

THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN

by

Rudyard Kipling

(Feb 1889)

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Introduction

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“The White Man’s Burden”: Kipling’s Hymn to U.S. Imperialism

In February 1899, British novelist and poet Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem entitled “The White Man’s Burden: The United States and The Philippine Islands.” In this poem, Kipling urged the U.S. to take up the “burden” of empire, as had Britain and other European nations.

Published in the February, 1899 issue of McClure’s Magazine, the poem coincided with the beginning of the Philippine-American War and U.S. Senate ratification of the treaty that placed Puerto Rico, Guam, Cuba, and the Philippines under American control. Theodore Roosevelt, soon to become vice-president and then president, copied the poem and sent it to his friend, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, commenting that it was “rather poor poetry, but good sense from the expansion point of view.”

Not everyone was as favorably impressed as Roosevelt. The racialized notion of the “White Man’s burden” became a euphemism for imperialism, and many anti-imperialists couched their opposition in reaction to the phrase.

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The White Man's Burden

by

Rudyard Kipling

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 make 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 !) towards the light:-
"Why brought ye 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 cloak 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 judgement of your peers.

End

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