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# The White Man's Burden

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## PREFACE

This paper is concerned with a broad, general defining of the concept of the "White Man's Burden." There is a brief history given leading up to the "White Man's Burden," with emphasis on the Monroe Doctrine. The three composing factors of the "White Man's Burden" are Christianity, Pragmatism, and Manifest Destiny; they are explained in detail and an attempt has been made to show how they form a cohesive unit, and in turn, a foreign policy. This paper has attempted to show the beginning of American foreign policy with the hopes of better understanding our foreign policy in the 1970's.

# WHITE MAN'S BURDEN

Take up the White Man's Burden--
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captive's 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 gain.[1]

Thus said Rudyard Kipling in an article to McClure Magazine
in February, 1899. By this time, the United States had begun it's
odyssey into the world with the intention of flexing it's small,
but growing nationalistic and capitalistic muscle. The United
States, then, at best a tenth ranked country, had quite a arduous
task facing it, but stormed ahead like the reckless youth she was.[2]
The reasons for this controversial move into the world are many,
with probably no one particular motive being the sole reason. Some
of the factors influencing the birth of United States diplomacy
were: Fredrick Jackson Turner's argument that with the end of the
American frontier, the United States was restless for more areas to
expand on; 2) A. T. Mahon's book, Influence of Sea Power in History,
gave the theory of the country that has the largest navy always
wins; this was a popular argument in America; 3) Many Americans were
dedicated to the philosophy of Manifest Destiny--it was America's
duty to make the world free and a better place to live; 4) America
felt the need to get involved in power politics--Africa had "been

divided by Europe in the 1890's, the U. S. was getting behind in acquiring colonies; 5) Social Darwinism--only the fit should survive in international relations; 6) Pragmatism--it was practical for America to get involved in the world; 7) Christianity--it was an aggressive religion, in that part of it's dogma was to spread it's word to the "heathen" of the world; and, 8) Strong belief in nationalism. These were some of the various reasons for America stepping out into the world in the late 1890's and early 1900's. Probably the three most influencing factors were, Manifest Destiny, Christianity, and Pragmatism, collectively known as the "White Man's Burden." When Kipling penned those lines, he showed his imperialistic ideas by displaying a disdainful hostility to the brown peoples, who, he thought, could never overcome their inferiority and could never develop the capacity for self-government; he saw the only solution for the heathen as the "White Man's Burden."[4] Many Americans were thirsty for the world in a way only imperialism could quench. They agreed with Kipling. On the floor of Congress on December 7, 1897, Representative Joseph Wheeler of Alabama, said, "...we now produce more than two-thirds of the cotton, nearly nine-tenths of the corn, and nearly half of the steel of the world. We have but about 4%, or one twenty-fifth, of the population of the world, and it is evident that to continue our progress we must have foreign markets and foreign commerce; and to protect the merchant-men sailing under the Stars and Stripes we must possess a fleet of efficient ships manned by our brave and true officers and men. But even more important then this is the defense of our great cities."[5] Representative William L. Greene, of Nebraska, on

Tuesday, April 12, 1898, in reference to intervening in the
Spanish-American War said, "You say this is jingoism. Mr. Chair-
man, I would rather be called a jingoist than to be found apologizing
for the atrocious and merciless action of the Spanish Government.
Call it therefore what you will. The American people will respond
to the cause of justice and right. The American people are ready
to fight, and they want to fight...As a common people, as patriotic
citizens, laying aside our parties and our prejudices, I want to
appeal to you in the name of my country, in the name of our murdered
dead, and in the name of God, let us vindicate American honor and
the American flag."[6] Representative John C. Spooner, of Wisconsin,
on Friday, April 15, 1898, stated, "We intervene (in Cuba), Mr.
President, not for conquest, not for aggrandizement, not because of
the Monroe Doctrine; we intervene for humanity's sake; we intervene
to gain security for the future; we intervene for our own permanent
peace and safety."[7] President McKinley said in his war message
on April 11, 1898, "In the name of humanity, in the name of civili-
zation, in behalf of endangered American interests which give us the
right and the duty to speak and to act, the war in Cuba must stop."[8]
Finally, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge said in the March, 1899, issue
of Forum, "From the Rio Grande to the Artic Ocean, there should be
one flag and one country, the United States!"[9] The American imperialists
found an outlet in their growing desire for foreign intervention
when the Spanish-American War began. In emphasizing the position
of the United States as a world power, it created a demand for action
as a world power--and in 1898 that meant imperialism.[10]

In looking back to our early history, neutrality and isolationism were the ideas that the United States grasped until the 1890's. At the very beginning of this country, in 1776, John Adams said, "We should separate ourselves as far as possible and as long as possible, from all European politics and wars."[11] Until approximately 1815 the United States accepted Adam's advice and took the road to neutrality. We made no alliances with Europe; basically America: abstained from belligerent act, remained impartial, and stayed out of involvement in war. America resorted to armed force internationally five times before 1889, only two are mentioned here, the other three are of little significance— the two undeclared wars with the Barbary pirates, from 1801-1805, and the quasi-war with France from 1798-1800.[12] All this changed when the United States found itself aligned on the side of Europe against England, mainly because of the Essex case, British blockade of American neutral ports, and impressment of American sailors.[13] One thing was certain after the Treaty of Ghent (a treaty signed by representatives of America and Great Britain officially ending the War of 1812), the United States had safely extracted itself from the European wars and pledged itself no more involvement in another war.[14] The other armed conflict of significance was the war with Mexico in 1846. President Polk asked Congress for war saying, "The cup of forbearance had been exhausted even before the recent information from the frontier of the Del Norte. But now, after reiterated menaces, Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil...war exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself."[15]

President Polk was known to be a jingoistic leader and he favored war as an answer to alot of problems facing the United States, for example, he was prepared to wage war to collect unpaid debts from Europe and he was willing to start war because Mexico refused to have normal diplomatic relations with the United States.

Another important facet of the pre-"White Man's Burden" era was the document called the Monroe Doctrine. This document was a product of President James Monroe and he presented it to Congress on December 2, 1823. It was a unilateral statement of foreign policy, affirming friendship and pledging aid to the American continents. The original draft of the Monroe Doctrine had provisions for aid to Greece, which was, at that time, attempting to break away from the Ottoman Empire and become a republic.[16] Secretary of State John Quincy Adams vetoed that provision and the finished document spoke in terms of protection and independence of the American continents. The document basically said:

1. The American continents, by the free and independent condition which they had assumed and maintained, were henceforth not to be considered subjects for future colonization by any European power.

2. It does not comport with the policy of the United States to take part in the politics or the wars of European powers in matters relating to themselves.

3. The United States would regard as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition to itself the effort of any European power to interfere with the political system of the American continents, or to acquire any new territory on these continents.[17]

The Monroe Doctrine was a document of the future and Europe paid
very little attention to it.  It was part of a foundation that the
United States would later call it's foreign policy; the Monroe
Doctrine has withstood the erosion of time, for instance, it was
used in July, 1895 by Secretary of State Richard Olney in attempting
to resolve a boundary dispute between Great Britain and Venezuela over
British Guiana.  Olney announced then, "There is a doctrine of American
public law, well founded in principle and abundantly sanctioned by
precedent, which entitles and requires the United States to treat
an injury to itself the forcible assumption by an European power of
political control over an American state."[18]  Eventually, England
agreed to arbitration of the dispute.  The "White Man's Burden" was
evolving slowly and by the latter part of the nineteenth century,
the "White Man's Burden" had arrived.

As mentioned previously, the "White Man's Burden" consisted of
three facets.  The first third of the "White Man's Burden" was
Christianity.  Christianity from the very beginning was a missionary
religion, its' disciples being anxious to share with others the message
that exalted them.[19]  The first United States missionary service was
offered in 1810, when the American Board of Commissioners for
Foreign Missions was formed by five men from Williams College.[20]
These men were sent to India, with fields opened soon afterward in
Africa and Burma.  The first missionary sent to China was Elijah
Bridgman in 1829; China had forbidden all missionary activity from
1724 until 1807.  When the ports of Asia were opened, the foreign
merchants and the missionaries were the first to get there.  Two
basic segments of Christianity deal with the Puritanical theory of

success will come if you work hard enough and, the unique idea of
mission--we as a people are special, we are God's chosen leaders,
ie.[21]  Also, the theories of hope and charity were taken to justify
America's brand of Christianity and it's entrance into the world;
in turn, it was seen as our Christian duty to help the poorer, lesser
advanced peoples of the world.[22]  The fact that many of these "heathens"
already had a religion made no difference to the nineteenth century
missionaries.  For example, it took English missionaries twenty-three
years (1797-1820) to break the native religion in Tahiti and get their
first convert.[23]  To get a candid view of what United States mission-
aries thought and the justifications they used, Robert E. Speer,
the Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian
Church of the United States in the late nineteenth century, said in
1904, "'The civilized nations are beginning to perceive that they do
have a duty to police the world.  The recognition of this duty has
been forced by tade...The civilized nations have a right to go back
of the mere forms of procedure in non-civilized lands and to secure the
rights denied in those lands.  Indeed, it is their duty to do so and
in the interest of trade they are constantly doing so...the missions
are really the most constructive force at work in the Western prop-
aganda, partly because they alone aim at once at the transformation
of character and the establishment of homes on the Christian conception
of the family, and partly because they alone underbase Western civilization
with right principle and so settle it on secure foundations...The
commercial movement is a necessary part of the great outward impulse
of civilization; the missionary welcomes it as an ally...The Western
trade movement needs the Christian mission for its own sake."[24]
Further, the Honorable T. R. Jernegan, the Consul-General of the

United States at Shanghai in the late 1890's, said, "Missionary
work has accomplished advantages to trade which the present awake-
ing of China will soon evidence to be of great practical value...
The ensign of commerce follows close in the wake of the banner of
the cross, and he who would strike down the hand that carries the
latter, injures the interest of the former." [25]  It is obvious that
Christianity was used often and by many for justification of U.S.
imperialism ; although there were missionaries who were sincere and
dedicated, there were others who became rich landowners and members
of crooked organizations.[26]  The use of Christianity as justification
sometimes reached the point of being ludicrous, as President McKinley
showed in a speech to a group of clergymen in 1903, "The truth is
I didn't want the Philippines, and when they came to us, as a gift
from the gods, I didn't know what to do with them...I walked the floor
of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not
ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and
prayed Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night.  And
one night it came to me this way...the Philippines must be ours...
I told the chief engineer of the War Department (our mapmaker) to
put the Philippines on the map of the United States."[27] So, according
to our Puritan heritage, it was the obligation of man to follow a
calling and conscientiously cultivate his vineyard--spread the good
news and save the "heathen."[28]  Christianity had two big influences
on the "White Man's Burden": 1) It defined things in black and white,
yes and no.  There was a clear answer for everything; and, 2) It is
a very aggressive religion with a built-in evangelistic concept.
The idea was that "we are right and everyone else is wrong."[29] Viewed

historically, one can hardly deny that religion has caused widespread tension and led directly to war; now with Christianity used as a justification for imperialism by the United States, an entire new concept is added to the discoloring of religion, Christianity in particular. For rationalizing our economic and political motives, Christianity became a priceless asset and a very important part of the triumvirate called the "White Man's Burden."

The second part of the "White Man's Burden" is Pragmatism. Pragmatism was founded by Charles Pierce and it was developed in comprehensive form by William James and John Dewey.[30] Pragmatism takes its name from it's central teaching that any idea which meets the pragmatic test--that is, gives practical results--must be accepted as true, provided of course, it does not conflict with experience. It was in this way that the United States applied it to it's foreign policy--as far as experience went, the U. S. really did not have any in foreign affairs, so experience did not enter in on the U. S. and it's relation to Pragmatism. The Pragmatists abandoned metaphysics as futile and taught that knowledge should be sought after, not as an end in itself, but as an instrument for improving conditions on earth.[31] Pragmatism was a technique, requiring analysis and solution. It looked not to the theory of political institutions, but to their machinery; it sought the causes of corruption, inefficiency, and governmental impotence not in the realm of morals but in administration, economics, and psychology.[32] Also, it was a democratic philosophy, it gave every man a vote, and counted the votes of all--poor and rich, ignorant and intelligent. Finally, Pragmatism taught that men held the future in their own hands--it was drenched in optimism.[33] Practical, democratic, in-

dividualistic, opportunistic, spontaneous, hopeful, pragmatism
was wonderfully adapted to the temperament of the average American.[34]
Every American knew that the world in which he lived was, in part,
of his own making, that he had bent Nature to his will and won
Providence over to his side, and the sublimation of this long ex-
perience to a philosophical theory could not startle him.  Pragmatism
later crystallized into the Progressive Movement, which was essentially
an ideological and political response to the transformation of the
nation from a rural, commercial economy to an urban, industrial one,
and it made a concerted effort to provide the basic political,
social, and economic reforms necessary; these advances were established
by getting at the inequitable taxation, wasteful consumption of the
nation's resources, unequal concentration of economic power, corrupt
party machines, child labor, and crowded slums.[35]  The fundamental
relation of Pragmatism to the "White Man's Burden" was, it was
practical for the U. S. to get involved in world affairs, the U. S.
needed the foreign markets for trade and also, we had to help our
"heathenistic" brothers in the world--the world would be what the
U. S. made of it.  William James said, "Truth happens to an idea...
The ultimate test of what a truth means is the conduct it dictates
or inspires."[36]  The U. S. had an opportunistic idea of "making it"
in the world economically and politically, so America set about
making things happen to make their idea work.  Add that to optimism
and democratic individualism, and the one-third of the "White Man's
Burden" was complete.

The final part of the "White Man's Burden" was manifest destiny.
Manifest destiny had evolved along with the vigorous democracy in the

the early years of America--it was a compound of an earnest belief
that the United States had achieved the ideal politkal system, which
should be extended as widely as possible, and an unshakeable con-
viction that a beneficent providence had intended the American
people to occupy the empty space stretching West.[37]  Many others,
enthusiasts of manifest destiny, for example Senator H. D. Lodge,
wanted to take in everything from Panama to the North Pole.  Some
early examples of American ideas of manifest destiny involved the
Oregon Territory and Texas, and annexing them into the United States.
By the 1840's, many Americans fathered the idea of eventual possession
of no less a domain than the entire Northern Hemisphere.[38]  Probably
one of the biggest reasons for the emerging popularity of manifest
destiny in the 1840's was the "danger from abroad," the ambition of
the European nations seemed to threaten fundamental American interests.[39]
Typical of the thinking of that time, Representative Robert Winthrop,
on January 3, 1846, spoke to Congress, "There is one element...to
which I may not have done justice.  I mean that new revelation of
right which has been designated as the right of our manifest destiny
to spread over this whole continent...if Great Britain had all our
titles in addition to her own, they would weigh nothing against it
(manifest destiny).  The right of manifest destiny!  There is a right
for a new chapter in the law of nations; or rather, in the special
laws of our own country; for I suppose the right of manifest destiny
to spread will not be admitted to exist in any nation except the
universal Yankee nation!"[40]  This was the first time this doctrine
was called to the attention of Congress and the American people.[41]
The Civil War, however, took the place of any ideas of expansion or
manifest destiny.  At the end of the war, the expansionist fever

was gone immediately following the Civil War. Americans were more
concerned with the problems of reuniting their country, the settling
of the West, and the hugh industrial expansion taking place.[42]
Since they were fully occupied at home, they had little incentive
to concern themselves with what was going on in the outside world.
Some examples of this indifference to foreign affairs and develop-
ments was revealed by the Senate; it rejected a treaty providing for
the purchase of the Danish West Indes in 1869, a treaty involving
the annexation of Santo Domingo (1870) was rejected, and even the
outbreak of the Ten Years' War between Spain and Cuba in 1868 could
not revive sufficient expansionist spirit to capitalize on the war
by acquiring Cuba.[43] An exception to the moribund attitude toward
expansion was the purchase of Alaska from the Russian government
in 1867 for the modest sum of 7.2 million dollars.[44] However, by
the 1890's, there was indisputable evidence that resistance to man-
ifest destiny in America was weakening.[45] The factors which ultimately
produced the strong expansionist mood characteristic of the American
public in the 1890's were several--broadly speaking, they consisted
of strategic, economic, religious, and emotional strands.[46] Strategi-
cally, there was a need to obtain defensible frontiers, to eliminate
bellicose neighbors, and to forestall European monarchies.[47] The
navy played a major part in renewing the quest for manifest destiny.
When Alfred T. Mahan's book, The Influence of Sea Power Upon History,
1660-1783, was published in 1890, it was evident what a major part
the navy would play in expansion.[48] Basically, Mahan suggested that
the country that has the largest navy is always superior--he used
Great Britain as an example. Mahan became the pre-dominant spokesman

for strategic expansion, saying it was "natural, necessary, irrepressible."[49] Economically, there was a definite need for overseas markets, a need of new investment opportunities for accumulated capital, the need of additional living space for an expanding population--as best expounded by Fredrick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis," and the need of an uniterrupted source of raw materials for the factory system.[50] In 1897, the value of manufactured exports by the United States exceeded that of total imports--the total exports exceeded the total imports by $286,263,144; one year later the difference soared to $615,432,676.[51] It was not until the very eve of the War with Spain that the economic case for expansionism was fully articulated. One of the first and probably foremost advocates of economic expansionism was Senator Albert J. Beveridge. On April 27, 1898, in a speech in Boston, he gave his views, "Ultimately, the trade of the world must be ours...We are Anglo-Saxons, and must obey our blood and occupy new markets, and if necessary, new lands... (This is) the Anglo-Saxon instinct of empire. American factories are making more than the American people can use; American soil is producing more than they can consume. Fate has written our policy, for us. The trade of the world must and shall be ours. And we will get it as our mother has taught us how. Like England, we will establish trading posts throughout the world; great colonies will grow about our posts of trade, and American law, American order, American civilization and the American flag will plant themselves on shores hitherto bloody and benighted...We go forth to fight for humanity; but where American blood establishes liberty and law, the American people will see that the blood is not shed in vain."[51] The expansionists were never really

clear on where the United States could obtain the specific places
for their economic imperialism, however; the economic expansionists
helped create a climate for opinion which was favorable to the cause
of manifest destiny.[52]   The religious need was brought forth in the
Christianity section of "White Man's Burden."  The emotional part
is the most difficult part of manifest destiny to isolate and identify.[53]
Presumptively, adventure and desire for conflict made up the funda-
mental element of emotionalism.  The oppression Americans had ex-
perienced since the end of the Civil War, the routine business of
making a living, with it's emphasis on materialism, and the rebuild-
ing of the nation gave Americans a thirst for adventure.  Manifest
destiny quenched that thirst.  The tensions from this type of society
brought out the desire for conflict.  For instance, the increasing
disparity between rich and poor, the growing bitterness of the farmer,
the violence of labor dispute, Coxey's Army, just to name a few,
caused a pessimism that found an outlet in jingoism.[54]

     When the Spanish-American War came into America's picture on
April 26, 1898, the United States  was, in fact, using the doctrine
of "White Man's Burden" to justify it's imperialistic motives.  The
one act that set the imperialistic wheels in motion was the blowing
up of the American battleship Maine in Havana harbor.  However, the
clamor in America for U. S. entrance into Cuba was great even before
this incident, ie., the Republicans had included a plank in their
platform in the election of 1896 which called for Cuban independence.[55]
Also, entering into our campaign in Cuba was the "de Lome letter,"
which the Spanish Ambassador to America, de Lome, had written calling
McKinley a "wishy, washy, scared President."[56]  This letter was

released in an Eastern newspaper and this infuriated the American
public.  Another reason for our entrance into Cuba was some
Americans felt that Spain was threatening the United States security
by having armed soldiers in Cuba.[57]  Finally, "Yellow Journalism"
helped fan the fires of imperialism and antagonized the American
public until we finally entered the war.  After our entrance into
the war, the Press used thrilling and spectacular stories to keep the
publics interest going for the war.  "Yellow Journalism" had it's
emphasis on blaring headlines and the sensational story, caring
not if the story was true or even close to it.[58]  The "White Man's
Burden" was overwhelmingly our justification of war with Spain,
however.  It encompassed the majority of arguments for intervention--
it was America's fate to free Cuba from tyranny, there was brutality
being exercised by the Spaniards in their Cuban labor camps--our
Christian ethics wouldn't stand for that, the U. S. had to meet the
European threat in this hemisphere, and America could develop Cuba
into a political and economic asset for America.[59]  A peace treaty
was signed six months later on December 10, 1898 (called the Treaty
of Paris, in which Spain ceded the Philippines to the U. S.  The
U. S. did not believe the Philippines were ready for independence;
it was decided that they needed our "guidance" for awhile.)  When
the Filipinos learned that their independence was not at hand, they
rose up in what was called the Philippine Insurrection (1899).[60]
In this episode, the United States employed a force of 70,000 men
to fight.  It was in this year, 1899, that America blindly left it's
"noble and magnanimous" cause of the "White Man's Burden," turned it's
back on Jefferson's words, "Conquest is not in our principles," and

stepped boldly into the sphere of militaristic imperialism.[61]
America had violated the principle of consent of the governed,
by using force and not "relying on fate."  McKinley said that the
United States' fundamental purpose in the Philippines was "to over-
come all obstacles to the bestowal of the blessing of good and stable
government...under the free flag of the United States...Americans
come not as invaders or conquerors but as friends eager to assure
the full measure of individual rights and liberties which is the
heritage of free peoples."[62]  True "freedom," then, was not the
national liberty being withheld, but the "individual" liberty which
was being offered by America.  Unfortunately the Filipinos did not
buy the story.  When their opposition rose, the followers of the
"White Man's Burden" could no longer conceal what was happening by
flowery rhetoric, it was clearly imperialism.

The "White Man's Burden" transgressed into jingoistic imperialism
after the Philippine Insurrection--this imperialism consisted of
two emotions, which were as diverse as the olive-branch and the arrow
of the American eagle; these emotions were humanitarianism and a
belligerent spirit of national self-assertion; these two emotions
meshed together to form "a vigorous American foreign policy."
This "vigorous foreign policy" is still followed today, even though
it has seen many alterations.  It seems that in the 1960's, the U. S.
was still depending on the emotions of humanitarianism and the
belligerent spirit of national self-assertion to get our way.  We still
fought a country (Vietnam) desiring freedom from American control.
We still got nationalism confused and we still wanted to protect
"poor, ignorant countries from being exploited by some foreign nations--
this time the enemy was Communism and sometimes nationalism.  In fact,

many experts today in foreign policy say that one of our major flaws
in foreign policy is our inability to deal with nationalistic move-
ments--we can't tell the difference between nationalism and Communism.
Senator J. William Fulbright suggests that we reject the narrow,
egotistical, self-righteous, and arrogant in the use of power America
that Teddy Roosevelt strived for and instead seek out the humanistic
and self-critical America of Abraham Lincoln.[63] Senator Fulbright
goes on to suggest that we should take nationalistic movements
realistically, not necessarily as threats to the United States,
but as genuine movements of the people; and then accept them, not
look at the situation as if it is our destiny to alter. The "White
Man's Burden" set off a spark that is still being felt today in the
1970's. It was a florid justification of a mainly self-centered and
selfish nation, eager to step out into the world. Today the U. S.
is suffering from a foreign policy that was developed at the turn of
the century; it droops around America's neck like the albatross that
hung on the neck of the ancient mariner. It is time that the United
States heed the words of President John F. Kennedy when he spoke
in the early 1960's, "There cannot be an American solution for
every world problem."

## FOOTNOTES

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