

Sacrifice and the American Dream in the Works of E.L Doctorow

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Sacrifice and the American Dream in the Works of E.L Doctorow

Throughout the works of E.L. Doctorow, many facets of American society are explored, ranging from the plight of the homeless to the idiosyncrasies of the rich. A persistent theme prevalent in all of his novels is the existence of the [American dream](#). He seems fascinated by upward social mobility, especially when it involves the impoverished and underprivileged. Yet [Doctorow](#) also points out that with the success or attempted success of the American dream, one must make sacrifices, compromising morality, physical well-being, conscience, or identity. The overall benefits, though, of achieving prosperity, equality, or acceptance seem to always outweigh the adverse affects that result from chasing the enduring dream.

In his most acclaimed novel to date, Doctorow tells a "story of the intersection of three very different families"(Weiss n. pag.) during the gilded era of the 1910's. Titled after the ubiquitous music of the decade, Ragtime chronicles the clashing social, economic, and political ideas that plagued the beginning of the century. The three seemingly separate

families provide a cross section of the diverse American culture predominating this period of history. The first household represents the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant(WASP) culture, one which supposedly has already achieved the American dream. The other two families represent certain ethnic and racial groups who strive to attain the dream throughout the novel. But in pursuing this, they are each forced to pay a certain price.

In most of his novels, Doctorow seems "particularly compelled by the stories[of]...poor immigrants"(Righteous 112); Ragtime is no excepti...

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