

Cartoons

Cartoons also both supported and satirized Kipling's message.

Kipling's poem caused quite a stir, not only among poets, but also among essayists and cartoonists. Political cartoons use many techniques to make a statement about political events. Because cartoonists are poking fun at something that has happened, they can sometimes get away with making pointed political statements that might be unpopular or difficult to put into words. Cartoonists use humour in their visual clues to get their point across. They may use current or historical references that the viewer does not always know, so their meaning is not always clear at first. Viewers must study the images carefully to see the artist's message.

Analyzing Political Cartoons

Symbolism

Cartoonists use simple objects or symbols to stand for larger concepts or ideas. After you identify the symbols in a cartoon, think about what the cartoonist intends each symbol to represent.

Exaggeration

Sometimes cartoonists overdo, or exaggerate, the physical characteristics of people or things to make a point.

When you study a cartoon, look for any characteristics that seem overdone or overblown. (Facial characteristics and clothing are some of the most commonly exaggerated characteristics.) Then, try to decide what point the cartoonist was trying to make through exaggeration.

Labelling

Cartoonists often label objects or people to make clear exactly what they represent.

Watch for the various labels that appear in a cartoon, and ask yourself why the cartoonist chose to label that particular person or object. Does the label make the meaning of the object more clear?

Analogy

An analogy is a comparison between two unlike things that share some characteristics. By comparing a complex issue or situation with a more familiar one, cartoonists can help their readers see it in a different light.

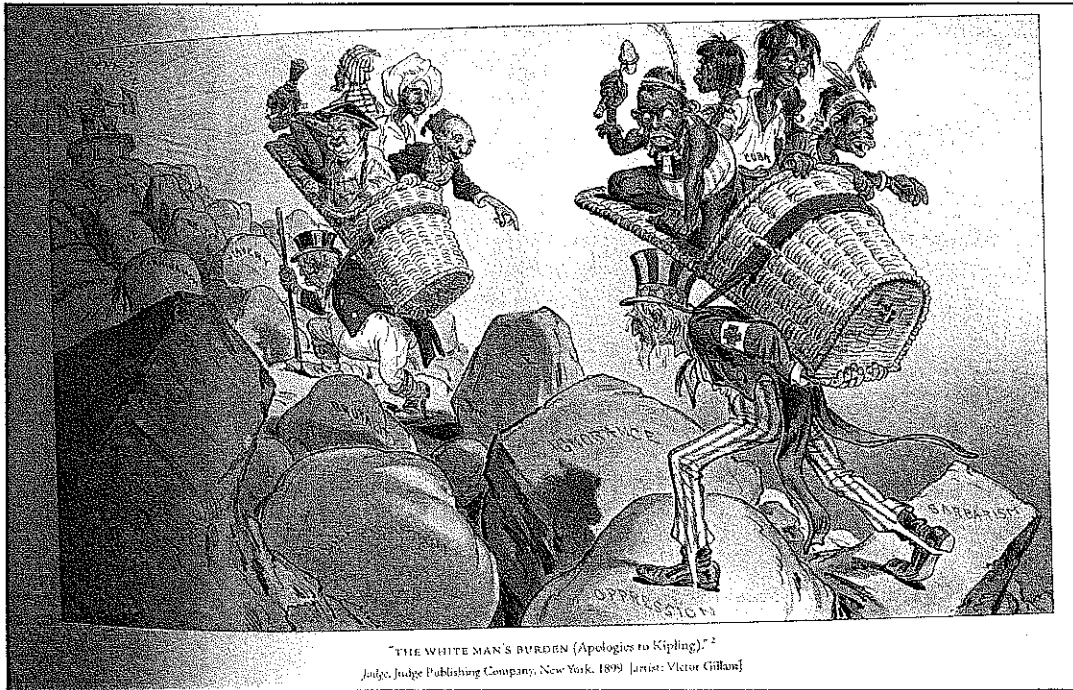
After you have studied a cartoon for a while, try to decide what the cartoon's main analogy is. What two situations does the cartoon compare? When you understand the main analogy, decide if this comparison makes the cartoonist's point more clear to you.

Irony

Irony is a difference between the ways things are and the way things should be or the way things are expected to be. Cartoonists often use irony to express their opinions on issues.

When you look at a cartoon, see if you can find any irony in the situation the cartoon depicts. If you can, think about what point the irony might be intended to emphasize. Does the irony help the cartoonist express his or her opinion more effectively?

Consider the political cartoon below. It was created in 1899 by artist Vincent Gillam in support of Kipling's poem. Two characters carry baskets containing people from Africa and Asia, over stones labeled *ignorance, brutality, slavery, vice, oppression, barbarism, and superstition* towards a shining figure on a hilltop called *Civilization*.



The caption reads “The White Man’s Burden (Apologies to Kipling)”.

- **Symbolism:** The British, as symbolized by the “John Bull” figure in the red jacket and top hat, are carrying Indian and Chinese people up a steep slope, while the Americans, as represented by “Uncle Sam” are carrying African and Aboriginal people.
- **Exaggeration:** A caricature is a picture or description that ludicrously exaggerates the peculiarities or defects of people or objects to create an easily identifiable likeness. Caricatures can be complimentary or insulting and are often used for political purposes. A caricature often stereotypes races, as you can see by the appearance of the men in the baskets.

- **Labelling:** The men are climbing over rocks called *oppression*, *cannibalism*, *vice*, and *ignorance* that represent the negative qualities of the people in colonized lands. They move towards a classically styled palace called *Civilization*.

Gillam obviously believes that the colonizing nations of Great Britain and the United States, with great personal sacrifice, are *saving* the backwards indigenous people from their harmful ways.

Interesting Note: This cartoon was recently republished in an article that supported Kipling's view, entitled "Carrying the 'White Man's Burden' in Iraq", December 2005.

Now, consider another cartoon that takes a satirical view of Kipling's idea. (Satire is a work of literature or art that makes fun of or mocks anything its author thinks ridiculous, usually with sarcasm or irony.) This cartoon was created in 1899 by the artist William Walker.



THE WHITE (?) MAN'S BURDEN.

The caption reads "The White (?) Man's Burden". Note the use of the question mark.

Look closely at who is carrying whom in this cartoon. Here the Indian and the African men are carrying the *burden* of the whites. Again, the nationalities of the people are represented symbolically by their costumes. The Americans and the British are in the front, and the Germans and the French are following.