“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.

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.


Source: http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5476

“The Poor Man’s Burden”: Labor Lampoons Kipling

In one of many parodies of “The White Man’s Burden” from the time, labor editor George McNeill penned the satirical “Poor Man’s Burden,” published in March, 1899.

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.


Source: http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5475

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

Poet Ernest Crosby penned a parody of Kipling’s work, “The Real White Man’s Burden,” and published it in his 1902 collection of poems Swords and Plowshares. Crosby also wrote a satirical, anti-imperialist novel, Captain Jinks, Hero, that
parodied the career of General Frederick Funston, the man who had captured Philippine leader Emilio Aguinaldo in 1901.

With apologies to Rudyard Kipling

Take up the White Man’s burden.

Send forth your sturdy kin,

And load them down with Bibles

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
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

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.


Source: http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5475