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## RUDYARD KIPLING

**The White Man's Burden, 1899**

This poem, written by Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), is often presented as the epitome of colonialist sentiment, though some readers see in it a critical, satirical attitude toward colonialism. Do you find the poem to be for or against colonialism? Can it be both?

**THINKING HISTORICALLY**

"The White Man's Burden" is a phrase normally associated with European colonialism in Africa. In fact, however, Kipling wrote the poem in response to the annexation of the Philippines by the United States. How does this historical context change the meaning of the poem for you?

Source: Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," *McClure's Magazine* 12, no. 4 (February 1899): 290-91.

Neither fiction nor fact, a poem conveys emotions. How does this poem help us understand something about the feelings of people like Kipling? How would you describe that feeling?

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 hope to nought.

Take up the White Man's burden—  
No iron 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 own 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 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 cloke your weariness.  
 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!  
 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.

## REFLECTIONS

Many of the selections within this chapter as well as its title point to the dual character of colonial society. There are the colonized and the colonizers, the "natives" and the Europeans, and, as racial categories hardened in the second half of the nineteenth century, the blacks and the whites. Colonialism centered on the construction of an accepted inequality. The dominant Europeans invested enormous energy in keeping the double standards, dual pay schedules, and separate rules and residential areas—the two castes.

One problem with maintaining a neat division between the colonized and the colonizers is that the Europeans were massively outnumbered by the indigenous people. Thus, the colonizers needed a vast number of middle-status people to staff the army, police, and bureaucracy. These people might be educated in Paris or London, raised in European culture, and encouraged to develop a sense of pride in their similarity to the Europeans ("me Christian, same like master") and their differences from the other "natives." Often, like the Indian Dr. Veraswami, they were chosen for their ethnic or religious differences from the rest of the colonized population.