

Sources from the Past

Rudyard Kipling on the White Man's Burden

Rudyard Kipling lived in northern India for the first six years of his life. He grew up speaking Hindi, and he mixed easily with Indian subjects of the British empire. After attending a boarding school in England, he returned to India in 1882 and became a journalist and writer. Many of his works express his deep enchantment with India, but he also believed strongly in imperial rule. Indeed, he wrote his famous poem entitled "The White Man's Burden" to encourage the United States to impose colonial rule in the Philippines. While recognizing the unpopularity of foreign rule, Kipling considered it a duty to bring order to colonial lands and to serve subject peoples.

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-cought, 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,
 In hundred times made plain,
 seek another's profit,
 And work for 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 cowardly 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 read,
 Go make them with your living,
 And mark them with your dead.

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 humor
 (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 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.

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," *McClure's Magazine* 12, no. 4 (1899): 290-91.

Compare and contrast the sorts of adjectives Kipling uses to describe native peoples as opposed to Europeans. How does his very language usage convey his sense of white superiority?