

Rudyard Kipling, The White Man's Burden, 1899

This famous poem, written by Britain's imperial poet, was a response to the American take over of the Phillipines after the Spanish-American War.

Take up the White Man's burden--
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild--
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

Take up the White Man's burden--
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain
To seek another's profit,
And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden--
The savage wars of peace--
Fill full the mouth of Famine
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
The end for others sought,
Watch sloth and heathen Folly
Bring all your hopes to nought.

Take up the White Man's burden--
No tawdry rule of kings,
But toil of serf and sweeper--
The tale of common things.
The ports ye shall not enter,
The roads ye shall not tread,
Go mark them with your living,
And mark them with your dead.

Take up the White Man's burden--
And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better,
The hate of those ye guard--
The cry of hosts ye humour
(Ah, slowly!) toward the light:--
"Why brought he us from bondage,
Our loved Egyptian night?"

Take up the White Man's burden--
Ye dare not stoop to less--
Nor call too loud on Freedom
To cloke your weariness;
By all ye cry or whisper,
By all ye leave or do,
The silent, sullen peoples
Shall weigh your gods and you.

Take up the White Man's burden--
Have done with childish days--
The lightly proffered laurel,
The easy, ungrudged praise.
Comes now, to search your manhood
Through all the thankless years
Cold, edged with dear-bought
wisdom,
The judgment of your peers!

"The Brown Man's Burden"

Much like Lulu Baxter Guy's "The Black Man's Burden," Henry Labouchère's "The Brown Man's Burden" shifts the emphasis of Kipling's notorious poem, offering a view of imperialism from the perspective of those who were most directly affected by the expansionist policies of nations like Britain and the United States. "The Brown Man's Burden" offers an indictment of imperial hypocrisy, with particular emphasis on the violence employed in subjugating countries like the Philippines in the name of freedom.

Pile on the brown man's burden
To gratify your greed;
Go, clear away the "niggers"
Who progress would impede;
Be very stern, for truly
'Tis useless to be mild
With new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child.

Pile on the brown man's burden;
And, if ye rouse his hate,
Meet his old-fashioned reasons
With Maxims up to date.
With shells and dumdum bullets
A hundred times made plain
The brown man's loss must ever
Imply the white man's gain.

Pile on the brown man's burden,
compel him to be free;
Let all your manifestoes
Reek with philanthropy.
And if with heathen folly
He dares your will dispute,
Then, in the name of freedom,
Don't hesitate to shoot.

Pile on the brown man's burden,
And if his cry be sore,
That surely need not irk you--
Ye've driven slaves before.

Seize on his ports and pastures,
The fields his people tread;
Go make from them your living,
And mark them with his dead.

Pile on the brown man's burden,
And through the world proclaim
That ye are Freedom's agent--
There's no more paying game!
And, should your own past history
Straight in your teeth be thrown,
Retort that independence
Is good for whites alone.

“The White Man’s Burden” Student Worksheet

Introduction:

In 1899, British writer Rudyard Kipling was inspired by events during the Spanish-American War and composed a poem titled “The White Man’s Burden.” The poem became a focal point for the debate about imperialism and prompted both positive and negative responses, including parodies of the original poem. Much can be learned about the way people thought at the turn of the 20th century by examining literature of this type. In this lesson, you will read both “The White Man’s Burden” and a takeoff of the poem titled “The Brown Man’s Burden.”

All web links for this lesson can be found at:

Directions:

“The White Man’s Burden”

Go to _____ . Read the whole poem then
answer the following questions:

1. Describe what you think Kipling means by “the white man’s burden.”

2. How would you characterize the tone of this poem?

3. To whom do you think the poem is addressed? What do you think Kipling hoped to accomplish by publishing this poem?

4. List two or three words or phrases that Kipling uses to describe indigenous peoples. How do these examples reveal Kipling’s attitude towards these peoples?

5. Give three examples of some of the specific difficulties Kipling foresees in taking up “the white man’s burden.”

6. Kipling portrays “the white man’s burden” as a difficult and thankless undertaking, yet urges that it be taken up nevertheless. How does the last verse of the poem reveal why he thinks it should be taken up in spite of all the difficulties associated with it?

“The Brown Man’s Burden”

Go to _____
answer the following questions:

. Read the whole poem then

7. In Kipling’s poem, each verse begins “Take up the white man’s burden”; in this poem, the author has changed this line to read “Pile on the brown man’s burden.” What is the significance of this?
8. How would you characterize the tone of this poem?
9. To whom do you think the poem is addressed? What do you think the author hoped to accomplish by publishing this poem?
10. What is the author’s main objection to what Kipling advocates in “The White Man’s Burden”?
11. What does the author see as the true motivating force behind imperialism?
12. In your own words, write either a four-verse poem or a one-page editorial responding to Kipling’s poem from the perspective of someone living at that time.