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

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. Theodore Roosevelt, soon to become vice-president and then president, described it as “rather poor poetry, but good sense from the expansion point of view.” Not everyone was as favorably impressed as Roosevelt. African Americans, among many others, objected to the notion of the “white man’s burden.” 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.

Notice “Pile on” instead of “take up”. What’s the difference?

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

What is the conflict like between the “fearless armies” and the “feeble folk”?

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,

What point is the poem trying to make?

With bullets, blood or death

Better by far defend it

With honor’s holy breath.

\*heed=believe or pay attention to

\*feeble=weak

From : 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. Source: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5476>

**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

How are the poor working 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,

How could the poor man’s fury “bring your [white man’s] pride to naught”?

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:

What point do you think this poem is trying to make?

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.

From: George McNeill, “The Poor Man’s Burden,” *American Federationist* (March 1899).[Source: ttp://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5475](http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5475)

**Crosby on Kipling: A Parody of “The White Man’s Burden”**

*With apologies to Rudyard Kipling*

Take up the White Man’s burden.

Send forth your sturdy kin,

And load them down with Bibles

How is this poem different from the last two? Who is the subject in this one?

And cannon-balls and gin.

Throw in a few diseases

To spread the tropic climes,

For there the healthy niggers

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 sou of rent.

Take up the White Man’s burden,

And teach the Philippines

What interest and taxes are

According to this poem, what kind of things do the white man bring, and teach to those he helps?

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’s Man’s burden. To you who thus succeed

In civilizing savage hordes, They owe a debt, indeed; Concessions, pensions, salaries, And privilege and right—

With outstretched hands you raised to bless

Grab everything in sight.

Take up the White Man’s burden

Overall, what seems to be the point this poem is trying to make?

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.

From: Ernest Crosby, “The Real White Man’s Burden,” *Swords and Ploughshares* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1902), 32–35. [Source: http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5475](http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5475)

Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Write Your Own “Burden” Poem!

Directions: You will write your own version of Kipling’s poem. When examining these “spoof” poems, you can see that there are several different ways to go about this poem:

1. You can write a “Pile on” version where you are writing from the oppressed person’s point of view. OR
2. You can write a “Take up” version where you are altering the things that are brought/given by the white people. OR
3. You can write a “Take up” version for a group other than the white man. What burdens do groups have to bear when helping or dealing with others? Perhaps you could consider nationality, age, gender, etc. OR
4. You can take some other perspective of the poem, as long as you keep to the same structure and general idea of the original poem.

Requirements:

1. Your poem must be at least **16 lines long**
2. It must include at least 2 repetitions of the “Take up the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’s burden” or the “Pile on the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’s burden” line
3. It must follow the same rhyme scheme of the original. (abcb defe)
4. (a)
5. (b)
6. (c)
7. (b)
8. (d)
9. (e)
10. (f)
11. (e)
12. (g)
13. (h)
14. (i)
15. (h)
16. (j)
17. (k)
18. (l)
19. (k)