

# The White Man's Burden Questions

1. According to Kipling, and in your own words, what was the "White Man's Burden?"
2. What reward did Kipling suggest the "White Man" gets for carrying his "burden?"
3. Who did Kipling think would read his poem? What do you think this audience might have said in response to it?
4. For what audience do you think George McNeill wrote his poem? How do you think those audiences might have responded to "The Poor Man's Burden?"

5. For what audience do you think H.T. Johnson wrote his poem? How do you think those audiences might have responded to "The Black Man's Burden?"

6. What are the tone and message of "The Real White Man's Burden?" For what audience was this poem written and how might they have responded?

## “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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Take up the White Man’s burden—  
 Send forth the best ye breed—  
     Go send 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—  
     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) to the light:  
 “Why brought ye us from bondage,  
     “Our loved Egyptian night?”  
 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!

Source: Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden: The United States & The Philippine Islands, 1899.” *Rudyard Kipling’s Verse: Definitive Edition* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1929).

## “The Poor Man’s Burden”: Labor Lamoons Kipling

In one of many parodies of “The White Man’s Burden” from the time, labor editor George McNeill penned the satirical “Poor Man’s Burden,” published in March, 1899. Source: George McNeill, “The Poor Man’s Burden,” *American Federationist* (March 1899).

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Pile on the Poor Man’s Burden—

Drive out the beastly breed;  
Go bind his sons in exile  
To serve your pride and greed;  
To wait in heavy harness,  
Upon your rich and grand;  
The common working peoples,  
The serfs of every land.

Pile on the Poor Man’s Burden—

His patience will abide;  
He’ll veil the threat of terror  
And check the show of pride.  
By pious cant and humbug  
You’ll show his pathway plain,  
To work for another’s profit  
And suffer on in pain.

Pile on the Poor Man’s Burden—

Your savage wars increase,  
Give him his full of Famine,  
Nor bid his sickness cease.  
And when your goal is nearest  
Your glory’s dearly bought,  
For the Poor Man in his fury,  
May bring your pride to naught.

Pile on the Poor Man’s Burden—

Your Monopolistic rings  
Shall crush the serf and sweeper  
Like iron rule of kings.  
Your joys he shall not enter,  
Nor pleasant roads shall tread;  
He’ll make them with his living,  
And mar them with his dead.

Pile on the Poor Man’s Burden—

The day of reckoning’s near—  
He will call aloud on Freedom,  
And Freedom’s God shall hear.  
He will try you in the balance;  
He will deal out justice true:

For the Poor Man with his burden  
Weighs more with God than you.

Lift off the Poor Man’s Burden—

My Country, grand and great—  
The Orient has no treasures  
To buy a Christian state,

Our souls brook not oppression;

Our needs—if read aright—  
Call not for wide possession.  
But Freedom’s sacred light.

## “The Black Man’s Burden”: A Response to Kipling

Among the dozens of replies to Kipling’s poem was “The Black Man’s Burden,” written by African-American clergyman and editor H. T. Johnson and published in April 1899. A “Black Man’s Burden Association” was even organized with the goal of demonstrating that mistreatment of brown people in the Philippines was an extension of the mistreatment of black Americans at home.

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Pile on the Black Man’s Burden.  
 'Tis nearest at your door;  
 Why heed long bleeding Cuba,  
 or dark Hawaii’s shore?  
 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  
 His wail with laughter drown  
 You’ve sealed the Red Man’s problem,  
 And will take up the Brown,  
 In vain ye seek to end it,  
 With bullets, blood or death  
 Better by far defend it  
 With honor’s holy breath.

Source: H.T. Johnson, “The Black Man’s Burden,” *Voice of Missions*, VII (Atlanta: April 1899), 1. Reprinted in Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden, 1898–1903* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1975, 183–184.

## The Real "White Man's Burden"

By Ernest Crosby~*New York Times* (Feb. 15, 1899)

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Take up the White Man's burden;  
 Send forth your sturdy sons,  
 And load them down with whisky  
 And Testaments and guns.  
 Throw in a few diseases  
 To spread in tropic climes,  
 For there the healthy \*\*\*\*\*  
 Are quite behind the times.

And don't forget the factories.  
 On those benighted shores  
 They have no cheerful iron-mills  
 Nor eke department stores.  
 They never work twelve hours a day,  
 And live in strange content,  
 Altho they never have to pay  
 A single cent of rent.

Take up the White Man's burden,  
 And teach the Philippines  
 What interest and taxes are  
 And what a mortgage means.  
 Give them electrocution chairs,  
 And prisons, too, galore,  
 And if they seem inclined to kick,  
 Then spill their heathen gore.

They need our labor question, too,  
 And politics and fraud,  
 We've made a pretty mess at home;  
 Let's make a mess abroad.  
 And let us ever humbly pray  
 The Lord of Hosts may deign  
 To stir our feeble memories,  
 Lest we forget -- the Maine.

Take up the White Man's burden;  
 To you who thus succeed  
 In civilizing savage hoards  
 They owe a debt, indeed;  
 Concessions, pensions, salaries,  
 And privilege and right,  
 With outstretched hands you raise to bless  
 Grab everything in sight.

Take up the White Man's burden,  
 And if you write in verse,  
 Flatter your Nation's vices  
 And strive to make them worse.  
 Then learn that if with pious words  
 You ornament each phrase,  
 In a world of canting hypocrites  
 This kind of business pays