

“The Black Man’s Burden”: A Response to Kipling

Among the dozens of replies to Kipling’s poem was “The Black Man’s Burden,” written by African-American clergyman and editor H. T. Johnson and published in April 1899. A “Black Man’s Burden Association” was even organized with the goal of demonstrating that mistreatment of brown people in the Philippines was an extension of the mistreatment of black Americans at home.

Pile on the Black Man’s Burden.
 'Tis nearest at your door;
 Why heed long bleeding Cuba,
 or dark Hawaii’s shore?
 Hail ye your fearless armies,
 Which menace feeble folks
 Who fight with clubs and arrows
 and brook your rifle’s smoke.
 Pile on the Black Man’s Burden
 His wail with laughter drown
 You’ve sealed the Red Man’s problem,
 And will take up the Brown,
 In vain ye seek to end it,
 With bullets, blood or death
 Better by far defend it
 With honor’s holy breath.

Source: H.T. Johnson, “The Black Man’s Burden,” *Voice of Missions*, VII (Atlanta: April 1899), 1. Reprinted in Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man’s Burden, 1898–1903* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1975, 183–184.