

Understanding U.S. Imperialism Through Poetry

Directions: You will be given two poems that discuss themes related to American Imperialism. Read each poem carefully, paying attention to the language, imagery, and emotions conveyed. After reading each poem, answer the following questions in complete sentences (2-3).

Based on your readings and answers, explain what you understand about American Imperialism. Your final reflection questions at the end need a minimum of 5 sentences



Rudyard Kipling, The White Man's Burden, 1899

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--
No tawdry rule of kings,
But toil of serf and sweeper--
The tale of common things.
The ports ye shall not enter,
The roads ye shall not tread,
Go mark them with your living,

And mark them with your dead.
Take up the White Man's burden--
And reap his old reward:
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 he us from
bondage,
Our loved Egyptian night?"
Take up the White Man's burden--
Ye dare not stoop to less--
Nor call too loud on Freedom
To cloke your weariness;
By all ye cry or whisper,
By all ye leave or do,
The silent, sullen peoples
Shall weigh your gods and you.
Take up the White Man's burden--
Have done with childish days--
The lightly proffered laurel,
The easy, ungrudged praise.
Comes now, to search your
manhood
Through all the thankless years
Cold, edged with dear-bought
wisdom,
The judgment of your peers!

Guiding Questions

According to Kipling, what is the “White Man’s Burden?”

Based on this poem, how did imperialists (people who supported annexation) think of the people in the countries they were taking over (i.e., Cuba, Philippines, etc.)?

Kipling supported the U.S. annexation of the Philippines. What might someone who opposed annexation say about Kipling’s argument in the “White Man’s Burden?”

Pablo Neruda, “Banquet of the Tyrants”

There is a vile race of tenacious men
Of themselves inflated, and made all,
Everyone, from hair to foot, tooth and
claw:

And there are others, like a flower, that
exhale in the wind

In the love of man his perfume.

As in the forest there are turtledoves
and beasts

And insectivorous plants and pure
Sensitive and carnation in the gardens.

Some feed on the soul of men:

The others give their soul to be
nourished

And the gluttons perfume their teeth,

Just like cold iron in the guts

From the virgin who kills is heated.

Tyrants sit at a banquet

Where men are served; and those vile

That tyrants love, diligent

Brain and heart of men devour:

But when the bloody hand

Sink in the delicacy of the dead martyr

A light arises that terrifies them, flowers

Big as a sudden cross arise

And they flee, red muzzle, and terrified

To his black entrails the tyrants.

Those who love themselves: those who
augusta

Reason to their greed and gluttony they
put:

Those who do not display on the
honorable forehead

That belt of light that the yoke melts

As the immense sun in embers breaks

The stars that rush to her bosom:

Those who do not carry human decorum

Decorated the healthy chest: the minors

And seconds of life, only

At your mean enjoyment and I grow

attentive

And not to the universal concert.

Dances, meals, music, harems,

Never the approval of an honest man.

And if perhaps without blood it can be
done

Let it be... nail 'em, nail 'em

On the highest fork of the road

In the middle of the villain's forehead,

To the great humanity traitors.

Like a relentless worker

That a bronze coffin nails,

those who with you

They bite the nation apart

Guiding Questions

Analyze the contrasting imagery presented in the text. Who are the “vile race of tenacious men”

Discuss the significance of the banquet mentioned in the second stanza. How does it reflect the relationship between the U.S. Imperialism and foreign countries?

Examine the last stanza. What is being disapproved by the tyrants, and how do the people who are oppressed react?

Final Reflections Questions

How do the poets convey the impact of American Imperialism on individuals or nations?

What insights do you gain from the poems about the consequences of imperial actions?
