
Imperialistic Symbolism in The White Man's Burden by Rudyard Kipling

Rudyard Kipling is an infamous author whose memory will be immortalized with the greats for his memorable poems and novels. Kipling has penned numerous poems and novels including *If*, *The Man Who Would Be King*, and the novel which would later become a lovable Disney movie, *The Jungle Book*. However, his most infamous work might be a poem called *The White Man's Burden*. Over the years, *The White Man's Burden* has become a classic symbol of imperialism. Imperialism is when a stronger nation exploits a weaker nation by force. It has been a constant in world history and still remains to this day, whether it is country imperialism, economic imperialism or corporate imperialism. *The White Man's Burden* exemplifies imperialism as seen through history on many occasions. The *White Man's Burden's* take on imperialism has been clearly shown with the annexation of Africa, the United States of America's role in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Spanish- American War and of course the American Revolution.

Many cases of imperialism from different countries were shown in the annexation of Africa. The annexation of Africa was when many different countries, including France, England, Portugal, Belgium, Spain, Italy and Germany, each conquered parts of Africa, with France and England having the most land. The reason for this takeover was the need for resources. Africa was a weak nation and was full of resources including gold, coffee, tea, oil, diamonds, iron, uranium, gas and more. Countries jumped at the chance to get the resources and leave Africa in better shape than how they found it. *The White Man's Burden* touches upon the topic of helping the people and leaving the country in a better place. In *The White Man's Burden* Kipling states, "On fluttered folk and wild- Your new-caught, sullen peoples, Half devil and half child, Take up the White Man's burden" (Lines 6-9). Notice the language that Kipling uses when talking about the weaker nations. He says, "Your new caught, sullen people", talking about the African people like a piece of fish that you just captured. He says they are newly caught and depressed, but insinuating that the African people should be grateful because they are all beneath us. At the end of the day, they are just immature, childish, devil creatures and they, the white people, are the superior race and they are going to help them, while also helping themselves to their resources and expanding European influence. The numerous countries all exhibited these exact traits of imperialism as witnessed in the infamous poem in the annexation of Africa.

Although the annexation of Africa didn't include the United States, America has been involved in its fair share of imperialism. The most recent of these events is America's role in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan which still continues to this day. This case of imperialism wasn't as much as taking over another country as much as it was trying to spread American political influence while also hoping that the rest of the world sees America as the greatest country that was ever created. However, in my opinion, it is still a form of imperialism. What happened was the Iraq War was a disaster and USA found no WMD's from Saddam Hussein. When Obama became President, he said that the real enemies were in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where many terrorist's groups had presence. Obama sent more and more troops to these places in hope of kicking out the terrorist's groups and reorganizing Afghanistan with American values. This has not happened yet, to this day, Afghanistan remains the same. However, the US' role in these countries seem to mirror what Kipling wrote in *The White Man's Burden* when he talked about the art of war and conquering. Kipling states, "Go send your sons to exile, To

serve your captives' need" (Lines 3-4). What Kipling is saying is to send your best fighters into battle, for parents to send their sons into battle to defend their country and help others in the process. To have them bound to the Armed Forces and go to those 'wild nations'. Kipling also says to "Take up the White Man's burden, In patience to abide, To veil the threat of terror, And check the show of pride" (Lines 9-12). In simpler terms, Kipling is saying for these sons that are going to war to not be scared and be prideful. Be prideful in themselves and their cause. Throw caution to the wind and do what you need to do. That they are taking up the "White Man's burden" and helping the world.

Another example of Americans being imperialists is the Spanish- American War. The Spanish- American War was a conflict between, obviously, Spain and the United States that lasted from April 1898 to August 1898. This eventually led to America's intervention in the Cuban War of Independence and the United States conquering territories in Latin America and the western Pacific. This is not only imperialism because America took territories in Latin America and the west and made them part of the United States, but this is imperialism also because after America got an easy victory over Spain, it verified itself as a major power. This war also made America an imperial power with control of not only the territories mentioned before, but also control over Guam, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and also Cuba. America around this time began their crave for foreign resources and making a profit with them. They were doing what Kipling called in the White Man's Burden, "To seek another's profit, And work another's gain" (Lines 15-16). America was working off of other countries resources and seeking a profit. This proves how much of Kipling's work in the White Man's Burden has actually happened in history.

One last case of The White Man's Burden defining imperialism in history also includes America. However, in this case, America was the one conquered and not the one doing the conquering. This was the American Revolution when England originally conquered the would be United States and America eventually got its independence after a hard fought war. What makes this such a good example to the White Man's Burden is that all of the quotes used before can apply to this situation. When Kipling says, "Your new- caught, sullen peoples, Half devil and half child" (Lines 8-9), I believe that's how the British saw the colonists, as if they were beneath them. As uncultured, inexperienced swine that can be easily manipulated, as shown by trying to get taxation without representation past the colonists. When Kipling says, "Go send your sons to exile, To serve your captives' needs" (Lines 3-4), that is exactly what England did. They sent their best soldiers to control the colonists and even went as far as to quarter their soldiers in colonial's houses without their consent. When Kipling says, "To seek another's profit, And work another's gain" (Lines 15-16), England used products from the colonies, England and other countries and gave it a super high taxes to make it very, very expensive. This led to the "Taxation without Representation" movement and one of the iconic reasons the Revolutionary War started, the "Boston Tea Party". With these numerous examples, one could even say The White Man's Burden is a poem that could be about The Revolutionary War.

In conclusion, The White Man's Burden will forever live in infamy as one of the most iconic pieces of political literature to ever be written. One great thing about it is that its so versatile in the fact that anyone can pull out verses from the poem and relate it to a point in imperialism history. Rudyard Kipling made the valid point that no one had made before him: imperialism isn't fun, but it is necessary. In my opinion, Kipling did the world a lot of good when he wrote the illustrious poem, The White Man's Burden.