

The White Man's Burden

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For the book by William Easterly, see William Easterly.

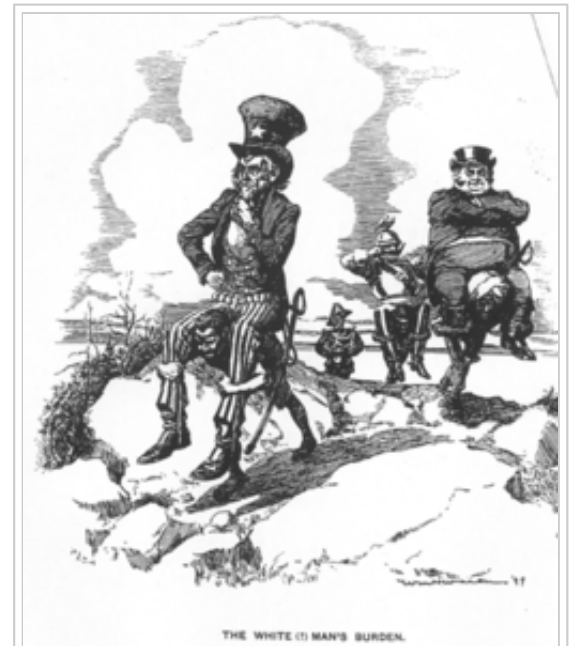
"White Man's Burden" redirects here. For the 1995 film, see White Man's Burden (film).

"The White Man's Burden" is a poem by the English poet Rudyard Kipling.

It was originally published in the popular magazine *McClure's* in 1899, with the subtitle *The United States and the Philippine Islands*.^[1] The poem was originally written for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, but exchanged for "Recessional"; Kipling changed the text of "Burden" to reflect the subject of American colonization of the Philippines, recently won from Spain in the Spanish–American War.^[2] The poem consists of seven stanzas, following a regular rhyme scheme. At face value it appears to be a rhetorical command to white men to colonize and rule other nations for the benefit of those people (both the people and the duty may be seen as representing the "burden" of the title).

Although Kipling's poem mixed exhortation of empire with somber warnings of the costs involved, imperialists within the United States of America understood the phrase "white man's burden" as justifying imperialism as a noble

enterprise.^{[3][4][5][6][7]} Because of its theme and title, it has become emblematic both of Eurocentric racism and of Western aspirations to improve and industrialise the developing world.^{[8][9][10]} A century after its publication, the poem still rouses strong emotions, and can be analyzed from a variety of perspectives.



A cartoon by William H. Walker satirizing the concept of the white man's burden, from an 1899 edition of *Life* magazine

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Poem

Original title: "The White Man's Burden: The United States and The Philippine Islands"^{[11][12][13]}

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.

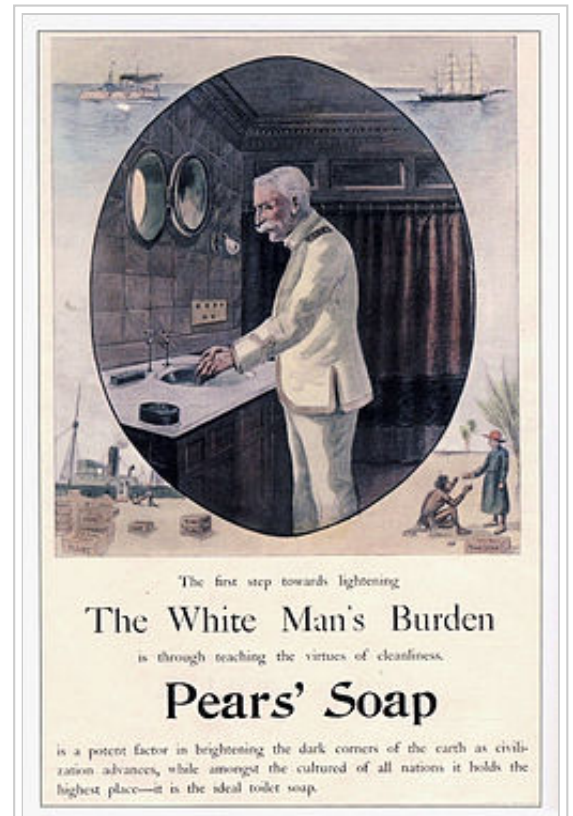
Take up the White Man's burden, No tawdry rule of kings,
But toil of serf and sweeper, The tale of common things.
The ports ye shall not enter, The roads ye shall not tread,
Go mark^[14] them with your living, And mark them with your dead.

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!

History



This 1890s' advertisement for soap uses the theme of the white man's burden, encouraging white people to teach cleanliness.

The poem first appeared in the United States on February 5, 1899, in *McLure's* newspapers such as the *New York Sun*, during the Battle of Manila. On the following day, the United States Congress ratified the Treaty of Paris, which asserted its jurisdiction over the Philippines.^[15] On February 7, Senator Benjamin Tillman read three stanzas from "The White Man's Burden" on the floor of the United States Senate—to argue that the U.S should rescind its claim to the Philippines. "Why," Tillman asked, "are we bent on forcing upon them a civilization not suited to them and which only means in their view degradation and a loss of self-respect, which is worse than the loss of life itself?"^[16]



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Benjamin Tillman's speech to the Senate on February 7, 1899

The poem was widely distributed in the United States and began "The Kipling Boom", a wave of Kipling publicity in the newspapers.^[17]

Differing interpretations



The white man's burden, 1898 *Detroit Journal* cartoon

One view proposes that whites have an obligation to rule over, and encourage the cultural development of people from other cultural backgrounds until they can take their place in the world economically and socially. The term "the white man's burden" has been interpreted by some as racist, or possibly taken as a metaphor for a condescending view of "undeveloped" national culture and economic traditions, identified as a sense of European ascendancy which has been called "cultural imperialism".

An alternative interpretation is the philanthropic view: "The implication, of course, was that the Empire existed not for the benefit — economic

or strategic or otherwise — of Britain itself, but in order that primitive peoples, incapable of self-government, could, with British guidance, eventually become civilized (and Christianized). The truth of this doctrine was accepted naively by some, and hypocritically by others, but it served in any case to legitimize Britain's acquisition of portions of central Africa and her domination, in concert with other European powers, of China."^[18]

On the face of it, the poem conveys a positive view of the idea that "The White Man", generally accepted to mean the colonial powers (Great Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, The Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Russia, Italy and the United States), had a duty to civilize the more brutish and barbaric parts of the world. It begins by describing the colonized Filipinos as "new-caught, sullen peoples, half devil and half child". Although a belief in the virtues of empire was widespread at the time, there were also many dissenters; the publication of the poem caused a flurry of arguments from both sides, most notably from Mark Twain and Henry James.^[19] While Kipling may have intended the piece as a form of satire, much of Kipling's other writing does suggest that he genuinely believed in the "beneficent role" which the introduction of Western ideas could play in lifting non-Western peoples out of poverty and ignorance.^{[20][21]} Lines 3–5, and other

parts of the poem suggest that it is not just the native people who are held in captivity, but also the "functionaries of empire", who are caught in colonial service and may die while helping other races less fortunate than themselves (hence "burden").

An analysis focused on the social status and background of colonial officers active at the time is lacking; as is one of the Christian missionary movement, also quite active at the time in parts of the world under colonial rule (e.g. the Christian and Missionary Alliance) which also emphasised the theme of aiding those less fortunate. Several authors note that Kipling offered the poem to Theodore Roosevelt to help persuade many doubting Americans to seize the Philippines.^{[22][23]} His work with regards to British colonialism in India had become widely popular in the United States. The poem could be viewed as a way for Kipling to share the virtues of British colonialism with Americans. In September 1898 Kipling wrote to Roosevelt, stating 'Now go in and put all the weight of your influence into hanging on permanently to the whole Philippines. America has gone and stuck a pickaxe into the foundations of a rotten house and she is morally bound to build the house over again from the foundations or have it fall about her ears'.^[24] He forwarded the poem to Roosevelt in November of the same year, just after Roosevelt was elected Governor of New York.

The *Norton Anthology of English Literature* argues the poem is in line with Kipling's strong imperialism and a belief of a "Divine Burden to reign God's Empire on Earth."^[2] According to journalist Steve Sailer, however, the far-right writer John Derbyshire has described Kipling as "an imperialist utterly without any illusions about what being an imperialist actually means. Which, in some ways, means that he was not really an imperialist at all."^[25]

Literary response

Several parodies and other of critical works have used themes or quotes collected from Kipling's poem. Early examples include Henry Labouchère's poem "The Brown Man's Burden," (1899)^[26] and H. T. Johnson's April 1899 popular response, entitled "The Black Man's Burden" (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5476/>). A "Black Man's Burden Association" was organised with the goal of demonstrating that mistreatment of brown people in the Philippines was an extension of the mistreatment of black Americans at home.^[27]

Ernest Crosby wrote a poem, "The Real White Man's Burden" (1902).^[28]

E. D. Morel, a British journalist in the Congo Free State, drew attention to the brutality of imperialism in 1903. His article, "The Black Man's Burden"^[29] was published in 1903. In another article, also entitled "The Black Man's Burden,"^[30] he describes his view of both the White and Black Man's Burdens.^[31]

West-Indian American writer Hubert Harrison's response entitled "The Black Man's Burden"^[32] from *When Africa Awakes* was published in New York in 1920.^[33]

See also

- The Gods of the Copybook Headings
- Industrial Revolution



Wikisource has original text related to this article:

- 1899 in literature
- 1899 in poetry
- Colonialism
- List of the works of Rudyard Kipling
- Orientalism
- White savior narrative in film

Notes

1. "The White Man's Burden". *McClure's Magazine* 12 (Feb. 1899).
2. Stephen Greenblatt (ed.), *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, New York 2006 ISBN 0-393-92532-3.
3. Zwick, Jim (December 16, 2005). *Anti-Imperialism in the United States, 1898–1935*.
4. Miller, Stuart Creighton (1982). *Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899–1903*. Yale University Press. ISBN 0-300-03081-9. p. 5: "...imperialist editors came out in favor of retaining the entire archipelago (using) higher-sounding justifications related to the "white man's burden."
5. Judd, Denis (June 1997). "Diamonds are forever: Kipling's imperialism; poems of Rudyard Kipling". *History Today* 47 (6): 37.: "Theodore Roosevelt...thought the verses 'rather poor poetry, but good sense from the expansionist stand-point'. Henry Cabot Lodge told Roosevelt in turn: 'I like it. I think it is better poetry than you say'."
6. Examples of justification for imperialism based on Kipling's poem include the following (originally published 1899–1902):
 - Opinion archive, International Herald Tribune (February 4, 1999). "In Our Pages: 100, 75 and 50 Years Ago; 1899: Kipling's Plea". *International Herald Tribune*: 6.: "An extraordinary sensation has been created by Mr. Rudyard Kipling's new poem, *The White Man's Burden*, just published in a New York magazine. It is regarded as the strongest argument yet published in favor of expansion."
 - Dixon, Thomas (1902). *The Leopard's Spots – A Romance of the White Man's Burden 1865–1900*. Full text of a novel by Thomas Dixon praising the Ku Klux Klan, published online by The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
7. Pimentel, Benjamin (October 26, 2003). *The Philippines; "Liberator" Was Really a Colonizer; Bush's revisionist history*. *The San Francisco Chronicle*. p. D3.: characterising the poem as a "call to imperial conquest".
8. "Eurocentrism". In *Encyclopedia of the Developing World*. Ed. Thomas M. Leonard, Taylor & Francis, 2006, ISBN 0-415-97662-6, p. 636.
9. Chisholm, Michael (1982). *Modern World Development: A Geographical Perspective*. Rowman & Littlefield, 1982, ISBN 0-389-20320-3, p.12.
10. Mama, Amina (1995). *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender, and Subjectivity*. Routledge, 1995, ISBN 0-415-03544-9, p. 39.
11. *Modern History Sourcebook: Rudyard Kipling, The White Man's Burden, 1899*. New York: Fordham University.
12. Kipling, Rudyard (1929). *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Definitive Edition*. Garden city, New York: Doubleday.
13. Original published version (<http://www.unz.org/Pub/McClures-1899feb-00290>)
14. In the original published version, this word is "make". <http://www.unz.org/Pub/McClures-1899feb-00290>
15. Herman, *Shadowing the White Man's Burden* (2010), p. 45 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=noJ0pg5otWwC&lpg=PP1&pg=PA45>).
16. Herman, *Shadowing the White Man's Burden* (2010), pp. 41–42 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=noJ0pg5otWwC&lpg=PP1&pg=PA41>).
17. Herman, *Shadowing the White Man's Burden* (2010), pp. 23–24 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=noJ0pg5otWwC&lpg=PP1&pg=PA23>).
18. David Cody, "The growth of the British Empire" (<http://www.victorianweb.org/history/empire/Empire.html>), VictorianWeb, (Paragraph 4)
19. John V. Denson (1999). *The Costs of War: America's Pyrrhic Victories*. Transaction Publishers. pp. 405–406. ISBN 978-0-7658-0487-7(note ff. 28 & 33).
20. Langer, William (1935). *A Critique of Imperialism*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, Inc. p. 6.
21. Demkin, Stephen (1996). *Manifest destiny – Lecture notes*. USA: Delaware County Community College.

22. Wolpert, Stanley (2006)
23. Brantlinger, Patrick (2007) "Kipling's 'The White Man's Burden' and its Afterlives" *English Literature in Transition 1880–1920*, 50.2, pp. 172–191
24. Kipling, Rudyard (1990) *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, ed. Thomas Pinney London, Macmillan, Vol II, p. 350
25. Sailer, Steve (2001). "What Will Happen In Afghanistan?" (http://www.isteve.com/Man_Who_Would_Be_King.htm). Published by United Press International. 26 September 2001.
26. Labouchère, Henry (1899). "The Brown Man's Burden" (<http://www.swans.com/library/art8/xxx074.html>) an anti-imperialist parody of Kipling's poem.
27. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5476/>
28. Crosby, Ernest (1902). *The Real White Man's Burden*. Funk and Wagnalls Company. pp. 32–35. Published online by History Matters, American Social History Project, CUNY and George Mason University.
29. "The Black Man's Burden" (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1903blackburden.html>)
30. "The Black Man's Burden" (http://wadsworth.com/history_d/special_features/ilrn_legacy/wawc2c01c/content/wciv2/readings/wciv2readingsm orel.html)
31. Morel, Edmund (1903). The Black Man's Burden (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1903blackburden.html>). Fordham University.
32. "The Black Man's Burden" (<http://www.expo98.msu.edu/people/Harrison.htm>)
33. <http://www.expo98.msu.edu/people/Harrison.htm>

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- Chisholm, Michael (1982). *Modern World Development: A Geographical Perspective*. Rowman & Littlefield, 1982, ISBN 0-389-20320-3.
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- Kipling (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/Kipling.html>). Fordham University. Full text of the poem.
- Labouchère, Henry (1899). "The Brown Man's Burden" (<http://www.guhsd.net/mcdowell/history/projects/wmburden/brownman.html>).
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2001.

- "The White Man's Burden." *McClure's Magazine* 12 (Feb. 1899).
- *The Shining*. Jack Nicholson's character Jack, uses the phrase to refer to whiskey.

External links

- The text of the poem at (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kipling.html>) Fordham University

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| Poetry by Rudyard Kipling | Racism in the United Kingdom | British colonisation in Africa
| Philippine–American War | American colonial period of the Philippines | 1899 in international relations
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