

# Rudyard the relationship between oppressors and the oppressed



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Even after a hundred years since its publication, Rudyard Kipling's poem 'The White Man's Burden' continues to be debated, discussed and reinterpreted in various ways. When we look at the context in which the poem was written and published (originally written for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations), it becomes clear that Kipling is promoting the virtues of imperialism through the work. According to the poem, the White man's burden translates into a dutiful and paternalistic care of the less advanced societies. He seems to espouse the view that the lesser peoples of the world would benefit enormously through the influence of the superior Western culture and knowledge. There are passages in the poem, where the author believes that without the supervision of white races, the colored peoples of the world would proceed to self-destruct and get obliterated. Hence, it is the White man's burden to take charge of the political and administrative affairs of colonial masses and lift them out of morass.

When we look at the literary scene of late nineteenth century, the view presented by Kipling is not too radical. Many of the writers of the time saw an element of benevolence behind imperialistic actions. But two prominent contemporaries to Kipling - Mark Twain and Henry James - attacked the poem for its unabashed promotion of racism and power. Hence, while racist attitudes evident in the poem were not against the cultural currents of Britain during late nineteenth century, in the context of modern geo-political realities, it comes across as 'reactionary'.

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