

White Man's "Burden"

Unfortunately, during the Age of Imperialism, there were a lot of very racist views that were held by the Europeans. To understand the issue fully, a historian needs to not only understand what people thought, but also to try to understand why.

Darwinism

During the 1800's, a leading scientific writer, called Charles Darwin, would



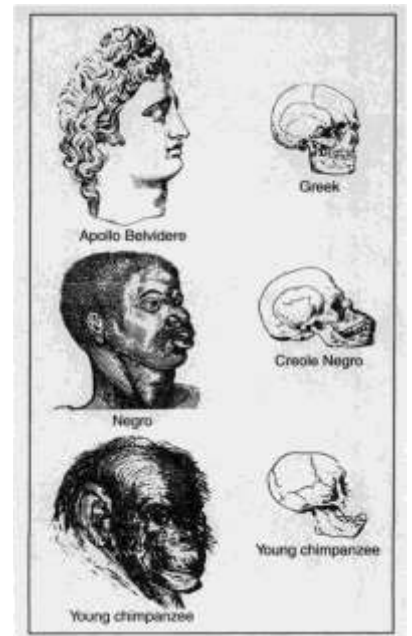
"Christmas in our new possession." Santa Clause shown bringing books to a Philipino boy. The implication is that people in these areas should be grateful to US and Europeans for all the good things they bring to them.

change the way people thought about the world. Darwin went into nature, and observed the way that it worked. His main idea, referred to as natural selection, states that when an animal is stronger, it is the one that breeds, and passes on its superior genes to its offspring. For example, if a bird has a mutation that gives it a longer than normal beak, and that helps it get food easier, that bird will survive better, and breed more, which will eventually help all birds to have longer beaks.

People in Europe began to take this idea and apply it to people. So, when they looked at European culture, the large buildings they had, the better

technology, and everything else they felt was better, they assumed this meant that they were somehow genetically better than every other group of people. This led many to conclude that it wasn't really the African people's fault that they didn't have the technology or religious beliefs of Europe, because they were simply inferior. This belief is known as social Darwinism.

Factory owners and wealthy leaders used this same logic when explaining why they were better than the poor people. They didn't see a problem with using the poor people's labor to make themselves rich, because they figured that they were just better than everyone else, literally. Of course, this belief for most people was just a way that they could try to make themselves feel better about getting rich from other people's work.



Racist propaganda like this implied that Africans were more similar to monkeys than humans. Disguised as "educational", these posters sadly shaped many generations of peoples' ideas about Africans and people of other races.

The White Man's Burden

There were many people who saw it as their responsibility to begin to make the African and Indian people more like themselves. Western Civilization (the way Europeans do things from the Greek and Roman cultures) in their minds, was the best way to do things, and they had an obligation to try to make the rest of the world the same as they are. This did have some very positive effects for the people living in the colonies.

One of those positive effects was that the people gained access to the education that the Europeans had. Schools and Universities were built for the first time in Africa, and many of the languages were translated into an alphabet that could be written down for the first time. Another positive effect was the better medical care that the Europeans began to provide. Other positive effects included better technology, the spread of Christianity, and other benefits that came from the European culture. Some laws were also good, as the Europeans stopped different tribes from fighting against each other.



A European pours alcohol down an African's throat while a missionary pretends to be spreading Christianity and a European Imperialist takes all of the gold away from the African. This cartoon points out many of the problems with Imperialism, mainly that people pretended to care about Christianity while they stole and ruined the African's lives.

Of course, these positive effects came with a price. The Europeans took the land, the resources, and in many cases, the labor of the people. Many tribes lost their cultures as the Europeans forced them to act more like Europeans. This sometimes included their religion, as Europeans forced the people to hold to the same beliefs that they had, whether they wanted to or not. Of course, the laws that the Europeans made for the people did not always apply

to themselves, so there were many things that were unfair about what the Europeans did.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. How did the concept of Social Darwinism contribute to Imperialism?
2. What were the positive and negative impacts of Imperialism on the indigenous people living in the colonies?
3. How is the concept of the White Man's Burden racist?

Write about it.

The two cartoons on the front have the same overall message, and the ones on the back have a different message. Compare and Contrast the artist's purposes in the two cartoons seen on this worksheet.