

Analyzing the poem the white mans burden by rudyard kipling

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The White Man's Burden The White Man's Burden is one of the most controversial of Rudyard Kipling's poems. Written just when the United States was about to annex the Philippines after the Spanish-American War, it was intended for the American readers. The idea is to urge or convince Americans to assume the role taken by the Europeans, which is colonial administration. The poem considered imperialism as a thankless but noble enterprise as the US is encouraged to govern a wild country that is half devil and half child until it is finally ready to be a member of the global community.

The poem was published in 1899, a period wherein racial discrimination is still the norm in America. Although slavery was finally abolished and outlawed in 1865, people of color were still treated as inferior. The audience of the poem, hence, was still characterized by prejudicial outlook, seeing imperialism as a favor and even a burden for America as the best of the white men will be sent on a mission to civilize the colored colonials. This theme is underscored by several concepts, which can be classified into three: captives, wild, serf, sweeper; burden, terror, pride, profit, gain; laurel, manhood, praise, wisdom. The first set of keywords described the colonials, the next described the process of imperialism and, finally, the last set highlighted the rewards. It is clear that the poem encourages imperialism. Kipling appeared to campaign for this move not only because it is a noble thing to civilize others. Also, he seemed to consider imperialism as a precondition for the United States to be finally recognized by its peers, which of course are the European colonials. There is an implied proposition that in order for America to be finally considered as a world power - within the

league of the European club - it must be able to govern its own colony.

There are scholars who believe that this poem by Kipling is a satire. But this interpretation is quite far-fetched. The tone, the diction and the themes involved are on the serious side and no attempt at humor is apparent. The thesis is clear: America must take the burden and colonize a backward nation. His poem provided the arguments for these. First, there is the suggestion that imperialism is a task that must be accomplished because it is noble. The colonization will benefit the colony. America and its best would strive to make the client state and its people ready and worthy member of the community of nations. Secondly, Kipling argued that imperialism is a selfless act, hence, noble, as America would work for the betterment of another. Finally, Kipling also threw in the reward variable. He did not mention anything material as it would have undermined the previous two arguments. What he dangled was an intangible concept that is hard for the American public to resist - prestige and recognition.

All in all, the poem reflects a political position and exhortation that is tainted with prejudice. If Kipling did have the best of intentions in arguing for imperialism, such intention was still typified by condescension and an implied notion that those countries that will become America's colonies are inferior and needs guidance in the process of their nation-building.