“The Black Man's Burden”

This poem by Lulu Baxter Guy turns the tables on Rudyard Kipling's "The White Man's Burden," suggesting that the real "burden" was borne by African-Americans under the weight of racial oppression.

Making an impassioned plea for racial equality, Guy implores readers to "think of the brave deeds [African-Americans] have done," such as those of the black soldiers who took part in the charge of San Juan Hill during the recent Spanish-American War.


The Black Man's Burden

Take off the black man's burden,
This boon we humbly crave.
Have we not served ye long enough?
Been long enough your slave?
Cut loose the bands that bind us,
Bid us like men be strong.
Think of the brave deeds we have done;
Look not for all the wrong.

Take off the black man's burden,
'Tis this that we demand;
Think not of all the crimes you've heard
But that march up San Juan.
Oh, South, can't you remember
When you fought to hold our lives?
How loyal was the black man
To your daughters and your wives?

Take off the black man's burden,
Ye men of power and might.
Wait not one for another
But dare to do the right.
The blood, the smoke, the ashes,
Of martyred men that's slain;
Comes wafted to you from the south
But for another's gain.

Take off the black man's burden,
His mind can then expand.
He'll prove your equal in the race,
Stand every whit a man.
We'll wait till the burden's lifted,
And to those who crush us down,
Will come the words of God to Cain,
"Thy brother's blood crieth from the ground."