RAGTIME
BOOK BY TERRENCE MCNALLY
MUSIC BY STEPHEN FLAHERTY
LYRICS BY LYNN AHRENS
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY E.L. DOCTOROW

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STUDY GUIDE
And everything was Ragtime...

This sweeping musical portrait of early-twentieth-century America tells the story of three families in pursuit of the American Dream.

Written by the award-winning composer/lyricist team of Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens (Once on This Island, Seussical, and Lucky Stiff), and noted playwright Terrence McNally, and based on E.L. Doctorow's distinguished novel, Ragtime is the winner of the 1998 Tony Awards for Best Score, Book and Orchestations, and both the Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards for Best Musical and Best Score.

At the dawn of a new century, everything is changing, and anything is possible. Set in the volatile melting pot of turn-of-the-century New York, three distinctly American tales are woven together: that of a stifled upper-class wife, a determined Jewish immigrant, and a daring young Harlem musician. They are united by their courage, compassion, and belief in the promise of the future. Together they confront history's timeless contradictions of wealth and poverty, freedom and prejudice, hope and despair, and what it means to live in America.
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Full Synopsis

Act One

We are introduced to the social and political climate of the United States in the early twentieth century by meeting a parade of characters – famous celebrities and private citizens of the time. First, we visit New Rochelle, New York, to meet a well-to-do white family: Mother, Father, their Little Boy, Mother's Younger Brother and Grandfather. Next, we go to Harlem to meet Coalhouse Walker, Jr., a ragtime pianist, and his admirers. Immigrants arrive at Ellis Island, where we meet Tateh, an artist who makes silhouettes, and his Little Girl. The lives of these three American families are entwined with Booker T. Washington, Harry Houdini, J.P. Morgan, Henry Ford, Evelyn Nesbit, and Emma Goldman. Whites, African Americans, immigrants, and celebrities are set on a collision course from the opening number ("Ragtime").

Father is accompanying Admiral Peary on a trip to the North Pole. At the dock, he consoles Mother that everything will be the same upon his return, but Mother is not convinced ("Goodbye My Love"). On its way out of the harbor, Father's ship passes a rag ship filled with immigrants, arriving in New York. Tateh and the Little Girl are on board. Tateh and Father wave to one another; Father admires the immigrants for their naive bravery in coming to a new land, and Tateh questions Father's reasons for leaving the place that he has worked so hard to find. Simultaneously, Mother wonders what this year without her husband will bring ("Journey On").

Mother's Younger Brother is in love with Evelyn Nesbit. He is frustrated and lost, searching for meaning in his life and hoping to find it in her. Her show is a vaudeville act that tells the true story of her lover's murder by her famous husband ("Crime of the Century"). Younger Brother goes to all of her shows. One day, after the show, Younger Brother approaches her, but she dismisses him.

The scene shifts to Mother and the Little Boy in the garden. The Little Boy wants to see Houdini, as he has a cryptic message for him: "Warn the duke." While she begins to read her Father's letter, mother makes a shocking discovery – there is a newborn African-American child buried in the flowerbed. The police arrive on the premises with Sarah, the mother of the child. Rather than let Sarah go to prison, Mother takes Sarah and the child into her own home ("What Kind of Woman").

With many other immigrants, Tateh and The Little Girl disembark at Ellis Island, full of hope ("America"). Tateh sets up his business on the Lower East Side, selling paper silhouettes of celebrities for a nickel each. Emma Goldman chastises him for selling one of J.P. Morgan, the epitome of capitalism. J.P. Morgan enters the scene and metaphorically crushes the immigrants, but Harry Houdini magically swoops in as an emblem of immigrant triumph. Time passes, Tateh becomes less idealistic – he is still poor and the Little Girl is sick. When a man tries to buy the Little Girl, Tateh has
reached rock bottom. He swears to make a better life for himself and his child ("Success").

Far Uptown, the people of Harlem celebrate the great musician, Coalhouse Walker, Jr. ("His Name Was Coalhouse Walker"). He tells his friends the story of how he loved and lost Sarah, but reveals that he's just found out where she might be living and is determined to win her back ("Getting' Ready Rag"). Henry Ford appears to tell us of his new method of mass production and his most famous product – the Model T ("Henry Ford"). A new car rolls off of the assembly line, and Coalhouse drives off in search of Sarah.

Back in New Rochelle, Mother and the Little Boy wait at the train station, on their way to New York City to take care of the family business while Father is away. Tateh and the Little Girl wait across the tracks for a train to Boston. Mother and Tateh greet one another, and Tateh is surprised to be treated with respect ("Nothing Like the City"). The Little Boy has a premonition that they will see Tateh and the Little Girl again, but Mother tells him that is absurd.

On his way to New Rochelle, Coalhouse encounters a group of hostile volunteer firemen who threaten him for being cocky by driving past them in his new car. Meanwhile, Sarah, living in Mother's attic, begs her infant's forgiveness for her desperation – trying to explain what drove her to such an unimaginable act ("Your Daddy's Son"). When Coalhouse arrives at Mother's home, Sarah will not see him. Coalhouse returns every Sunday for weeks, wooing Sarah with his ragtime tunes and winning over Mother, Grandfather and the Little Boy ("The Courtship"). Father returns from the North Pole to find a very different household from the one he left. He cannot wrap his head around the facts that his wife is independent, his family is accepting of the African-American courtship happening in his living room and there is ragtime music coming from his piano ("New Music").

Finally, Sarah comes down to see Coalhouse and they reunite. Coalhouse tells Sarah of his admiration for Booker T. Washington's achievements and, together, he and Sarah imagine a future for their child ("Wheels of a Dream"). Meanwhile, in Lawrence, Massachusetts, Tateh has lost sight of the American dream and now works at a mill 64 hours a week. In Union Square, Emma Goldman tries to generate a strike against the oppressive mill owners. Younger Brother happens to hear her speech and is energized to the cause of workers rights – he finally has something in which to believe ("The Night That Goldman Spoke in Union Square").

A violent labor strike erupts in Lawrence. Tateh intends to put The Little Girl on a train to a safer place, with other children and a chaperone. However, she is so distraught that he jumps on the train with her. He soothes her terror with a flipbook of silhouettes that he has made ("Gliding"). The train conductor notices the book of moving silhouettes and buys it for his own child. Tateh sees this as a wonderful new
business idea.

Coalhouse once again encounters the volunteer firemen, and, this time, they do more than threaten him. As Booker T. Washington gives a speech about rising above and holding fast, the men destroy Coalhouse's car. Coalhouse moves through the legal channels in search of justice for this crime against him, but he is denied at every avenue ("Justice"). He postpones his marriage to Sarah until the matter is resolved. Sarah, out of desperation and naiveté, tries to seek help from a visiting Vice Presidential candidate but is clubbed to death by police, who suspect her of having a gun ("President"). Act One closes with the anger and grief of Sarah's funeral ("Till We Reach That Day").

Act Two

Coalhouse mourns the loss of Sarah ("Coalhouse's Soliloquy"). Seeking vengeance, he shoots three of the firemen who trashed his car, burns their firehouse and demands that the fire chief, Willy Conklin, be brought to justice ("Coalhouse Demands").

A group of young men joins Coalhouse as he strikes out against the system. Booker T. Washington publicly condemns Coalhouse's actions. Father goes to the police to tell them what he knows about Coalhouse. Younger Brother, who is moved by the plight of the oppressed and angry about the injustice done to Coalhouse, erupts at Father for working against Coalhouse. He storms out of the house in anger, and Mother, who is still caring for Sarah and Coalhouse's baby, is deeply upset. In reaction, Father takes the Little Boy to a baseball game. But even this has changed and is now a game, not just for upper class whites, but for immigrants, too ("What a Game"). Meanwhile, Coalhouse's band of men sets fires around the city. Reporters besiege the family in New Rochelle. Father, thinking that it is time to get away, takes the family to Atlantic City, where Evelyn Nesbit and Houdini both happen to be starring attractions ("Let's Run Away to Atlantic City").

In Atlantic City, we discover that Tateh is now a famous film director and has recreated himself as Baron Ashkenazy. His daughter, healthy and beautifully dressed, is by his side. Once again, Tateh meets Mother and tells her the story of his success ("Buffalo Nickel Photoplay, Inc.").

Later, the Little Boy asks Houdini for his autograph and gives him the message: "Warn the duke." Houdini is confused and intrigued, but the Little Boy runs off. The Little Girl and Little Boy play together as Tateh and Mother watch from the boardwalk ("Our Children"). Tateh reveals his humble origins to Mother, who is moved by his honesty.

In Harlem, Younger Brother searches for Coalhouse and, although the residents are distrustful of him, one of Coalhouse's men takes him to Coalhouse's hideout.
Meanwhile, drawn by laughter and dancing in a club, Coalhouse thinks of the first time that he met Sarah ("Sarah Brown Eyes"). A blindfolded Younger Brother is brought to Coalhouse's den. Younger Brother wants to express his sympathy for Coalhouse's actions but all he can manage to do is offer his knowledge of explosives ("He Wanted to Say"). Coalhouse focuses his rage by taking over J.P. Morgan's Library. He threatens to blow up the library and all of its treasures, as well as himself and all of his men, one of whom is now Younger Brother. Father tells Mother that he has volunteered to act as a negotiator, and Mother realizes that this experience has irrevocably changed their relationship ("Back to Before").

Coalhouse and his men barricade themselves inside the library. Emma Goldman applauds this, but Booker T. Washington deplores these actions. Father tells the authorities that Booker T. Washington is the only man to whom Coalhouse will listen. Booker T. is sent into the library to speak with Coalhouse. He chides Coalhouse, both for risking the lives of the young men around him, while leaving his own son to be raised by white men, and for endangering the position of all African Americans by making them seem hot-headed and violent ("Look What You've Done"). He assures Coalhouse that, if he surrenders, he will have a fair trial and a forum for his opinions. Coalhouse negotiates the safe passage of his men, including Younger Brother, while Father remains behind in the library. The men protest his decision, but he explains to them that the only way to win the fight is to go out into the world and tell their story ("Make Them Hear You"). When Coalhouse is left alone with Father, he asks about his son. Father promises a safe end to the standoff, but, when Coalhouse exits the building to surrender, he is shot dead by authorities.

The era of ragtime ends. The characters come forward, one by one, to tell us the end of their stories: Younger Brother joins the revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, Emma Goldman is deported, Booker T. Washington establishes the Tuskegee Institute, Evelyn Nesbit fades into obscurity, Houdini has the one true mystical experience of his life when he is performing in Sarajevo and the duke is shot, Grandfather dies and Father is killed during wartime. Finally, Mother and Tateh marry and move to California with their children.

As the curtain falls, Little Coalhouse runs into Mother's arms, and men and women of all nationalities – and races – join Mother on the stage ("Epilogue").

Source: https://www.mtishows.com/ragtime-version-1
Ragtime Historical Who’s Who

Henry Ford  
July 30, 1863 – April 7, 1947

The American founder of the Ford Motor Company and father of modern assembly lines used in mass production. His introduction of the Model T automobile revolutionized transportation and American industry. He was a prolific inventor and was awarded 161 U.S. patents.

Matthew Henson
August 6, 1866 – March 9, 1955

An African American explorer and associate of Robert Peary during various expeditions, the most famous being a 1909 expedition which claimed to be the first to reach the Geographic North Pole.

Harry Houdini
March 24, 1874 – October 31, 1926,  
born Ehrich Weiss

A Jewish-Hungarian-American magician and escapologist, stunt performer, actor and film producer, as well as a skeptic and investigator of spiritualists.

J.P. Morgan
April 17, 1837 – March 31, 1913

An American financier, banker and art collector who dominated corporate finance and industrial consolidation during his time. He is widely credited with having saved or rescued the U.S. national economy in general—and the federal government in particular—on two separate occasions. He bequeathed much of his large art collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and to the Wadsworth Atheneum of Hartford, Connecticut.
Evelyn Nesbit  
December 25, 1884 – January 17, 1967

An American artists’ model and chorus girl, noted for her entanglement in the murder of her ex-lover, architect Stanford White, by her first husband, Harry Kendall Thaw.

Stanford White
November 9, 1853 – June 25, 1906

An American architect and partner in the architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White, the frontrunner among Beaux-Arts firms. He designed a long series of houses for the rich and the very rich, and various public, institutional, and religious buildings, some of which can be found to this day in places like Sea Gate, Brooklyn. His design principles embodied the “American Renaissance”. In 1906 White was murdered by millionaire Harry Kendall Thaw over their mutual relationship with Evelyn Nesbit, leading to a widely-reported trial.


Emma Goldman
June 27, 1869 – May 14, 1940

An anarchist political activist and writer. She played a pivotal role in the development of anarchist political philosophy in North America and Europe in the first half of the 20th century.

Goldman’s deep commitment to the ideal of absolute freedom led her to espouse a wide range of controversial causes. A fiery orator and a gifted writer, she became a passionate advocate of freedom of expression, sexual freedom and birth control, equality and independence for women, radical education, union organization and workers' rights.

Support for these ideas—many of which were unpopular with mainstream America—earned Goldman the enmity of powerful political and economic authorities. Known as "exceedingly dangerous" and one of the two most dangerous anarchists in America, she was often harassed or arrested while lecturing, and sometimes banned outright from speaking. Insisting on the right to express herself in the face of overwhelming odds, Goldman became a prominent figure in the establishment of the right to freedom of speech in America.

Booker T. Washington (Booker Taliaferro Washington)
c. 1856 – November 14, 1915

An American educator, author, orator, and advisor to presidents of the United States. Between 1890 and 1915, Washington was the dominant leader in the African-American community.

Washington was from the last generation of black American leaders born into slavery. He was a key proponent of African-American businesses and one of the founders of the National Negro Business League. His base was the Tuskegee Institute, a historically black college in Alabama. He called for black progress through education and entrepreneurship, rather than trying to challenge directly the Jim Crow segregation and the disenfranchisement of black voters in the South. Washington mobilized a nationwide coalition of middle-class blacks, church leaders, and white philanthropists and politicians, with a long-term goal of building the community’s economic strength and pride by a focus on self-help and schooling.

From the Live Arts Ragtime Dramaturgs

At A Glance

By Shelby Marie Edwards

Shelby Marie Edwards is a Masters student at the University of Chicago studying the Humanities with an emphasis in Theatre and Performance Studies.

Theatre is a mirror of reality...

In every theatrical play we find characters in pursuit of an objective. This objective can be as benign as the chore of folding towels or as intense as stealing a loaf of bread for survival. In Ragtime, we find characters working at the extremes of emotion and objective. There are thousands of objectives within Ragtime. We see characters looking for the following:

   Love - Purpose - Survival - Acceptance - Justice - Revenge

Faith: Is there a right way to combat justice?

Many of the characters in Ragtime are fighting for the same objective, but doing so using different strategies. Most, though not all, of the characters are fighting for justice. Justice, in this context, is defined as fairness or an outcome that is felt to be morally correct (whether or not these outcomes align with the law).

Booker T. Washington is a real life historical figure who appears as a character in Ragtime. In his time, Washington was satisfied with racial segregation, believing that black people could live a purposeful life within the constraints of laws like the Jim Crow racial segregation and voting disenfranchisement laws. Martin Luther King could be seen as Washington’s intellectual heir. In the show, the character of Coalhouse Walker takes a different tact. His approach is more closely aligned with Malcom X’s “by any means necessary” mentality.
The answer is...

I encourage all audience members to use this lens when evaluating the actions of characters in *Ragtime*: **What are their objectives, how do they manifest themselves through action, and what are the consequences?** Only then can we begin to judge for ourselves the morality behind actions. Extremism is not necessarily needed for social progress, but the existence of extremes of opinion creates space for dialogue, change, and the chance to acknowledge the power of systemic wounds. In my personal ideology, I don’t believe that there exists one right way to combat injustice. In the same breath, I do believe that there are wrong ways of fighting for justice.

In Conclusion...

*Ragtime* masterfully wrestles with issues relating to class, race, sex, and socioeconomic status in America. One of the most beautiful aspects of the script is that all the characters are pursuing their own **individualized American dream**, maneuvering through the particular hardships they were born into. Although more than 100 years have passed since the time of *Ragtime*, there are a striking number of similarities to issues we face today. This show continues to be fresh and relevant, and asks us to challenge our assumptions at every turn.
Jewish Immigration to America
Curated, assembled, and written by Geri Schirmer

Geri Schirmer has been a member of the Live Arts community since 1992 - since the beginning. She is usually seen as an actor on stage, but she has also been an assistant director, producer, dramaturg, props designer, educator, and Gala volunteer. Live Arts is her creative home and heart. In other life endeavors, she has been a teacher of children with intellectual and physical challenges and the Adolescent Program Coordinator at the Sexual Assault Resource Agency. She and her husband now spend every moment they can with three phenomenal grandchildren. A life-long admirer of young talent and enthusiasm, her next project is coordinating the Live Arts Teen Theater Project of "I Never Saw It Coming", a play about teen dating and sexual violence, coming this winter and spring.

Motivations for Immigration

Tateh is the immigrant profiled in Ragtime. Tateh's language is Yiddish, the common language for Ashkenazi Jews living all over Russia and Eastern Europe. The word "tateh" is the Yiddish word for Father. It is important to know where Tateh comes from - and what he is leaving behind.

Tateh as portrayed at Live Arts by Chris Estey, in a photograph by Martyn Kyle

Pogrom is a Russian word designating an attack, accompanied by destruction, looting of property, murder, and rape, perpetrated by one section of the population against another. The Jews of Russia were the victims of three large-scale waves of pogroms, each of which surpassed the preceding in scope and savagery. These occurred between the years 1881 and 1884, 1903 and 1906, and 1917 and 1921.
The Pale of Settlement

After the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881, Russian Jews fell victim to increasingly brutal policies. In 1882, restrictions were placed on Jewish worship, and Jews were excluded from holding public office and from many professions. Most were forced to move to an area bordering Germany, Austria and Romania, called the Pale of Settlement.

The Pale of Settlement (Russian: Ч е р т а ́ о с ё д л о с т и, chertá osyódlosti, Yiddish: דער tkhum-ha-moyshən, Hebrew: הַמּוֹשָב תְּחוּם , tẖum hammosháv) was a western region of Imperial Russia with varying borders that existed from 1791 to 1917, in which permanent residency by Jews was allowed and beyond which Jewish permanent or temporary residency was mostly forbidden. At its height, the Pale, including the new Polish and Lithuanian territories, had a Jewish population of over five million, and represented the largest component (40 percent) of the world Jewish population at that time. Jewish life in the shtetls (Yiddish: שטעטלעך shtetlekh "little towns") of the Pale of Settlement was hard and poverty-stricken. Because of the harsh conditions of day-to-day life in the Pale, some two million Jews emigrated from there between 1881 and 1914, mainly to the United States.


Ellis Island

For most immigrants in these years, Ellis Island was their introduction to America. It was daunting - trying to cope with a foreign language and unsanitary conditions, and frightened by hard-to-understand rules and regulations and often derisive and belittling treatment form the authorities. Yet they had made it!

“Four out of ten Americans can trace their heritage via Ellis Island. Like the Statue of Liberty, it has been a powerfully evocative symbol to generations of immigrants. Ellis Island opened in 1892 in the midst of an industrialization in the United States that drew eager workers from dozens of foreign nations; at its height in 1907, more than one million people came through its doors. Its decline began shortly after World War I, when Congress imposed severe restrictions on immigration, reflecting the attitudes of a society grown wary of foreigners. After 1924, immigration slowed to a trickle and Ellis Island fell into disuse. It was closed in 1954.”

- Pamela Reeves, Ellis Island: Gateway to the American Dream (Friedman/Fairfax Pub., 1991).
In March 1909, the Jewish Daily Forward, a Yiddish newspaper, printed the following appeal from over a hundred immigrants detained on Ellis Island:

Esteemed Mr. Editor:
Have pity on us, the unhappy people who are imprisoned on Ellis Island. Please, print our letter in your worthy paper so that our American brothers may know how we are suffering.

Most of us are Russian Jews who cannot return to Russia. We are political refugees or deserters from the army. Many of us have sold everything to have enough for the passage to America.

You know very well what a Jewish emigrant must go through before he gets to America. First of all, the difficulties with borders; later he is put on a train like a piece of luggage on the way to the port, where he lies for many days in a shed waiting for the arrival of the ship. On the ship every emigrant is looked on like a dog. After the torment, when with the help of God he arrives in America, he must show that he is in possession of twenty-five dollars. Where is he going to get it? Who has ever heard of such a treatment of human beings? For this sort of nonsense they ruin the lives of so many people and deport them to the countries from which they have escaped.

It would be impossible to describe everything that is taking place here, on Ellis Island. We are crammed over a thousand people in a place where there is hardly place for two hundred. We are not allowed to go out for fresh air. We lie on a filthy floor. We don’t have our luggage with us, and we cannot change our shirts for many weeks.

People go around in despair, everybody cries and moans. Men are kept separated from their wives and children. They can see each other only when they take us to eat. They don’t let a husband talk to his wife or a father talk to his child. Many children get sick, some are taken to hospitals, some never come back.

Today is a holiday, the Fourth of July, and because of this they don’t deport anybody. But tomorrow the slaughter will start again. There are some who think of jumping into the water if they will take them to the boat.

Dear Mr. Editor, our hope is that you will print this letter which was written by one of our emigrants, a student from the university of Petersburg, on the Fourth of July 1909. This is the eve of the seventeenth day of the month Tammuz, when Jews fast in the memory of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

Signed: Alexander Rudnev

Source: Pamela Reeves, Ellis Island: Gateway to the American Dream, (Friedman/Fairfax Pub., 1991).
The Third Wave of Immigration

The Third Wave of immigration was a period of increased immigration from Europe to the United States between 1880 and 1920. Most immigrants made the journey based on promises of a better life in the U.S., though few would actually find it. As immigrants usually lacked training or education, the majority of the work available for them was manufacturing or hard labor jobs. There were no labor laws yet, and the industrialists in charge usually decided that wages should be set according to the market (which drove them lower and lower), so the amount of time at work required to make anything close to a living wage usually meant the working class worked for twelve hour days, 5 days a week. In addition to this, the vast majority of immigrants in New York City lived in run-down tenements with barely any light, only occasional running water, and no heat in the winter. One third of people living in cities were thought to be close to starvation regularly, and the terrible living conditions and weakened immune systems meant that typhus and tuberculosis were rampant. In response to these terrible living and working conditions, many immigrants worked and protested for better safety measures and better pay. A number of labor strikes and protests were enacted, and while many of them were violent and ended poorly for the strikers, housing codes and labor laws were eventually put into place.

Jewish Life in the Lower East Side

"They were despised by New Yorkers. They were filthy and illiterate. They stank of fish and garlic. They had running sores. But somehow, piano lessons began to be heard. People stitched themselves to the flag. They carved paving stones for the streets. They sang. They told jokes."
- E.L. Doctorow, Ragtime (Chapter 3)

The capital of Jewish America at the turn of the century was New York’s Lower East Side. This densely packed district of tenements, factories, and docklands had long
been a starting point for recent immigrants, and hundreds of thousands of the new arrivals from Eastern Europe settled there on arrival.

When a new Jewish immigrant first set foot on the Lower East Side, he or she stepped into a Jewish world. The earliest Eastern European Jews to settle there had quickly established synagogues, mutual-aid societies, libraries, and stores. For a new Jewish immigrant in a strange country, this immersion in a familiar world, around people who shared a common language, faith, and background, could be profoundly reassuring.

For all the comfort that this shared heritage brought, however, the Lower East Side was still a very difficult place to live—and a crowded one. By the year 1900, the district was packed with more than 700 people per acre, making it the most crowded neighborhood on the planet. This congestion brought with it many hazards, along with many annoyances. Nearly half of the city’s deaths by fire took place in the Lower East Side. Disease was rampant, clean water was hard to come by, and privacy was unheard of. For many immigrant children, their education in American life was acquired in the city streets, where lovers strolled amid streams of raw sewage, vendors offered almost anything for sale, con artists and petty thieves worked the crowds, and horse carriages burdened with goods clogged the muddy roadways.

The Lower East Side could certainly be frightening, dangerous, noisy, and cramped. However, it was still a place of relative safety compared to the virulently anti-Semitic Russian Empire. And, however chaotic it might be, as some observers at the time noted, it was still the greatest concentration of Jewish life in nearly two thousand years.

Sources: Carnegie Mellon University Department of Drama


**Immigration Then and Now: What, if Anything, Has Changed?**

The letter by Alexander Rudnev from Ellis Island, written in 1909, sounds like it could be written by an immigrant sitting in an El Paso detention center today. Audience members of *Ragtime* will not fail to notice that there are frightening similarities in the treatment and national sentiments about immigrants at the turn of the 20th century and today. How could we have made such little progress in our national conversation about the cultural economic and contributions, not to mention the moral imperative, of welcoming and celebrating a person new to our country? The production company of *Ragtime* and the community of Live Arts do not have the answers, but we know we must raise and examine this question. Please join us in
having a sincere and open conversation about our national character, and where we go from here, together. --G.S