

Name: _____ Class: _____

The White Man's Burden

By Rudyard Kipling
1899

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) was a British writer who is best known for The Jungle Book. In 1899, he wrote "The White Man's Burden." Originally subtitled with "The United States and the Philippine Islands," Kipling wrote this poem after the Spanish-American War, during which the United States acquired the Philippines from Spain. This poem sparked considerable controversy when it was written, including H.T. Johnson's response—a poem called "The Black Man's Burden," because of its claim that the duty of white men was now to go to the Philippines in order to "civilize" the island's people. As you read, take notes on how Kipling might have come to his opinion on the Philippines, and how he justified this stance.

- [1] Take up the White Man's burden—
Send forth the best ye breed—
Go, bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
[5] To wait, in heavy harness
On fluttered¹ folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child.



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- Take up the White Man's burden—
[10] In patience to abide,²
To veil the threat of terror
And check³ the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain,
[15] 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,
[20] And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
(The end for others sought)
Watch sloth and heathen⁴ folly
Bring all your hope to nought.⁵

1. **Fluttered (adjective):** describing someone who moves or behaves in an agitated, aimless manner
2. **Abide (verb):** to wait for; to withstand; to accept without objection
3. **Check (verb):** to stop, slow, or hold back something, often something undesirable
4. **Heathen (adjective):** uncivilized
5. A variant spelling of "naught" – meaning "nothing."

[25] Take up the White Man's burden—
No iron rule of kings,
But toil of serf⁶ and sweeper—
The tale of common things.
The ports ye shall not enter,

[30] The roads ye shall not tread,
Go, make them with your living
And mark them with your dead.

Take up the White Man's burden,
And reap his old reward—

[35] The blame of those ye better
The hate of those ye guard—
The cry of hosts ye humour
(Ah, slowly!) to the light:
"Why brought ye us from bondage,
[40] Our loved Egyptian night?"⁷

Take up the White Man's burden—
Ye dare not stoop to less—
Nor call too loud on Freedom
To cloak your weariness.

[45] By all ye will or whisper,
By all ye leave or do,
The silent sullen peoples
Shall weigh your God and you.

Take up the White Man's burden!

[50] Have done with childish days—
The lightly-proffered laurel,⁸
The easy, ungrudged praise:
Comes now, to search your manhood
Through all the thankless years,
[55] Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom,
The judgment of your peers!

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6. A member of a servile class bound to work the land and subject to the will of the land's owner

7. May be referencing the book of Exodus in the Old Testament, in which Moses leads the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt.

8. An evergreen shrub or tree, whose leaves were once used by the ancient Greeks to crown victors

Text-Dependent Questions

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

1. According to the poem, what is the “white man’s burden”? [RL.2]
 - A. The white man’s burden, according to the poem, is to free other peoples from tyranny.
 - B. The white man’s burden, according to the poem, is the responsibility to amend past grievances (i.e. like the colonization of Africa and the Americas).
 - C. The white man’s burden, according to the poem, is to civilize those deemed uncivilized by ruling them.
 - D. The white man’s burden, according to the poem, is to spread freedom to other industrialized nations.

2. PART A: Which of the following best summarizes the language used to describe the people of the Philippines? [RL.4]
 - A. The poem describes the Philippine people as both children and fiends, seemingly unable to properly govern themselves.
 - B. The poem describes the Philippine people as docile children who can easily be taught to lead European lifestyles.
 - C. The poem describes the Philippine people as violent and uncontrollable, emphasizing the need for white men to be careful and keep their distance.
 - D. The poem describes the Philippine people as equals to white Europeans and therefore ideally suited for self-rule.

3. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
 - A. “On fluttered folk and wild— / Your new-caught, sullen peoples, / Half devil and half child.” (Lines 6-8)
 - B. “To veil the threat of terror / And check the show of pride;” (Lines 11-12)
 - C. “No iron rule of kings, / But toil of serf and sweeper—” (Lines 26-27)
 - D. “By all ye leave or do, / The silent sullen peoples / Shall weigh your God and you.” (Lines 46-48)

4. Which of the following best describes the effect the poem’s repetition has on its tone? [RL.5]
 - A. The poem repeats certain phrase structures to strengthen its persuasive tone.
 - B. The poem repeatedly refers to the colonized people as “heathen” or “children,” thus contributing to the snobby tone.
 - C. The poem repeats the phrase “Take up the White Man’s burden” and therefore makes the tone seem bossy and argumentative.
 - D. The poem repeats the phrase “Take up the White Man’s burden” as a sort of call to action, thus contributing to the encouraging, prideful tone.

5. What does stanza 5 reveal about the poem's, and likely Kipling's, point of view regarding the white man's burden? [RL.6]
