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Social Class in *The Great Gatsby*

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald is about Jay Gatsby, who tries to win back his old love, Daisy Buchanan, while living the American Dream in the 1920s. The story shows how the pursuit of true love and wealth can lead to heartbreak and tragedy. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald highlights the point that the American Dream is a hard way to the top. This is very well represented through Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby. Tom, who was born with money, faces no real consequences for his actions, while Gatsby is destroyed because he can't escape his past. Through these characters, the narrator challenges the claim that anyone can achieve success through effort, and pushes that instead social class and privilege are the biggest part of shaping someone's future life.

First, in *The Great Gatsby*, Tom Buchanan faces no real consequences for his actions. Page 179 of the book states, "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy - they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness." This shows that no matter how Tom acts and what decisions he makes, he can use his money and social position to get out of bad scenarios. For example, Tom cheats on his wife, but she will not leave him because of his power and wealth. Additionally, Tom is able to get away with cheating right in front of George because he is seen as respectable. Tom using social status to get out of facing consequences shows that social class and privilege are a bigger part of shaping someone's life than the American Dream.

Secondly, in *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby is killed because he can't escape his past. On page 69 of the book it reads, "'Can't repeat the past?' He cried incredulously. 'Why of course you can!'" The past that Gatsby wants to repeat is his love for Daisy. However, Gatsby's past is also a lower working class family

who had nothing. He is so focused on Daisy and his love for her that he forgets that his family origins is what kept them apart in the first place. His love for Daisy was so strong that he took the blame for her killing Myrtle, setting off a chain reaction that ended in his death. Gatsby's death coming from his inability to escape his past shows that your social class is the biggest part of shaping someone's life.

Finally, in *The Great Gatsby*, Nick's success in finding a career is largely due to connections through social status. On page 3 of the text, it reads, "My family have been prominent, well-to-do people in this middle western city for three generations... everybody I knew was in the bond business, so I supposed it could support one more single man." This shows that even though you still have to work some, Nick was born into a position to succeed in life. This is much different than someone like Gatsby, who had to find any way possible to make money because he wasn't set up like Nick. This shows how social class and privilege are the biggest part of shaping someone's future.

Some may argue that social class doesn't determine the outcome of your life and that anyone can achieve the American dream. For example, the book describes that Gatsby had a lot of money and a house with a similar size and location to the Buchanans. However, this argument is incorrect because even though he had money, he was only in the new money social class and came from the lower working class. His death also came from a working-class man chasing the American dream who died, so this trend is repeated throughout the book.

In conclusion, Fitzgerald highlights that the American Dream is a hard way to the top. This is very well represented through Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby. Through these characters, the narrator challenges the claim that anyone can achieve success through effort, and pushes that instead social class and privilege are the biggest part in shaping someone's future life over the so-called American dream. In the book, Tom Buchanan faces no real consequences for his actions, Gatsby is killed because he can't escape his past, and Nick's success in finding a career is largely due to connections through social status. In today's world, problems with the higher classes getting away with things while working-class people cannot are still

around. In many legal cases, people with high social status get their charges dropped or lowered much easier than other Americans.