

History 202
First Midterm
October 29th 2007

Passage Option 1: Response to the *White Man's Burden*

This passage is an American response to Rudyard Kipling's 1899 ballad that calls Americans to action in joining the fight against Spain. The initial ballad written by Kipling has an almost haughty tone, referring to the White Men as inherently superior while darker people are "half devil and half child." Because of this natural supremacy, white men are dutifully bound to come to the aid of their intellectual inferiors and civilize them, a concept called Social Darwinism. In such instances, the more civilized or simply more evolved individuals have an obligation to come to the aid of those who are not.

The author of the response, however, doesn't buy such a notion of Social Darwinism. His language is harsh and critical of Kipling and this war in particular. There is a clear will not to impose the American way of life on other civilizations. Similarly, suspicion is vocalized concerning Great Britain's willingness to call for aid. But in conclusion there is a revision of what the White Man's burden really is: "to set and keep his own house in order." There is no need for America to run off and fight in distant jungles when it requires sacrificing necessary reforms at home.

The big fight between these two authors concerns imperialism. At the time there was a hot debate among Americans as to whether or not they should try to extend the reach of their "empire." Citizens such as Mark Twain and Jane Addams were pitted against the idea of expansion. Their political counterparts were the likes of Rudyard Kipling and Theodore Roosevelt who loudly vocalized their fervor for expansion. This response clearly defines the two viewpoints and arguments for both sides, especially concerning the loaded phrase, "the White Man's Burden."

The decision facing the American people concerned their priorities. The imperialistic stance sacrificed current domestic needs for the bigger picture: the future state of world affairs, the land holdings of different empires and the civilized status of all countries. Those who were not impressed by the idea of America as an empire were focused on the current state of affairs. They were occupied with the state of reforms and repairs at home, right now. In their minds there was no time to waste on plans and wars that may or may not pan out; all attention must be focused on issues at home.

This political division takes the form of a similar debate today. In 2007 there is still similar controversy concerning the war in Iraq. There are many Americans who feel that we should pull out of Iraq and leave the wars to be settled by those directly involved. Why should Americans spend so many resources and lives on a foreign country especially when there are other important issues to address at home. Yet there are other Americans who remain enthusiastic about the war and favor a continued presence in the Middle East. They cling to the roots of Social Darwinism and feel that as a Democracy, the United States has an obligation to spread our superior political system.

In America there is a history of trying to stay distant and uninvolved until the point of necessity. This was the case in the Spanish-American war, above, as well as the war in Iraq. The urge is to stay solitudinous and focused on domestic issues until the outside world comes knocking, which is usually in the form of an outright attack. The

point is that this debate for expansion, Social Darwinism and Imperialism existed in the 1800s and remain pertinent to this day.