

## RAGTIME COSTUME NOTES 2.27.13

### PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Coalhouse: The novel's descriptions of him are wonderfully telling. "He was a stocky man with a red-complected shining brown face, high cheekbones, and large dark eyes so intense as to suggest they were about to cross. He had a neat moustache. He was dressed in the affection of wealth to which colored people lent themselves. He wore a fitted black overcoat, a black and white hound's-tooth suit, gray spats, and pointed black shoes. He held in his hand a charcoal-gray cap and driving goggles." Let's see what we can achieve. Also, check out image 19 below. It's a departure from our use of a dark suit, but the lighter colored driving coat might be representative of a brighter time in his life before everything is destroyed.

Tateh: He requires two major costume changes. I doubt you'll have much of a challenge in determining the right look for him. He's a bit clichéd in terms of dress, but the common stuff you'll find online is certainly appropriate. I would like to add a prayer shawl to his waistline. It's a nice touch. As Tateh's fortunes turn and we are introduced to him a second time in Atlantic City, he very much dresses the part of his newfound wealth. The novel describes his attire in the following manner: "... a small, limber man who wore jodhpurs and a white linen cap with a button." Also, see image 16 below. In his Act 2 attire, he wears long leather boots and has a wonderful sport coat. It's pretty clichéd film director attire for the era, but that certainly doesn't mean it's wrong.

Mother: See image 15 below. Mother may have 2-3 costume changes. In the beginning of the show she should blend into the exact same appearance of the other women of New Rochelle. However, once Father departs and she is left to her own devices, I'd like her to appearance to change significantly. Her new manner of dress should be suggestive of the independence and strength she gains as she asserts her control over all aspects of the family's life, including Father's business. A third costume might be appropriate for the funeral scene of Sarah.

Father: He should be impeccably dressed. The biggest challenge for Father comes following his expedition. He should come in fully emblazoned with the attire of a man who has lived in the wilderness of the arctic. He requires a grizzly, long fur coat. I also want

Younger Brother: See image 25 below. Pioneer's representation of Younger Brother somehow feels spot-on. This costume would also fit and work for Act 2, once he joins Coalhouse's gang.

Sarah: Love both images 28 & 29 below. They portray Sarah as a bit more modest, conservative. I think I want to take things in this direction for her. In one passage, the novel describes Sarah as "the kind of moral being who understood nothing but goodness. She had

no guile and could act only in total and helpless response to what she felt. If she loved she acted in love, if she was betrayed she was destroyed. There were the shining and dangerous facts of the life of an innocent.” This passage is strikingly revealing of the core of her character. Let’s dress her in a manner that conveys these assessments.

Emma Goldman: She is pretty commonly dressed amongst most production. She requires a long black dress with a tight corset. I would also LOVE to find the appropriate eyeglasses. See images 17-18 below. See image 25 below for a clearer view of Emma Goldman at Pioneer.

Evelyn Nesbitt: There is actually a solid amount of content online that reveals Evelyn’s appearance. See image 14 below. Is her attire in this picture pretty suggestive? Yes. Is it absolutely over the top flash? Nope. I think I’d like to take a cue from this photograph of her. Yes, it should suggest Vaudeville and sexual allure, but it also retains a semblance of some elegance and light formality. She really isn’t the person she’s portrayed to be in the show. I want to costume and have her played a bit truer to life.

Little Girl: Again, gotta go back to the costuming work of the Broadway show as depicted in [this clip](#). Love the coat. Also really love the muted but evident colors of her scarf. As for Act 2, look again to image 16 below. Andover’s choices for her dress in this portion of the show were very appropriate.

Little Boy (Edgar): See images 15 and 22-23. Honestly, I really like the sailor suit outfit that Pioneer achieved much more than [U of M’s production](#) in the latter photos. It is a bit more muted on top, with a less pronounced scarf. I would prefer that direction.

Booker T. Washington: Well, the novel describes his attire by stating, “He wore a black suit and homburg.” See image 10 below. Love the collar and tie in this photo.

Houdini: Apparently, Wendy Doigan may have info on a straightjacket. See images 26-27 below. Think the jumpsuit idea might work really well for his opening sequences in the show. U of M’s production does a nice job capturing historically accurate attire for the man.

J.P. Morgan: He should appear immaculately attired. He is *the* man of influence and power in his era, and he should look every bit the part. Here is a passage from the novel that describes his appearance: “Morgan carried a gold-headed cane. He was wearing a wing collar and an ascot.” See image 8 below.

Henry Ford: See image 11 below. Again, love the style of the collar (very typical for Ford from the images I’ve seen). Also love the tie. He costume should reflect his position in society, but should also, lightly, be suggestive of his humble roots.

Willie Conklin: Here's the man we love to hate. One thing the novel makes mention of is that he wears a sort of military cap which distinguishes him from his men. I kind of like this visual. It suggests a pathetic component of ego within the character.

Admiral Peary: See image 20 below. I love the fur leg-coverings, but they would be much more appropriate for Father during the scene in which he returns from his expedition. Peary's attire should be suggestive of a ship captain rather than a polar explorer. He should have a traditional white captain's hat and blue uniform.

## **CHORUS GROUPS**

1. New Rochelle – White, creams, beige – one costume. Will need to put on black shawls, hats. Coats for funeral scene
  - Andover's resources for this chorus group were wonderful. Very faithful to the original Broadway production designs. If we can borrow what we don't have from them for the NR chorus, let's do it. See image 7 below.
2. Immigrants – Jewish immigrants prayer shawls fiddler stuff, Haitian colorful, Italians black
  - Our immigrants should be in muted, earth tones. They should appear a bit impoverished, and so their attire should be indicative of their modest resources. Here's a clip from the [Broadway production](#). Great costuming!
  - Check out images 1-2 below, which highlight the direction Pioneer and Andover took in costuming their European immigrants.
3. Factory Workers – Overalls (Note quick change from Success to Henry Ford)
  - Check out 4:58 in [this video sequence](#) of the number. It is pretty much a perfect reflect of the costuming choices I'd love to see in this number.
4. Coal House's Gang & Sarah's Friends – women dresses; men jackets (look sharp)
  - The very end of [this sequence](#) gives you a glimpse of Coalhouse's gang, but I'd rather they wear dark coats than tan trench coats. Bottom line, his 4 followers are supposed to be dressed immaculate, just as Coalhouse does.
  - The novel makes mention that each man wore a "fully brushed back derby" as a kind of uniform. Their dress also reflects that of Coalhouse.
5. People of Harlem
  - This group should probably offer a bit more color, more than the other two main chorus groups. I don't know that I dislike the lighter tones of the suits that the men are wearing in [this sequence](#), but when the males become Coalhouse's followers I know I want them in dark suits. See image 21 below.
6. Sob Sisters/Reporters/Photographers – Refer to *Radium Girls*
  - We already costumed our reporters and photographers perfectly in *Radium Girls*. If we can pull the same outfits we used for that and add a few more that are similar in appearance, that would be ideal. They looked great.
  - See images 3-4 below.
7. Chorus Girls – Matching(?) Similar to Evelyn Nesbit so long as she stands out

- [This link](#) offers a ton of examples of the direction that can be taken in the number. However, I generally HATE the approach that most of the designs take. I really loved Andover's costumes for this number. Check out image 6 below.

8. Jurors (Crime of the Century) – New Rochelle people can stay the same; immigrants will need suit jackets.

9. Band Members – Some type of Uniform.

- The band members will be comprised of our Harlem People chorus. Don't know where or how we can find uniforms similar to those depicted in [this clip](#), but they are the ideal in my mind.

10. Newsboys – newsboy caps, knickers. They're pretty a-typical.

11. Firemen - uniforms

- Okay, they can take on a few different appearances. First off, we need to costume five men, which includes Willie Conklin.
- In the novel, their dress is described in the following manner: "They all wore blue work shirts with green handkerchief ties, dark blue trousers, and boots." I don't think we're bound in by this description, but it is specific and true to the source materials.
- See image 13 below. It's a different take, but it will probably be executed much more easily than the descriptions above. I think both directions would work. Their appearance should build a strong sense of animosity within the audience. That's the key.

12. Policemen – uniforms (from *Urinetown*?) If we can find what they used, I think we're basically fine.

- They're a bit modern. For a more accurate depiction of the style of attire of the time period, see image 5 below. I'd say we should plan on costuming about 5-9 students, depending on our ability to find militia men uniforms. See next costume group below.
- Pioneer made use of double-breasted suits with gold-trimmed sleeves. That might be a better approach to cheat the look of the era if we can't find what we used in *Urinetown*.

13. Militia men – research – see image 9 below.

- Tough additional costume request, I know. Still, this is one of the requests that's pretty important to me. It's such an important scene. It's an utterly sticking moment in the novel. It is tremendously important to the struggles of the era. Just relying on police in uniform is not an extensive enough representation of the violence. The military presence really hits home the imagery we need to capture.

14. Rallyers

- These individuals can probably be dressed as the immigrants. Perhaps we add a few factory-type outfits and/or use the uniforms of some of the workers from "Henry Ford" in this scene.
- See Image 25 below.

## 15. Atlantic City Vacationers

- I definitely want to do something for the People of Harlem chorus in terms of putting them into band uniforms to represent the Ragtime band. See image 24 below.
- I don't think the People of New Rochelle needs any adjustment in attire for this number. The immigrant group can and should be used as the entertainers in this scene. We also need to select a few cast members to represent the film actors from Tateh's picture. They will be choreographed into "Buffalo Nickel"



Image 1: Immigrants' chorus (Pioneer HS)



Image 2: Immigrants' chorus (Andover HS). I LOVE the use of the Ellis Island tags. I really want to do this. It's an authentic device as well.



Image 3: *Radium Girls* reporters.



Image 4: Kim's costume for *Amber Gram* was also spot-on as a reporter.



Image 5: Technically speaking, this is a period appropriate uniform.



Image 6: Andover's swing girls and Evelyn Nesbit are among that best visuals that I have seen in this number. Love the red. If we can borrow these costumes, let's do it!



Image 7: Andover's HS's New Rochelle chorus group. White suits, white dresses. White parasols.



Image 8: J.P. Morgan.



Image 9: Militia men at the Lawrence, Mass. Strike.



Image 10: Coalhouse's gang and policemen. Note: dark attire of his gang members. I almost image the men of Harlem may need 4 costume changes. Technically, they play Haitian immigrants, the men of Harlem in Gettin' Ready Rag, Ragtime band members in Atlantic City, and Coalhouse's gang members.



Image 11: Booker T. Washington



Image 12: Henry Ford



Image 13: much more simple look for the firemen, Image 14: Evelyn Nesbitt.  
but I'm not sure this isn't the best approach.



Image 15: Blurry? Yes! Anyway, this image really captures three characters wonderfully. In Pioneer HS's production of the show, Mother is dressed simply but elegantly. Little Boy wears a sailor suit, which I think is great. And their first maid, Kathleen, is also appropriately attired in this image. Want to definitely have the apron.



Image 16: Love two of the characters here. Both Tateh and the Little Girl are wonderfully costumed. This is Andover HS. What can we borrow?



Image 17: Emma Goldman's eyeglasses.



Image 18: Love Pioneer's choices F or attire for Goldman.



Image 19: Coalhouse. Clearly not a dark coat.



Image 20: Admiral Peary.



Image 21: Wonderful example of absolute best-case scenario for People of Harlem attire.



Image 22: Typical child's sailor uniform for Edgar (Little Boy).



Image 23: Edgar (Little Boy)



Image 24: Atlantic City vacationers and Ragtime band.



Image 25: Younger Brother, Emma Goldman, and the rally of workers on strike.



Image 26: Harry Houdini.



Image 27: Harry Houdini



Image 28: Sarah.



Image 29: Sarah.