



Sen. Benjamin Ryan Tillman, 1905

Hon. Benjamin R. Tillman
U.S. Senator from South Carolina

Address to the U.S. Senate

"Are We To Spread the Christian Religion
with the Bayonet Point as Mahomet Spread
Islamism with A Scimiter?"

7 February 1899  Excerpts

[Tillman begins his speech — delivered the day after the Senate ratified the treaty ending the Spanish-American War — by arguing against waging a full-scale war in the Philippines which the U.S. had acquired in the treaty. He proceeds to discuss Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden," which had appeared in the February 1899 issue of *McClure's Magazine*.]

As though coming at the most opportune time possible, you might say just before the treaty reached the Senate, or about the time it was sent to us, there appeared in one of our magazines a poem by Rudyard Kipling, the greatest poet of England at this time. This poem, unique, and in some places too deep for me, is a prophecy. I do not imagine that in the history of human events any poet has ever felt inspired so clearly to portray our danger and our duty. It is called "The White Man's Burden." With the permission of Senators I will read a stanza, and I beg Senators to listen to it, for it is well worth their attention. This man has lived in the Indies. In fact, he is a citizen of the world, and has been all over it, and knows whereof he speaks.

"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."

I will pause here. I intend to read more, but I wish to call attention to a fact which may have escaped the attention of Senators thus far, that with five exceptions every man in this Chamber who has had to do with the colored race in this country voted against the ratification of the treaty. It was not because we are Democrats, but because we understand and realize what it is to have two races

side by side that can not mix or mingle without deterioration and injury to both and the ultimate destruction of the civilization of the higher. We of the South have borne this white man's burden of a colored race in our midst since their emancipation and before.

It was a burden upon our manhood and our ideas of liberty before they were emancipated. It is still a burden, although they have been granted the franchise. It clings to us like the shirt of Nessus, and we are not responsible, because we inherited it, and your fathers as well as ours are responsible for the presence amongst us of that people. Why do we as a people want to incorporate into our citizenship ten millions more of different or of differing races, three or four of them?

But we have not incorporated them yet, and let us see what this English poet has to say about it, and what he thinks.

"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."

Ah, if we have no other consideration, if no feeling of humanity, no love of our fellows, no regard for others' rights, if nothing but our self-interest shall actuate us in this crisis, let me say to you that if we go madly on in the direction of crushing these people into subjection and submission we will do so at the cost of many, many thousands of the flower of American youth. There are 10,000,000 of these people, some of them fairly well civilized, and running to the extreme of naked savages, who are reported in our press dispatches as having stood out in the open and fired their bows and arrows, not flinching from the storm of shot and shell thrown into their midst by the American soldiers there.

The report of the battle claims that we lost only seventy-five killed and a hundred and odd wounded; but the first skirmish has carried with it what anguish, what desolation, to homes in a dozen States! How many more victims are

we to offer up on this altar of Mammon or national greed? When those regiments march back, if they return with decimated ranks, as they are bound to come, if we have to send thousands and tens of thousands of re-enforcements there to press onward until we have subdued those ten millions, at whose door will lie these lives — their blood shed for what? An idea. If a man fires upon the American flag, shoot the last man and kill him, no matter how many Americans have to be shot to do it.

The city of Manila is surrounded by swamps and marshes, I am told. A few miles back lie the woods and jungles and mountains. These people are used to the climate. They know how to get about, and if they mean to have their liberties, as they appear to do, at what sacrifice will the



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Filipino prisoners of war, ca. 1899

American domination be placed over them? There is another verse of Kipling. I have fallen in love with this man. He tells us what we will reap:

“Take up the White Man's burden,
And reap his old reward—
The blame of those ye better,
The hate of those ye guard—
The cry of hosts ye humor
(Ah, slowly!) toward the light—
‘Why brought ye us from bondage,
Our loved Egyptian night?’”

Those peoples are not suited to our institutions. They are not ready for liberty as we understand it. They do not want it. Why are we bent on forcing upon them a civilization not suited to them and which only means in their view degradation and a loss of self-respect, which is worse than the loss of life itself?

I am nearly done. Nobody answers and nobody can. The commercial instinct which seeks to furnish a market and places for the growth of commerce or the investment of capital for the money making of the few is pressing this country madly to the final and ultimate annexation of these people regardless of their own wishes. . . .

Why not tell these people [the Filipinos] now before further blood is shed? . . . We bought you from Spain and have title. We only want enough of your territory to give us a harbor of refuge, a naval station, the right to protect you from outside interlopers, and to get such commercial advantages as you of right ought to give us. Pass a resolution of that kind, and then if those people will not listen to reason and continue to fire on the flag, I for one will say the blood will be on their own heads. Let slip the dogs of war and teach them to respect the Stars and Stripes. But we are there now upon a false pretense. We are there wrongfully. We are there without any justification to ourselves or to the civilized world.

I yield to no man in loyalty to the sentiments, my country, may it ever be right, but right or wrong, my country. But, oh, my God, when I think how dishonorable the prosecution of the war promises to be to us as a people, how little justification for it we have, even to ourselves, I would that you, my fellows on this floor, would pass a resolution which could bring about immediately a cessation of hostilities and a condition which might give the Philippine people the same right to bless us as Cuba will possess, and which command for us the admiration and respect of the civilized and pagan world.

