"And if they come, my son, you who understand these things, tell me: what answer do we give these idiots?"

"I don't yet exactly know how these things will work out. But I think we shall be obliged to represent them because, in any case, there will not be a separate representative from each village."

"This business of yours is complicated, my son. I hope that you at least will be able to understand it, so that we don't make a laughingstock of ourselves in the eyes of our neighbors. You know that they will seize on the slightest opportunity—"

"I'll take care of it, Chief."

The conversation went on into details until the time when the other villagers returned from Mass. It was the Chief's job to announce the news of the coming election, as it had been given him by Bikounou. He did this solemnly, during an evening meeting. The news was received and commented upon in almost as many ways as there were men present at the meeting, for the people of Effidi, outstandingly intelligent, at least in their own opinion, were keen to show that they had understood what they had just been told, and that they would be perfectly capable of playing the new game which was being wished on them by the town. Naturally, many chests swelled with pride at the idea that, once again, the neighboring villagers would remain in the background of the regional scene, since their sons were unable to compete with those of Effidi.

6

RUDYARD KIPLING

The White Man's Burden, 1899

This poem, written by Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), is often presented as the epitome of colonialist sentiment, though some readers see in it a critical, satirical attitude toward colonialism. Do you find the poem to be for or against colonialism? Can it be both?

THINKING HISTORICALLY

"The White Man's Burden" is a phrase normally associated with European colonialism in Africa. In fact, however, Kipling wrote the poem in response to the annexation of the Philippines by the United States. How does this historical context change the meaning of the poem for you?

Source: Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," *McClure's Magazine* 12, no. 4 (February 1899): 290–91.

Neither fiction nor fact, a poem conveys emotions. How does this poem help us understand something about the feelings of people like Kipling? How would you describe that feeling?

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 hope to nought.

Take up the White Man's burden—
No iron 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, make them with your living
And mark them with your dead.

Take up the White Man's burden,
And reap his own 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 ye 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 will or whisper,
By all ye leave or do,
The silent sullen peoples
Shall weigh your God 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.

■ REFLECTIONS

Many of the selections within this chapter as well as its title point to the dual character of colonial society. There are the colonized and the colonizers, the "natives" and the Europeans, and, as racial categories hardened in the second half of the nineteenth century, the blacks and the whites. Colonialism centered on the construction of an accepted inequality. The dominant Europeans invested enormous energy in keeping the double standards, dual pay schedules, and separate rules and residential areas—the two castes.

One problem with maintaining a neat division between the colonized and the colonizers is that the Europeans were massively outnumbered by the indigenous people. Thus, the colonizers needed a vast class of middle-status people to staff the army, police, and bureaucracy. These people might be educated in Paris or London, raised in European culture, and encouraged to develop a sense of pride in their similarity to the Europeans ("me Christian, same like master") and their differences from the other "natives." Often, like the Indian Dr. Veraswami, they were chosen for their ethnic or religious differences from the rest of the colonized population.

In short, colonialism created a whole class of people who were neither fully colonized nor colonizers. They were in between. To the extent that the colonial enterprise was an extension of European social class differences, these in-between people could be British as well as "native." Orwell's Flory is only one of the characters in *Burmese Days* caught between two worlds. One of the most notorious of this class of Europeans "gone native" is the Mr. Kurtz that Conrad's crew will meet upriver. Achebe's point that Africa becomes a setting for the breakup of a European mind might be generalized to apply to the European perception of the colonial experience. It is certainly one of the dominant themes of the European colonial novel. Even the great ones often center on the real or imagined rape, ravishing, or corruption of the European by the seething foreign unknown. This attitude also helps us understand how Kipling could be both anti-imperialist and racist. Imperialism could seem like a thankless act to those who tried to carry civilization to "sullen peoples, half devil and half child."

All the novels and poetry excerpted in this chapter are well worth reading in their entirety, and many other excellent colonial novels can be chosen from this period as well as from the 1930s and 1940s. E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet* stand out as fictional introductions to British colonialism in India. (Both have also received excellent adaptations to film, the latter as the series for television called *The Jewel in the Crown.*) In addition to Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka have written extensively on Nigeria. Besides Francis Bebey, Ferdinand Oyono and Mongo Beti address French colonialism in Cameroon. On South Africa, the work of Alan Payton, Andre Brink, J. M. Coetzee, Peter Abrams, and James McClure, among many others, stands out.

The advantage of becoming engrossed in a novel is that we feel part of the story and have a sense that we are learning something firsthand. Of course, we are reading a work of fiction, not gaining firsthand experience or reading an accurate historical account of events. A well-made film poses an even greater problem. Its visual and aural impact imparts a psychological reality that becomes part of our experience. If it is about a subject of which we know little, the film quickly becomes our "knowledge" of the subject, and this knowledge may be incomplete or inaccurate.

On the other hand, a well-written novel or film can whet our appetite and inspire us to learn more. Choose and read a novel about colonialism or some other historical subject. Then read a biography of the author or research his or her background to determine how much the author knew about the subject. Next, read a historical account of the subject. How much attention does the historian give to the novelist's subject? How does the novel add depth to the historical account? How does the historical account place the novel in perspective? Finally, how does the author's background place the novel in historical context?