

Ragtime father analysis essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

For most of us, ordinary is the only adjective we would want to use to describe our life. Although we may strive for a simple life, its attainment might not be possible. In the book *Ragtime* by E. L. Doctorow, a father who likes to read articles to the family during dinner, is the perfect example of this kind of character. He has a family of five. However, big changes occur in his family. An ordinary life is all he seeks, but the world keeps challenging him with changes that completely destroy him. His experiences in *Ragtime* represent the life and value system of middle/upper class men at the turn of the 20th century.

He also represents tragedy; everything can seem perfect at one moment, and yet the next might bring terrible circumstances. As an only child, Father had a happy childhood until his mother died when he was 14. He attended Groton and Harvard. His dad made a fortune in the Civil War, but lost everything due to unwise speculations. He died suddenly. Father's constant unhappiness was established during his early adulthood. " His flamboyance had produced in his lonely son a personality that was cautious, sober, industrious and chronically unhappy" (181).

He took the money and invested in a fireworks business. Starting his business with inherited money was archetypal during the *Ragtime* period. Father and his family live in a three-story house in New Rochelle, New York. Middle-aged, he has a good relationship with his wife. He is solemn and attentive, even his way of saying goodbye to his family seems conservative. Father resents the Esquimos' open manner regarding their sexual activity. Perhaps he is jealous because he envies a life like that. He goes on the

expedition because he wants a sense of accomplishment in life and to experience adventure.

Most Americans during this period were racist, especially middle to high class. "It occurred to Father one day that Coalhouse didn't know he was a Negro" (134). He believes that all Negro men should be poor and filthy as they shouldn't have manners and own a car. Coalhouse did not fit the stereotypes. What irritates him most is his act of courtship. The author implies that he is jealous because his own relationship with Mother and the entire family was deteriorating. He's not only racist, but gets jealous easily, which can be seen during Coalhouse's piano playing. Although racist, he admires his perseverance which suggests that he is not totally blind.

Father recognized danger in Coalhouse's case and doesn't want his family involved. "Would you defend this savage? He's the one to blame for Sarah's death, due to his nigger pride" (176). Black men are always the ones to blame, they should not exist at all, his brain is filled with such ideas.

Although everyone might consider him as the least worthy character, he did help Coalhouse seek a lawyer after all, even though he plainly was trying to end the case.

Another sign of his goodness is towards the end of the novel, he refused to use the baby to force Coalhouse's surrender. The author tries to build Father as a man who cares for his family, but fails to express his emotions. He also has some false values which is the fault of the society. When his family moves to Atlanta, he finally feels happiness, a feeling that had been avoiding him all along. He doesn't feel happiness when constant changes are

happening, at the beach, away from all the potential danger to his family, he feels relieved and becomes a good husband.

He's very caring. The author focus more on his negative side, but still throws in some positive actions, such as taking his boy to the baseball game. Father is just a character that always happens to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. " No one in the family was unmindful of the dangers, yet no one would have him stay because of them" His life before the tragedies was already quite abominable. The expedition to the North Pole was a turning point in his life. Although his relationships with his wife has never been joyful, it's about to get much worse.

He felt completely invisible after his return. Mother learned all about his business. He even cried. Even his son realized that " His Father, the burly self confident man who had gone away, and came back gaunt and hunched and bearded" (98). Changes in the family ruined him mentally and physically. The author additionally demonstrates his resentment towards of changes through the way he reacts to a full baseball team of immigrants: revulsion. The involvement of his family with Coalhouse Walker was another turning point. Father hated him.

His appearance indirectly killed him with the chain of unfortunate events. Father claims that it's ridiculous to let a car take over everyone's life (157). He also blames Mother for taking Sarah. He even attempts to threat Conklin. He tries everything to turn his world in the reverse direction. Nonetheless he is doomed with an unstable life. Father, the compassionate husband, dies on

the Lusitania ship. A middle-class man started a business, sought an ordinary life, and ended up having many severe family problems.

Doctorow made Father a tragic man by having him die in an accident. The immigrant, as in every moment of his life, arriving eternally on the shore of his Self" (269). Although he is prejudiced towards immigrants, he is one himself in some ways. He was lost in his life, not knowing which direction his life is heading. His tragic ending was no different than a lot of immigrants' deaths. The life of a middle class man trying to support a family and have an ordinary life concluded sadly. The message is negative; Father is unfortunate and miserable. No matter how much one wants to make things right, sometimes things do not play out the way you expected.