

# The White Man's Burden

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By Rudyard Kipling, 1899

Rudyard Kipling (1865 - 1936) British author and poet. Kipling was born in Bombay, British India (now Mumbai) and has travelled in almost all parts of the world. He is best known for his works of fiction 'The Jungle Book' and a collection of stories which includes 'Rikki-Tikki-Tavi'. In 1907, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He is still an author who can inspire passionate disagreement and his place in literary and cultural history is far from settled: Was he a horrible racist imperialist or do you have to understand his stories in their right historical context?



## 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 hopes to nought.

[...]

Take up the White Man's burden  
And reap his old reward:

**burden** *sb* byrde  
**forth** *adv* ud, frem  
**ye** = you  
**breed** *vb* avle  
**bind** *vb* forpligte  
**exile** *sb* eksil, landflygtighed  
**captive** *sb* fange, tilfangetagen  
**wait on** *vb* opvarte, tjene  
**harness** *sb* seletøj  
**fluttered** *adj* nervøs, urolig  
**sullen** *adj* modvillig  
**people** *sb* folkeslag  
**a'bide** *vb* vente  
**veil** *vb* skærme, dække over  
**check** *vb* holde tilbage  
**an hundred** = a hundred  
**make plain** *id* gøre klart  
**work** = work for  
**gain** *sb* udbytte  
**savage** *adj* vild, primitive  
**famine** *sb* sult  
**bid** *vb* byde, befale  
**cease** *vb* ophøre  
**sloth** *sb* dovenskab  
**heathen** *adj* hedensk, ukristen  
**folly** *sb* tåbelighed  
**nought** *sb* ingenting  
**reap** *vb* høste

**better** *vb* forbedre  
**humour** *vb* lokke med smiger  
**bondage** *sb* trældom, slaveri  
**E'gyptian night** *sb* ref. til Biblen: tre dages mørke som i Egypten; meget mørkt nat

**stanza** *sb* strofe  
**con'temporary** *adj. sb* samtidig

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?'

[...]

### Comprehension and analysis

1. Pair work: Paraphrase each stanza (express in a shorter way what someone has said or written)
2. How is the black man described?
3. What must the white man do?
4. What *is* the White Man's Burden?
5. Analyse the illustration: What do you see in the picture? What is going on? How is it to be understood – literally or humorously or satirically?



THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN – *The Journal, Detroit.*

The white man's burden – *The Journal, Detroit, 1923*

### Post-reading

Kipling's poem was considered provocative even by some of his contemporaries, and almost immediately parodies appeared. On the Internet you can find some of these for further studies. Look up Henri Labouchère's 'The Brown Man's Burden' (1899) and Ernest Crosby's 'The Real White Man's Burden' (1902). Analyse the two poems and compare them to the original.