

Activity 6. Black Man's Burden (1920)

Source: Morel, E. D. (1920). *The Black Man's Burden* (London: National Labour Press. <http://www.archive.org/stream/blackmansburden00moreuoft#page/n7/mode/2up> (Accessed February 18, 2010).

Background: E.D. Morel was a British journalist and founder of the international Congo Reform Association. The title of his book *The Black Man's Burden* (Manchester, UK: National Labour Press, 1920) was a response to the poem "The White Man's Burden" by English poet Rudyard Kipling. In the poem, Kipling called on the United States to join Great Britain in the daunting task of bringing civilization to a savage non-White world populated by peoples he considered "half devil and half child" (http://www.wsu.edu/~wldciv/world_civ_reader/world_civ_reader_2/kipling.html, accessed February 15, 2010). The book is part documentation of events in the Congo and part polemic trying to stir up opposition to imperialism. Read passages A – D and answer questions 1 – 4.

Questions

1. According to Morel, how had Europe treated Africa in the past?
2. Why is "capitalist exploitation" the new and greatest threat to the African?
3. Why does Morel believe resistance will likely fail?
4. Write a 250-word "Letter to the Editor" of the *Times of London* either supporting or opposing the positions taken by Morel.
 - A. What the partial occupation of his soil by the white man has failed to do; what the mapping out of European political 'spheres of influence' has failed to do; what the Maxim and the rifle, the slave gang, labor in the bowels of the earth and the lash, have failed to do; what imported measles, smallpox and syphilis have failed to do; whatever the overseas slave trade failed to do, the power of modern capitalistic exploitation, assisted by modern engines of destruction, may yet succeed in accomplishing (7).
 - B. For from the evils of the latter, scientifically applied and enforced, there is no escape for the African. Its destructive effects are not spasmodic: they are permanent. In its permanence resides its fatal consequences. It kills not the body merely, but the soul. It breaks the spirit. It attacks the African at every turn, from every point of vantage. It wrecks his polity, uproots him from the land, invades his family life, destroys his natural pursuits and occupations, claims his whole time, enslaves him in his own home (7-8).
 - C. The African of the tropics is capable of tremendous physical labours. But he cannot accommodate himself to the European system of monotonous, uninterrupted labour, with its long and regular hours, involving, moreover, as it frequently does, severance from natural surroundings and nostalgia, the condition of melancholy resulting from separation from home, a malady to which the African is specially prone. Climatic conditions forbid it. When the system is forced upon him, the tropical African droops and dies (8).
 - D. Nor is violent physical opposition to abuse and injustice henceforth possible for the African in any part of Africa. His chances of effective resistance have been steadily dwindling with the increasing perfectibility in the killing power of modern armament . . . Thus the African is really helpless against the material gods of the white man, as embodied in the trinity of imperialism, capitalistic exploitation, and militarism (8).