



Lorestan University

Qualitative Inquiry as Praxis in L2 Studies

Journal homepage: <https://quipls.lu.ac.ir/>



Research Paper

Heterogeneous Manifestation of Ideological State Apparatus and Thatcherism in *Ragtime* Doctorow's Novel: A Thematic Analysis

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ARTICLE INFO

Article Type

Original Article

Article History

Received: 2025-05-10

Received in Revised

Form: 2025-05-16

Accepted: 2025-05-19

Available Online: 2025-05-19

Keywords:

Doctorow's *Ragtime*

novel, Dominant

ideology, Government

ideology apparatus,

ABSTRACT

While *Ragtime* is set in early 20th-century America, the ideological and power dynamics that it critiques can indeed be linked to Thatcherism, which dominated Britain in the 1980s, particularly in its neoliberal economic policies and emphasis on individualism, deregulation, and the reinforcement of classes. Therefore, the aim of study is to thematically examine the incorporation of Thatcherism alongside the Althusserian concepts of ideology and ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) in the analysis of *Ragtime* which provides the fascinating lens to examine the novel's themes. In a Thatcherism context, much like in Althusser's framework, there is a clear emphasis on how ideologies are reinforced and perpetuated through institutions such as the media, education, and the legal system—akin to the ISAs in Althusser's theory. *Ragtime* touches on these same themes, especially as it explores how different characters are shaped by the ideologies of the time, whether they are the industrial magnates like Henry Ford, whose wealth and power are built upon capitalist ideology, or the marginalized figures who struggle against the systemic forces of inequality.

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How to cite this article: Navidi, M. (2025). Heterogeneous manifestation of ideological state apparatus and Thatcherism in *Ragtime* Doctorow's novel: A thematic analysis. *Qualitative Inquiry as Praxis in L2 Studies*, 1(1), 136-157

DOI: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7744-947X>

Universal ideological
action

1. Introduction

One of the most relevant aspects of Thatcherism in this context is the focus on the individual's role within the market-driven society. In *Ragtime*, characters like Tateh and Coalhouse Walker Jr. embody resistance to these economic and racial ideologies. Their struggles reflect how those marginalized by the capitalist system challenge the ideology that underpins the social order, similar to the resistance movements during Thatcher's era. The tension between individual empowerment and systemic oppression is at the heart of the novel, and its parallels to the Thatcher era's emphasis on economic individualism are striking. The idea that language and discourse are active components of social life and ideology is critical in both Doctorow's work and Thatcherism. In *Ragtime*, language is used both as a tool of resistance and oppression, whether in speeches, media representations, or political discourse. In a Thatcherism context, language plays a role in promoting neoliberal ideologies that justify privatization, the dismantling of social programs, and the perpetuation of class divisions. This reflects Althusser's argument (2014) that ideological apparatuses, through language and discourse, create and reinforce the dominant ideology, which is internalized by individuals and perpetuated in society.

By examining *Ragtime* through the lens of Althusser's theory of ideology and Thatcherism, the analysis reveals how the novel's themes are not just about American history but also resonate with broader discussions about the role of ideology in shaping societal structures and power relations. The way Doctorow portrays language as both a tool of domination and liberation aligns with both Althusser's and Saussure's understanding (2007) of how discourse constructs and maintains the social order, revealing the extent to which ideology and power shape not just history, but individual lives. The analysis provides a rich and multidimensional reading of *Ragtime*, suggesting that Doctorow's work, while rooted in the historical context of early 20th-century America, also speaks to broader ideological forces that transcend time and geography, including the dynamics of Thatcherism and neoliberalism.

Thatcherism and Doctorow's *Ragtime* are two distinct topics that can be connected through their historical and cultural contexts. *Ragtime* is a novel by E.L. Doctorow published in 1975 that

explores the lives of various characters in early 20th-century America, including historical figures such as J.P. Morgan, Harry Houdini, and Emma Goldman. The novel captures the social, political, and cultural dynamics of the time, including issues of race, class, and immigration. Thatcherism, on the other hand, emerged in the late 20th century in Britain and was associated with Margaret Thatcher's conservative government. The policies of Thatcherism aimed to promote free-market capitalism, reduce the role of the state in the economy, and emphasize individual responsibility. While Thatcherism and *Ragtime* are set in different time periods and contexts, they both reflect broader themes of societal change, economic transformation, and the impact of political ideologies on individuals and communities. Both explore issues of power, identity, and social justice in their respective settings. One could draw parallels between the themes of individualism, social change, and economic upheaval in both Thatcherism and *Ragtime*. By examining these themes in relation to each other, one could gain insights into how different historical periods have grappled with similar challenges and how literature and politics intersect to shape our understanding of society.

Thatcherism refers to the political and economic policies associated with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher during her time in office from 1979 to 1990. Thatcherism is characterized by a commitment to free-market capitalism, privatization of state-owned industries, deregulation, and a reduction in the role of the state in the economy. It also emphasized individualism, personal responsibility, and a strong national defense. Thatcherism was influenced by neoliberal economic theories that advocated for limited government intervention in the economy and a focus on individual initiative and competition. Thatcher's government implemented policies such as reducing trade union power, cutting taxes, and promoting entrepreneurship and free trade.

Critics of Thatcherism argue that it led to increased social inequality, weakened workers' rights, and created a more individualistic society. Supporters, on the other hand, credit Thatcherism with revitalizing the British economy, reducing inflation, and curbing the power of trade unions. Thatcherism had a lasting impact on British politics and society, shaping debates around the role of the state, economic policy, and social welfare. The term is often used to refer to a particular brand of conservative politics that emphasizes free-market principles and individual responsibility. The connection between Thatcherism, Althusser's re-reading of Marxism (2005) and Doctorow's

Ragtime can be explored through the lens of ideology and how it shapes societal structures and power dynamics.

Thatcherism, with its emphasis on free-market capitalism and individual responsibility, can be seen as an ideological framework that shapes economic policies and social relations. Althusser's reinterpretation of Marx's ideas (2005) highlights the role of ideology in maintaining the dominance of governments and perpetuating existing power structures. In this context, Thatcherism can be seen as an ideological tool used to justify and perpetuate economic inequalities and class divisions. Overall, the connection between Thatcherism, Althusser's ideas on ideology, and *Ragtime* highlights the complex interplay between economic structures, political ideologies, and societal norms. By examining these connections, one can gain a deeper understanding of how power operates in society and how ideologies shape individuals' perceptions and actions (Althusser, 2005). Althusser's ideas on ideology and history align with the post-structuralist intellectual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Post-structuralists challenged traditional historical narratives and introduced new assumptions about the nature of history. They argued that history is not a mere recounting of past events but is always narrated and interpreted through ideological frameworks. According to Althusser (2014) and post-structuralists, history is not a static or objective account of events but is shaped by the perspectives and biases of those who narrate it. Historical periods have distinct characteristics that cannot be homogenized or treated as interchangeable. Historians should actively engage with the past and recognize that it is not a passive object but a dynamic entity that can be reinterpreted and reconstructed through historical texts.

Furthermore, the relationship between history and literature is complex and intertwined. History does not merely serve as a backdrop for literary works but provides rich material for storytelling and narrative construction. History can be a subject for narration and is often used as a source of inspiration and context in literary texts. Althusser's assertion (2007) that every person is subject to ideological actions that create tendencies in the ruling class underscores the pervasive influence of ideology on individuals and society. Ideology shapes our beliefs, values, and behaviors, reinforcing power dynamics and social hierarchies. By recognizing the role of ideology in shaping historical narratives and societal structures, we can gain a deeper understanding of how power operates and how history is interpreted (Althusser, 2007).

By drawing on Louis Althusser's theory of the "ideological apparatus of the state"(2014), the analysis further underscores how Doctorow uses his novel to critique and expose the ways in which dominant ideologies shape and control societal structures. Through his narrative and character development, Doctorow challenges readers to confront the contradictions and injustices embedded within the American dream. The exploration of Doctorow's novel through the lens of ideology and critique offers a compelling interpretation of how literature can serve as a platform for challenging prevailing beliefs and advocating for social change.

2. Background of *Ragtime* Music

The transition from traditional jazz to modern jazz in the 1940s and 1950s marked a significant shift in the genre, particularly in terms of rhythm and improvisation. Modern jazz introduced new rhythmic patterns and complex melodies, pushing the boundaries of traditional harmony while maintaining the essence of jazz music. The mention of key figures in jazz history, such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Dizzy Gillespie, highlights the contributions of these legendary musicians to the evolution of jazz. Their innovative styles and groundbreaking techniques helped shape the sound of jazz music and continue to influence musicians today. The integration of jazz music into mainstream culture, facilitated by advancements in technology such as the phonograph and radio, played a crucial role in popularizing the genre and expanding its reach to audiences across America. The formation of mixed-race jazz bands, like Benny Goodman's ensemble, also contributed to breaking down racial barriers and promoting diversity in jazz music. The narrative effectively captures the dynamic and diverse nature of jazz music, showcasing its evolution from its roots in New Orleans to its widespread popularity across America. Highlighting the cultural impact and artistic innovation of jazz musicians throughout history provides a compelling portrayal of this influential musical genre.

3. Method

3.1.Ideological State Apparatus and Thatcherism

Thatcherism, named after British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, refers to the political and economic policies implemented in the United Kingdom during her tenure from 1979 to 1990. Thatcherism was characterized by a commitment to free-market capitalism, privatization of state-

owned industries, deregulation, and a reduction in the role of the state in the economy. These policies aimed to promote individualism, competition, and entrepreneurship while reducing the influence of trade unions and government intervention in the market. In the context of Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses (2014), Thatcherism can be seen as a means of promoting and reinforcing the values and interests of the ruling class through various institutions such as the media, educational system, and legal institutions. By promoting neoliberal economic policies and individual responsibility, Thatcherism sought to shape public attitudes and beliefs in line with the interests of the capitalist class. The Thatcher government's emphasis on privatization and deregulation can be viewed as an attempt to reshape the ideological landscape of British society by promoting the values of free-market capitalism and reducing the influence of state-controlled institutions. Through these policies, Thatcherism aimed to create a more market-oriented society that prioritized competition, efficiency, and individual initiative.

In this sense, Thatcherism can be seen as a manifestation of the ruling class's control over the ideological apparatus of the state, using it to promote a specific set of values and beliefs that serve the interests of the capitalist class. By shaping public discourse and influencing public opinion through various ideological institutions, Thatcherism sought to establish a hegemonic ideology that justified and perpetuated the dominance of capitalism in British society. Overall, the concept of ideological state apparatuses (Althusser, 2014) provides a framework for understanding how political ideologies such as Thatcherism are disseminated and reinforced through various societal institutions, ultimately serving to maintain the existing social order and powers.

4. Research Findings

E.L. Doctorow's novel *Ragtime* provides a rich exploration of ideology, power, and the relationship between art and society. Doctorow's narrative challenges the dominant hegemony of society by presenting a complex and multi-layered portrayal of American society at the turn of the 20th century. Through his novel, Doctorow uses narrative as a tool to challenge and subvert the ruling ideology, offering a critical perspective on the social, cultural, and political structures of the time. Althusser's understanding of the relationship between art and society can be evaluated and analyzed through Doctorow's novel *Ragtime*. Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses (2014) provides a framework for understanding how dominant ideologies are perpetuated and

maintained through various societal institutions. In *Ragtime* Doctorow explores the ways in which ideology shapes individual beliefs and behaviors, and how power structures influence social relations. While Althusser (2007) rejects the possibility of knowing the truth through art, Doctorow's novel can be seen as conveying truths that ideologies seek to hide in societies. By presenting a diverse range of characters and perspectives, Doctorow challenges the dominant narratives of the time and offers a more nuanced understanding of American society. Through his exploration of race, class, gender, and power dynamics, Doctorow's narrative exposes the contradictions and complexities of the social order.

The juxtaposition of Doctorow's narrative with dominant hegemony in *Ragtime* serves to challenge and subvert the ruling ideology, offering a critique of the status quo and opening up space for alternative perspectives. The novel's cultural and political significance lies in its ability to provoke reflection and dialogue on issues of power, ideology, and social change. In conclusion, the study of Althusser's theories in relation to Doctorow's novel *Ragtime* offers a valuable lens through which to explore the complexities of ideology, power, and society. By examining how art can challenge dominant ideologies and reveal hidden truths, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which narratives shape our perceptions of the world and influence our beliefs and actions.

5. Discussion

5.1.Examining the Title of the Novel

The dual interpretations of the title *Ragtime* in E.L. Doctorow's novel add layers of complexity to the narrative and its exploration of history, society, and art. The association of Ragtime music with poverty and struggle provides a thematic backdrop for the novel's examination of the challenges and contradictions of its time. Barbara Cooper's (2008) view of *Ragtime* music as a metaphor for the historical challenges depicted in Doctorow's novel suggests that the title serves as a symbolic representation of the struggles and conflicts faced by the characters in the story. This interpretation highlights the way in which Ragtime music, with its syncopated rhythms and improvisational nature, mirrors the complexities and tensions of the historical period in which the novel is set. On the other hand, Brian Roberts' (2004) perspective on *Ragtime* music as a detailed and historical reading implies a more nuanced and in-depth approach to understanding the significance of the

title. This view suggests that Doctorow's use of *Ragtime* as a thematic element in the novel is not merely symbolic, but also rooted in a specific historical context that informs the narrative and shapes the characters' experiences (2019).

Cooper's (2008) assertion that Doctorow's examination of history in *Ragtime* is both vague and external, while attempting to present a balanced and impartial view of historical events, underscores the novel's complex engagement with the past. By weaving together monuments, factual information, and internal and external events, Doctorow creates a new interface between the artist and history, offering a fresh perspective on how we understand and interpret the past. In conclusion, the title of *Ragtime* in E.L. Doctorow's novel serves as a multifaceted symbol that reflects both the struggles of its time and the intricate connections between history, society, and art. The dual interpretations of the title highlight the novel's thematic richness and its exploration of the ways in which music, history, and narrative intersect to create a compelling and thought-provoking work of literature (Cooper, 2010). Berlin's (2009) perspective on jazz as a type of folk music that originated as the music of black people in America provides a valuable context for understanding the cultural significance of Ragtime music in E.L. Doctorow's novel *Ragtime*. The fusion of African and European musical influences in jazz, with its emphasis on improvisation and individual expression, reflects the complex interplay of history, society, and art that is central to Doctorow's narrative. By highlighting the historical roots of jazz and its evolution from *Ragtime* music, Berlin's (2009) analysis underscores the ways in which music can serve as a powerful symbol of cultural identity and social change. The Jazz Age of the 1920s, characterized by the rise of jazz as a defining feature of American culture, reflects the transformative power of music in shaping individualism and societal values.

The connection between *Ragtime* and jazz as innovative forms of music embraced by American blacks in the late 19th century suggests a continuity of artistic expression and cultural resilience that resonates with Doctorow's exploration of history and society in his novel. The rich musical traditions and diverse influences that inform jazz music parallel the complexities and contradictions of the characters and events depicted in *Ragtime* adding depth and resonance to the novel's thematic exploration. In conclusion, Berlin's perspective on jazz as a dynamic and transformative form of music rooted in African and European traditions provides a compelling framework for understanding the cultural significance of Ragtime music in E.L. Doctorow's novel.

The historical context and social implications of jazz as a symbol of individualism and American identity enrich our appreciation of the complex interplay between music, history, and society in Doctorow's narrative (Berlin, 2009).

The novel *Ragtime* by E.L. Doctorow actually begins in the early 1900s, during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, not Franklin D. Roosevelt. Theodore Roosevelt served as President of the United States from 1901 to 1909, and he was known for his progressive policies and energetic leadership style. *Ragtime* indeed takes place during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, beginning in 1901, a period marked by significant social and political change in the United States. Roosevelt's leadership, characterized by progressive reforms and a focus on trust-busting, contrasts with the later policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was more focused on recovery from the Great Depression and implementing the New Deal.

Now, regarding the critique of the upper classes in *Ragtime*, Doctorow's portrayal of these characters is central to the novel's broader social commentary. The novel presents an intricate view of early 20th-century American society, focusing on how different social classes interact with and are shaped by the prevailing ideologies of the time. The characters like the father who sells fireworks and flags, and Stanford White, an influential architect, represent different aspects of the American elite. Doctorow uses these characters to explore the disparities between the upper classes and the marginalized groups in society. For example, the father who sells fireworks and flags might appear to embody the capitalist, entrepreneurial spirit, yet his personal limitations and lack of awareness reveal the fragility of this seemingly dominant class. His actions reflect the broader social forces that keep people within their prescribed roles, even if they are nominally "successful." On the other hand, figures like Stanford White serve as embodiments of the power, privilege, and excesses of the upper class. His position as an architect and cultural figure represents the entanglement of wealth and cultural authority that reinforces social structures.

By critiquing these figures, Doctorow critiques the way the upper classes of the time not only benefit from the existing power structures but also help maintain them. This critique aligns with Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) (2014), which work to perpetuate dominant ideologies and social hierarchies. The institutions that Stanford White and other upper-class characters represent—such as the media, education, and the arts—serve to normalize and

legitimize the ideological beliefs of the ruling class, maintaining the status quo and reinforcing class divisions.

In relation to Thatcherism, while the novel is set decades before Margaret Thatcher's time, the issues of class, wealth, and systemic inequalities in *Ragtime* resonate with the neoliberal ideals that Thatcher would later champion. Thatcherism emphasized individualism, market-driven policies, and the dismantling of welfare state programs—ideas that echo the exploitation and social stratification depicted in *Ragtime*. The novel critiques the myth of the American Dream, exposing how the system is designed to benefit the few at the expense of the many. In this sense, Doctorow's *Ragtime* provides a nuanced historical critique that aligns with Althusser's theories of ideology (2007) and offers a social commentary that resonates with later political eras, such as the rise of Thatcherism in Britain. Through its exploration of power, privilege, and resistance, *Ragtime* highlights how ideologies shape individuals and societies, whether in the early 1900s or in the neoliberal world of the late 20th century.

The analysis of the father character and Stanford White in *Ragtime* offers a compelling critique of the upper class's detachment from the social issues around them, and it underscores how Doctorow uses these characters to illustrate the ideological systems that sustain inequality. Both characters represent different aspects of the ruling class's relationship to power, ideology, and societal responsibility. The father's superficial patriotism and loyalty to the American Dream are indeed emblematic of a certain ideological stance that aligns with Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). His role in selling fireworks and flags—symbols of national pride—positions him as someone who subscribes to the surface-level trappings of American exceptionalism without engaging with the deeper inequalities embedded within the society. He symbolizes a segment of the population that is content to accept the ideological system without questioning it. He embodies the passive, uncritical citizen who adheres to national symbols but fails to critically examine or challenge the social order that privileges certain groups over others. This form of ideological compliance, which does not actively engage with the need for systemic change, mirrors the kind of passive conformity that is prevalent in many authoritarian or neoliberal ideologies, such as those promoted during the Thatcher era. Stanford White's character represents another facet of the ruling elite's relationship to social responsibility. His prioritization of aesthetics over social impact highlights a major critique of the upper classes in *Ragtime*. White's construction of a poorhouse

for immigrants is a significant symbol in this critique—while he builds a space meant for marginalized people, his focus remains on the beauty and design of the architecture, not on addressing the pressing needs of the immigrant community. This reflects the way the privileged classes often engage in superficial acts of charity or philanthropy without confronting the deeper structures of exploitation and inequality that perpetuate these conditions. His detachment from the social realities of the communities he serves underscores the divide between the powerful elite and the marginalized, emphasizing how their efforts often fail to challenge or change the underlying systems of oppression.

Evelyn's character adds an additional layer of complexity to this critique. She represents a form of upper-class privilege that is tied not only to wealth but also to gender dynamics. As a fashion model who symbolizes the white community through her appearance, Evelyn's character is a representation of both physical beauty and social status, yet she is trapped within a system that limits her freedom and autonomy. Her relationship with Stanford White, followed by her tumultuous marriage to Harry K. Th. The exploration of the contrast between the father's expedition to the North Pole and the experiences of the immigrant family in *Ragtime* offers a profound critique of privilege, power, and societal divisions, while also illuminating themes of assimilation, identity, and discrimination. The juxtaposition between exploration and exclusion indeed underscores the broader tensions between those who benefit from systems of power and those who are marginalized or oppressed within these structures. The father's expedition symbolizes an adherence to outdated ideals of American exceptionalism and manifest destiny, reflecting a romanticized vision of exploration and dominance. His journey to the North Pole, though framed as an adventure and discovery, ultimately reveals a narrow and exclusive form of nationalism. This contrasts sharply with the experiences of the immigrant family, who are forced to navigate a society that treats them as "others," and whose struggles for survival reflect the harsh realities of systemic exclusion and discrimination.

In *Ragtime*, Doctorow uses the immigrant family, particularly the characters of Mame, Tateh, and the Little Girl, to highlight the difficulties faced by newcomers in a society that both promises opportunity and simultaneously imposes rigid barriers based on class, race, and nationality. Their daily efforts to survive—sewing, peddling—are emblematic of the immigrant experience, where hard work often does not translate into upward mobility but rather into the

continual struggle to maintain dignity in the face of dehumanizing conditions. The reference to the houses built by Stanford White, described as "palaces," is particularly striking in its irony. These "palaces" (2019) represent the upper class's patronizing attitude toward the poor and marginalized. White's philanthropic gesture, in building homes for immigrants, still serves to reinforce the power dynamics of the time. His focus on beauty and aesthetics over the functional needs of the community only deepens the critique of how the ruling class commodifies the lives of those it deems lesser, without engaging with the real issues of inequality and exploitation. This mirrors the ways in which the rich and powerful, in both historical and contemporary contexts, often focus on surface-level charity or reforms that do little to challenge the systemic structures of oppression.

The connection of Mame's wordless singing to the concept of ideology is particularly insightful. Mame's act of singing without words could be seen as a form of silent resistance, a way of expressing emotions and internal struggles that cannot be captured by the language of the dominant culture. This silence, coupled with her rich inner life, might suggest a kind of marginalization where words fail to communicate the complexities of her identity or her condition in a society that seeks to homogenize and silence dissent. It's intriguing to consider how this connects to Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) (2014) where language, symbols, and institutions are used to reinforce dominant ideologies. In this context, Mame's silence might be interpreted as a metaphor for how ideological systems seek to erase or reduce the meanings that are important to marginalized individuals, forcing them to conform to societal expectations. In this framework, Mame's wordless singing also reflects the dehumanizing effects of the ruling classes' manipulation of language and symbols. Just as Thatcherism relied on the rhetoric of individualism and market-driven policies to sustain an unequal social order, the silence or reduction of meaningful speech in *Ragtime* might symbolize how the voices of those in marginalized positions—whether immigrants or women like Mame—are often sidelined or ignored in mainstream discourse. The notion of a loss of words can be viewed as the transformation of language into a tool of control, stripping away its power to represent the authentic experiences and needs of the oppressed. Thatcherism, with its emphasis on neoliberal values and the dismantling of social safety nets, echoes the ways in which the novel critiques the exploitation and marginalization of immigrant communities. Both in *Ragtime* and during the Thatcher era, the prevailing ideologies serve to keep the oppressed in positions of subservience by limiting their

opportunities for meaningful participation in society and by reducing their struggles to simple categories that can be easily ignored or dismissed by the powerful.

In conclusion, Doctorow's *Ragtime* offers a rich exploration of how ideology shapes identity and power structures. Through the experiences of the immigrant family, Mame's wordless singing, and the contrast between the father's North Pole expedition and the lives of those excluded from the American Dream, Doctorow critiques the mechanisms that reinforce societal divisions. Althusser's theories of ISAs (2014) and the ideological manipulations seen in Thatcherism are reflected in the novel's portrayal of how the ruling class uses language, symbols, and institutions to maintain control, often at the expense of the very individuals whose lives they claim to shape. This examination of power, ideology, and social division in *Ragtime* offers a lens through which we can better understand both historical and contemporary struggles for justice, identity, and dignity.

Althusser's notion that ideology relies on repetition and a double structure, presenting historical illusions that shape our understanding of the world, could be applied to Mame's character as well. Her wordless singing may represent a form of resistance or subversion against dominant ideologies that seek to limit individual expression and diversity of thought. The mention of historical materialism in Althusser's work could also be relevant here, suggesting that Mame's actions and behaviors are influenced by larger socio-political forces at play. By exploring the significance of Mame's wordless singing in this context, it is possible to delve deeper into the themes of power, ideology, and resistance within the narrative (Althusser, 2014). The text presents a poignant depiction of the challenges faced by immigrants in adapting to a new society while grappling with the loss of language and identity. It delves into the theme of transformation and the initial stages of identity shift experienced by Mame. The narrative also introduces Tate, who finds himself engrossed in labor-related conflicts in a mill in Massachusetts, where workers stage riots due to inadequate wages, leading to the authorities separating children from their parents.

Tate's separation from his daughter underscores the harsh realities immigrants confront, especially in contexts where families are torn apart by government actions. Despite the hardships and the societal pressures to conform, Tate's unwavering determination to reunite with his daughter highlights the profound bond and commitment he holds toward his family. The contrast between Tate's labor struggles and his strong familial instincts paints a complex picture of the immigrant

experience, blending themes of resilience, sacrifice, and the yearning for family unity. Tate's disdain for aspects of American society, as exemplified by his statement "I hate cars," hints at a deeper dissatisfaction with the modernized and industrialized environment he finds himself in, reflecting a clash of cultures and values.

The interpretation of *Ragtime* highlights important themes of identity, resilience, and the struggle for autonomy, particularly in the context of ideological forces and societal pressures. By exploring the ideological landscape of the novel and the complexities of assimilation and cultural adaptation, it is possible to shed light on the powerful ways in which characters like Tate embody these struggles, offering a deep reflection on the individual's role in the face of societal transformation. The narrative captures the delicate balance between personal convictions and societal expectations. The immigrant experience, central to the novel, is shaped not just by external forces such as discrimination, labor struggles, and economic hardship, but also by the internal struggle for self-preservation, dignity, and a sense of belonging. As these characters, particularly Tate, navigate the complexities of assimilation, they face not only the challenges of cultural adaptation but also the emotional toll of family separation and the erosion of traditional values.

In the context of Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) (2014) we can view the American government's push to maintain its identity during a period of rapid technological and societal change as an attempt to enforce certain ideologies. These efforts, such as the policing of immigrant identities and the imposition of national values, can be seen as manifestations of the state's role in perpetuating dominant ideologies. The government's desire to assert its presence in a multicultural society reflects a resistance to the changing cultural and linguistic makeup of the country, which mirrors the broader societal shift towards neoliberalism and individualism—values that were notably emphasized during the Thatcher era in the U.K. Doctorow critiques the impact of these forces on immigrants and working-class families, using characters like Tate to explore the human cost of ideological conformity.

Tate, as a father and an immigrant, becomes a symbol of resilience, standing firm in his convictions despite the overwhelming pressures of a society that attempts to impose new values. His unwavering determination to preserve his individuality and maintain his familial bonds amidst the dehumanizing forces of industrial capitalism and systemic exploitation is a reflection of the personal struggles against dominant ideologies. His character stands in stark contrast to the state-

driven, impersonal forces that attempt to dictate the terms of his existence. As Doctorow's portrayal of such a character is a thematic consistency in his works, where seemingly marginal or pale characters take on significant roles, revealing a deeper complexity and resilience that challenges traditional narratives of power and identity. The contrast between Tate and characters like Mrs. Goldman, whom Doctorow critiques, further adds nuance to the exploration of ideological struggles. Mrs. Goldman, representing a more relative or perhaps indifferent stance on issues, symbolizes a certain kind of ideological passivity or relativism that is at odds with Tate's active resistance and commitment to his values. Doctorow's portrayal of this tension hints at his critique of social movements that, while valuable, may sometimes lack the urgency or commitment to effect real change, especially when they do not fully engage with the complexities of cultural identity and the deeper systemic forces at play.

The struggles that Tate faces—his fight to reunite with his daughter, his disdain for industrialization, and his unyielding belief in family values—echo larger themes of autonomy and the preservation of human dignity. These themes resonate with the idea of Thatcherism, where the dominant ideology championed individualism, personal responsibility, and market-driven policies, often at the expense of collective well-being and the protection of vulnerable communities. Tate's refusal to conform to these ideologies makes him a compelling figure in the novel, standing as a bulwark against the forces that seek to erase or marginalize immigrant identities. Ultimately, *Ragtime* presents a nuanced exploration of how societal norms, ideological systems, and cultural values shape the identities and actions of individuals. Through Tate's character and Doctorow's larger narrative choices, the novel delves deeply into the complexities of human experience, exploring themes of resilience, individuality, and the struggle for personal autonomy in the face of shifting ideologies. By examining the immigrant experience and the social pressures exerted by both the state and the capitalist system, *Ragtime* highlights the tensions between personal convictions and societal expectations, inviting readers to reflect on the forces that shape their own lives and identities within a rapidly changing world.

The text sketches a vivid picture of the father's return in the subsequent parts of the journey, portraying a striking transformation in his demeanor and appearance after living amongst the Eskimos for an extended period. The signs of primitiveness, akin to the Eskimos, have left a visible mark on him, symbolizing a profound shift towards savagery.

The narrator's observation encapsulates the stark change in the father, noting his altered visage and physical state. The mention of his bearded countenance resembling that of a rootless wanderer and his notably emaciated frame evokes a sense of displacement and detachment, hinting at the toll that his experiences and assimilation into a different culture have taken on him. This portrayal encapsulates the theme of cultural assimilation and the transformative power of prolonged exposure to diverse ways of life. The father's metamorphosis into a figure bearing characteristics reminiscent of the Eskimos reflects the novel's exploration of identity, belonging, and the impact of immersion in unfamiliar environments on the psyche.

The poignant description of the father's appearance serves as a poignant reminder of the complexities of cultural exchange and adaptation, shedding light on the interplay between individual identity and the influence of external cultures. As the narrative unfolds, this transformation adds layers of intrigue and introspection, inviting readers to contemplate the nature of human resilience, identity evolution, and the boundaries between civilization and wilderness (Doctorow, 2019). The text of novel delves into the concept of ideological satisfaction as articulated by Althusser (2005) emphasizing how individuals can perceive themselves as being in control of their destiny while being inherently influenced by ideological discourses. The portrayal of the father's contentment with his altered state, despite the visible signs of primitiveness, underscores a thematic tension between personal agency and ideological conditioning.

Moreover, the father's transformation also serves as a metaphor for the ideological contradictions embedded within the capitalist and colonial systems. The Western ideals of "civilization," "progress," and "individualism" (2019) are often constructed at the expense of the cultural, social, and material exploitation of others. His exposure to the Eskimo lifestyle reveals the cracks in these ideologies, suggesting that a rigid sense of cultural superiority is flawed, and that immersion in other worldviews can lead to a profound and disorienting transformation. The interplay between personal agency and ideological conditioning is central to Doctorow's narrative. As the father physically and emotionally changes, he is no longer a mere symbol of American ideals but a complex figure who embodies the contradictions of both Western civilization and its ideological constructs. His satisfaction with his new self, despite its signs of "primitiveness," reflects a resigned acceptance of the forces that shape him, highlighting the tension between individual autonomy and the conditioning power of ideology. Doctorow uses the father's

transformation to explore deeper themes of identity, assimilation, and resistance to ideological control. His change illustrates the profound effects of ideological conditioning, showing that individuals are rarely as autonomous as they might believe. His journey emphasizes the complexities of cultural exchange and the often painful and disorienting process of adapting to or being absorbed by foreign systems of belief.

In conclusion, the father's transformation in *Ragtime* serves as a potent symbol of ideological conditioning, reflecting Althusser's notion of how individuals (2007) are shaped by external ideologies. The tension between his perceived autonomy and the forces influencing his transformation invites readers to question the nature of identity, power, and the subtle ways in which ideological systems infiltrate and reshape individual lives. The narrative explores how the father's transformation challenges his national individuality and stands in contrast to the idealized notion of the American dream. His return home illuminates a sense of displacement and estrangement, symbolized by the changes within his family and surroundings. This evolution serves as a commentary on societal shifts and the erosion of traditional values, particularly within the framework of class dynamics and patriotism.

The depiction of the ruling class experiencing change and simulation, exemplified by characters like Morgan and the father, highlights subversive narratives within the novel. The revelation of Morgan's true position of power, masked by outward displays of cultural interest, and the father's realization of this shift upon his return, encapsulate themes of deceit, assimilation, and the illusion of stability within societal hierarchies.

The character of Evlin Nesbit's romantic interest in Tate's daughter symbolizes a convergence of personal desire and familial hope, mirroring complexities within interpersonal relationships and the broader social landscape. Nesbit's fixation on the young girl further underscores the novel's exploration of power dynamics, individual motivations, and the enduring pursuit of idealistic symbols amid societal transformations.

Through these intricate character dynamics and thematic explorations, the novel delves into the intricate interplay between identity, societal expectations, and the façade of stability within a changing cultural landscape. The text delves into the intricate dynamics of social and cultural norms, highlighting the unexpected relationships and challenges faced by characters from different classes and backgrounds within the novel. The contrast between the immigrant from the white

American class and the girl from the immigrant class underscores societal expectations and the critique of government ideologies presented by Doctorow.

The narrative skillfully critiques the rigidity of social structures and the ideological framework imposed by governmental institutions. Althusser's concept of reality (2012) being intertwined with ideological discourses is exemplified through the portrayal of societal norms upheld by institutions such as language, family, and education, which serve to reinforce state authority and control. The narrative demonstrates how institutions like language, family, and education act as agents of the state, reinforcing the ideological discourse that defines what is considered acceptable and “normal” in society.

This ideological framework, which Althusser (2014) suggests is maintained by various state institutions, creates a reality that is accepted by individuals as “common sense,” even though it often serves to uphold existing power structures. In *Ragtime*, Doctorow critiques the limitations of these systems by showing how individuals, even those who are seemingly detached from power structures, are subject to ideological control. The father's transformation, Morgan's hidden dominance, and Evelyn's pursuit of power and idealism all speak to the power of ideological systems to shape both personal identities and societal behaviors, even as they appear to promise autonomy and self-determination.

The narrative, in this sense, functions as a critique of the illusion of stability and the power of ideological control to shape individuals' realities. By highlighting the father's physical and emotional transformation, the novel underscores how even the most entrenched ideologies can be challenged or altered by exposure to new ways of life, but also how the systems of power are constantly at work to reshape and reassert their dominance. The critique of governmental and ideological systems that the novel offers aligns with broader critiques of Thatcherism, which, in its embrace of individualism, market-driven policies, and the erosion of collective social support, reflects a similar tension between the ideals of personal autonomy and the reality of systemic power dynamics.

In conclusion, Doctorow's *Ragtime* intricately explores the complex interplay between personal identity, class dynamics, and ideological control within the framework of early 20th-century America. By using characters like the father, Morgan, and Evelyn, the novel challenges the traditional narratives of the American Dream, revealing the undercurrents of power,

assimilation, and class struggle that shape individuals' lives. Through Althusser's lens, the narrative highlights how ideological forces work to maintain the status quo, even as those subjected to them may not recognize the extent of their conditioning, ultimately critiquing both the idealized American identity and the mechanisms that perpetuate societal inequalities.

The introduction of the Walker family in *Ragtime* provides a powerful examination of racial identity, societal perceptions, and resistance within a framework shaped by ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) (2014) as well as Foucault's notions of power (2001) and societal norms. Cool House Walker, as a talented musician, defies the stereotypical representation of Black individuals in early 20th-century America. By positioning Cool House Walker as a character who transcends stereotypes, Doctorow critiques the racialized ISAs that reinforce subjugation through systems of education, law, family, and the media. These institutions shape the way Black individuals are viewed and the roles they are allowed to occupy in society. Cool House Walker's defiance of these societal expectations—he is a musician, a figure of refinement—becomes an act of resistance, yet it is clear that his defiance, as with many marginalized figures, is not without consequence. Despite his talents and elegance, he must contend with the ingrained racial prejudices that limit his agency, much like other characters who are constrained by the limitations of their social standing.

This dynamic resonates with Althusser's argument about ISAs (2014) where the ideological apparatuses function not just through overt coercion but also through cultural and social norms that dictate individual behavior. These systems work to perpetuate the status quo by shaping individuals' behaviors and beliefs to fit within established frameworks of power and inequality. In Cool House Walker's case, his defiance of the social order by embodying an elevated Black identity—a talented, refined, and well-dressed figure—serves as a form of resistance against these racialized norms. However, his experiences demonstrate the consequences of such resistance within a society that is deeply committed to maintaining hierarchical racial structures.

Foucault's (2004) theory of power and societal norms, as referenced in the analysis, further complicates the relationship between Walker's identity and the power structures he navigates. Foucault's idea that power operates not only through formal laws and institutions but through everyday practices and norms that regulate behavior can be seen in how characters like Cool House Walker are constantly subjected to the gaze of society, which disciplines them by judging their conformity to accepted standards. Despite his efforts to assert his autonomy, Walker must still

contend with a society that has already prescribed his place based on racial prejudice. His attempt to defy these norms—and the consequences he faces as a result—illuminates the complexities of identity formation and the oppressive forces that shape an individual’s position within society. This critique of societal expectations in *Ragtime* offers a profound commentary on the larger forces of control and manipulation exerted through ideology and institutions. Just as Althusser’s ISAs (2014) are responsible for the regulation of social order by shaping individuals' ideologies, so too does Foucault’s framework of power influence identity formation, social behavior, and the way individuals are categorized and positioned in society. The tension between autonomy and conformity is central to the novel, particularly for characters like Cool House Walker, who represent resistance to oppressive structures but are simultaneously subject to the constraints of these systems.

6. Conclusion

The narrative’s exploration of power, identity, and autonomy thus illustrates the ways in which societal and ideological forces mold individuals' experiences and limit their potential. Characters like Cool House Walker embody both the desire for individuality and the crushing weight of conformity, offering a poignant reflection on the difficulties of asserting one's identity in a world dominated by entrenched ideologies. These struggles not only expose the workings of ideology but also challenge the reader to reflect on the broader societal constraints that continue to shape identities and behavior within existing power structures. In conclusion, Doctorow’s portrayal of racial identity through characters like Cool House Walker provides a compelling narrative that critiques the complex ways in which societal norms, power, and institutionalized ideologies intersect. By examining these characters through Althusser’s ISAs (2014) and Foucault’s ideas on power, (2004) the novel unveils the profound challenges individuals face in navigating oppressive social systems while asserting their autonomy and identity. The interplay between power and resistance in *Ragtime* serves as a striking commentary on the enduring relevance of these ideological frameworks in shaping personal and societal realities.

Bio-data

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Declarations

Funding: There is no funding source.

Competing interests: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Availability of data and materials: The data will be accessible to the readers upon request.

Authors' contributions: Conceptualization-writing-revision-data collection and analysis.

Declaration of generative AI-powered tools in the process of writing: The author declared that she has not used in writing this article.

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