**“The White Man’s Burden” Rudyard Kipling**

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

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!

As you read, answer the following questions to guide your understanding of the poems.

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. What do you think that this audience might have said in response to it?

4. Provide 3 pieces of evidence for things we would consider “racist” in the modern world.

5. How does Kipling view people from civilizations other than his own? Cite evidence from

the poem to support your answer.

6. How did this poem support the goals of imperialists or Social Darwinists in 19th century

Europe?

**Responses to Rudyard Kipling**

Not everyone was impressed with “The White Man’s Burden”. George McNeill penned the satirical “Poor Man’s Burden,” published in March, 1899. African Americans, among many others, objected to the notion of the “white man’s burden.” “The Black Man’s Burden,” written by African-American clergyman and editor H. T. Johnson and published in April 1899, was 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.

**The Poor Man’s Burden**

(After Kipling)

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**

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.

4. For what audiences do you think H.T. Johnson and George McNeil wrote their poems? How do you think those audiences might have responded to “The Black Man’s Burden” and “The Poor Man’s Burden”?

