

Rudyard Kipling, The White Man's Burden, 1899

This famous poem, written by Britain's imperial poet, was a response to the American takeover of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. Read the poem to yourself THREE TIMES before beginning to answer the questions.

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--
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 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.

Vocabulary

Burden: a heavy responsibility

Breed: children

Harness: boring daily work

Fluttered: unsteady

Folk: people

Sullen: bad-tempered; gloomy

Cloak: hide

Guiding Questions:

1. According to Kipling, what is the "White Man's Burden?"
2. Based on this poem, how did **imperialists** (people who supported annexation) think of the people in the countries they were taking over (i.e., Cuba, Philippines, etc.)?
3. Kipling supported U.S. annexation of the Philippines. What might someone say who opposed annexation say about Kipling's argument in the "White Man's Burden?"