up.

Walter Lee Younger and Jay Gatsby have similar dreams, but the difference is the events that inspire their dream. Even today, the individual's social and economic status determines what they want to strive for. Today, people want to advance technologically and discover new things, so many people strive for a better education by studying hard. However, this can differ from person to person. Many readers can learn about the character's personality through the dreams that are precious to them. These books teach many life lessons when it comes to how the characters struggle throughout the story because it has a relationship with an aspect of society. It depends on how the reader interprets the story and applies it to their own lives. In order to achieve the American Dream, one has to have perseverance, good work ethic, and aspiration and these characteristics remain timeless.

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