

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Black Man's Burden

By Reverend H.T. Johnson
1899

In 1899, Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem called, "The White Man's Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands" which urged the United States to take on the moral "burden" of conquering other non-white countries. One month after the poem was published, an African-American clergyman, H.T. Johnson, published this poem in response. As you read, take notes on how perspective and point of view influences Johnson's response to Kipling.

- [1] Pile on the Black Man's Burden.
'Tis nearest at your door;
Why heed long bleeding Cuba,
Or dark Hawaii's shore?
- [5] Hail ye your fearless armies,
Which menace feeble folks
Who fight with clubs and arrows
And brook your rifle's smoke.
Pile on the Black Man's Burden
- [10] His wail with laughter drown
You've sealed the Red Man's problem,¹
And will take up the Brown,
In vain ye seek to end it,
With bullets, blood or death
- [15] Better by far defend it
With honor's holy breath.



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1. "Red Man" is an outdated, politically incorrect term for Native American peoples, whose population was cut down by about 95% by the colonizers.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes a central theme of the text? [RL.2]
 - A. White people were intent on stealing as much wealth as they could from people of color, and violence was an unintended consequence.
 - B. Prejudice is used to justify conquering and/or killing people seen as inferior.
 - C. White people in the 19th century thought that colonization was for the betterment of all people.
 - D. Power over countries and peoples can lead to corruption, though not often.

2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
 - A. "Pile on the Black Man's Burden. / 'Tis nearest at your door;" (Lines 1-2)
 - B. "Hail ye your fearless armies, / Which menace feeble folks / Who fight with clubs and arrows / And brook your rifle's smoke." (Lines 5-8)
 - C. "Pile on the Black Man's Burden / His wail with laughter drown" (Lines 9-10)
 - D. "Better by far defend it / With honor's holy breath." (Lines 15-16)

3. Which of the following statements best summarizes how the poem describes the white man? [RL.3]
 - A. The poem describes the white man as a group of fearless armies setting out to defend the weak.
 - B. The poem describes the white man as arrogant and cruel, laughing at the black man.
 - C. The poem describes the white man as buffoonish and unaware of the destruction he causes.
 - D. The poem describes the white man as a conquering force setting out to spread its power and influence at the cost of indigenous peoples.

4. What is the poet's likely purpose in composing this poem? [RL.6]
 - A. To solely respond to Kipling's poem
 - B. To denounce English colonization and imperialism
 - C. To describe the plight of the black man in contrast to what Kipling calls the "white man's burden"
 - D. To fight for Native American rights and honor those who were killed

5. What, according to the text, is the “black man’s burden”? Cite evidence from [RL.3] [RL.2] the text to support your answer.
