

Amaan Jafery

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Prof N + Kratka

Essay #3

Many of *Philip Roth's* stories have themes of the concept or idea of the American Dream for Jewish immigrants and provide the experience of being a first generation child in America. **In *Philip Roth's "Goodbye Columbus" and "Call It Sleep" the concept of the American dream is explored and the author explores how gender roles are tied into the idea of the American dream.*** "*Call It Sleep*" and "*Goodbye Columbus*" both have examples of gender roles from different points of view, and how things can change in America. "*Call It Sleep*" explores a Jewish immigrant family in New York City in the early 1900's. The Novel is a coming-of-age-story and explores the experiences of David Schearl, a young Jewish boy. Showing the perspective of a young Jewish boy and his struggles that many young men can have with immigrant parents, and growing into the young man that the main character wants to be. *Goodbye Columbus* is about Neil and Brenda's relationship and the differences between them involving things like gender roles and Brenda's socioeconomic background. "*Goodbye Columbus*" ties together the concept of the American dream, gender roles, and the financial gap between Americans.

Some wonder what exactly is the American dream? The simple answer to that would be life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. America is known as the land of opportunity for everyone all over the world, and is portrayed as achievable through hard work and determination. The term was popularized in the early to mid 20th century by James Trustlow Adams, through his novel

“Epic Of America” In its entirety the American dream is a set of ideals and a beacon of hope for families who want a better life for themselves and for the next generation. While many disagree that the American dream is fair and achievable for all types of people, it strongly resonates with the immigrant population of our nation.

Immigration and the American dream are almost inseparable in their relation to each other.

Without immigration the American dream would be worthless. People describe our nation as a melting pot of different cultures, and experiences all coming together working toward a better life. The promise of the American dream is the primary motivator for immigrants to leave their homes and way of life behind and end up assimilating to American cultures and customs. This is heavily explored in *“Call It Sleep”* and *“Goodbye Columbus.”* David Schearl struggles to find his identity and what it means to be a good man due to a variety of different factors. “David wondered again why it was that everyone on the street knew where his father worked except himself. His father had so many jobs. No sooner did you learn where he was working than he was working somewhere else. And why he was always saying. “They look at me crookedly, with mockery in their eyes. How much can a man endure!(Roth page 22)” The American dream through David’s eyes is almost a failed promise since his family is struggling so hard, and his relationship with his father is awful. As well as not fitting in with other children in not just America but New York City. David’s struggles to assimilate have been the primary struggles for kids who share David’s circumstances. The novel *“Goodbye Columbus”* deals with plenty of socioeconomic status as Brenda and Neil both have different upbringing and live in different worlds. Brenda’s family has achieved the American dream while Neil’s is not quite there. “For an instant Brenda reminded me of those pug-nosed bastards from Montclair who come down to

the library during vacations, and when I stamp out their books, they stand around tugging their scarves until they hang to their ankles, hinting at Boston and New Haven.(Roth page 15)” Neil at first was very annoyed and jealous of Brenda due to her financial circumstances. While he is still struggling as well as his family being much more different than Brenda’s. Essentially making Brenda’s family closer or achieving it, while Neil is struggling making him annoyed, angry, and jealous of Brenda. Also closely tying into the concept of gender roles and these two characters' financial situation plays a role in that.

Gender roles are societal norms or expectations based on gender obviously. These include expectations about lifestyle, career choices, and personality traits. Gender roles have been ingrained into American culture and lifestyle since the beginning. In the early 20th century the concept of the nuclear family was very popular and was seen as the peak of the American dream. The nuclear family portrays a picture of a white suburban family where the man has a high paying job and the woman takes care of the children and does the housework. Men and women were both expected to adhere to their traditional gender roles. In “*Goodbye Columbus*” Brenda has very different family expectations than Neil due to Brenda’s family being wealthier. Gender roles could also play a role in the career path Neil might take due to family expectations. “Are you planning on making a career of the library? Bren, I’m not planning on anything. I haven’t planned a thing in three years. At least for the year I’ve been out of the army. In the army I used to plan to go away weekends. I’m-I’m not a planner. After all the truth I’d suddenly given her, I shouldn’t have ruined it for myself with that final lie(Roth, Page 51) Neil opens up to Brenda about how he feels he has no direction or purpose besides pleasing his parents trying to be a good son. Brenda often argues and fights with her mother about Neil, school, and her siblings. “I’m

not a slave...I'm a daughter. You ought to learn what a day's work means. Why? Brenda said. Why? Because you're lazy, Mrs. Patmkin answered, and you think the world owes you a living(Roth, Page 65). Brenda is fighting with her mother in front of Neil, and takes offense to being called lazy, mainly because she doesn't always help out with housework which would be adhering to gender stereotypes and roles. While Brenda may be portrayed as spoiled due to her family situation she is still expected to adhere to gender norms that her family and society place on her. David in "*Call It Sleep*" also has difficulty understanding gender norms and roles due to having a poor example of a father figure. Characters actions and personality reflect the people they interact with and what society determines as the norm.

In conclusion, **In Philip Roth's "*Goodbye Columbus*" and "*Call It Sleep*" the concept of the American dream is explored and the author explores how gender roles are tied into the idea of the American dream.** Philip Roth has different character's that explore different areas that involve the American Dream. Brenda is the very fortunate girl who gets to go to college and has a comfortable upper middle class lifestyle since her family has had financial success. Making Brenda and her family the positive example of the American dream that so many people emigrate and praise the American Dream as a revolutionary idea. Neil is much less of a traditional example of the American dream compared to Brenda. Neil is ambitious enough to want a career more respectable than the Newark library when he talks to Brenda about it. He is willing to work hard so people will respect his value as a man and as a provider. Which heavily adheres to traditional American gender roles. David's situation is much more on the negative side as his family is fractured and struggling financially. His father has to work multiple jobs, and he lives in a poverty stricken area. He struggles to assimilate to American culture and life, as

well as facing discrimination for his Jewish heritage, forcing him to hide and neglect who he really is. Brenda shows the positive outcomes and the spoils of the American dream. While David's situation and point of view of the American dream is a failed promise. The American dream is easily achievable for some while others have to struggle, and some may never achieve it at all.