

Brief Biography of W. Allison Sweeney

W. Allison Sweeney (1851-1921) was a writer, editor, and lecturer. He is best known as the editor of the *Chicago Conservator*, an African-American newspaper at the center of the W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington debate in the early 20th century. In 1919, Sweeney also wrote *History of the American Negro in the Great World War; his splendid record in the battle zones of Europe, including a resume of his past services to his country in the wars of the revolution, of 1812, the war of the rebellion, the Indian wars on the frontier, the Spanish-American war, and the late imbroglio with Mexico.*

“The Other Fellow’s Burden”
by W. Allison Sweeney

The “white man’s burden” has been
Told the world,
But what of the other fellow’s –
The “lion’s **whelp**”?
Lest you forget,
May he not **lisp** his?
Not in arrogance,
Not in resentment,
But that truth
May stand **foursquare**?
This then,
Is the Other Fellow’s Burden.

Brought into existence
Through the enforced **connivance**
Of a helpless motherhood
Misused through generations –
America’s darkest sin! –
There courses through his veins
In calm insistence – incriminating irony
Of the secrecy of blighting lust!
The best and the vilest blood
Of the South’s **variegated** strain;
Her statesmen and her loafers,
Her chivalry and her ruffians.
Thus bred,
His impulses twisted
At the starting point
By brutality and sensuous savagery,
Should he be crucified?
Is it a cause for wonder
If beneath his skin of many hues –
Black, brown, yellow, white –
Flows the **sullen** flood
Of resentment for prenatal wrong
And forced humility?
Should it be a wonder
That the muddy life current
Eddying through his arteries,
Crossed with the good and the bad,
Poisoned with conflicting emotions,
Proclaims at times,
Through no fault of his,
That for a **surety** the sins of fathers
Become the heritage of sons
Even to the fourth generation?

Or that murdered chastity,
That ravished motherhood –
So pitiful, so helpless,
Before the white hot,
Lust-fever of the “master” –
Has borne its sure fruit?
You mutter, “There should be no wonder.”
Well, somehow, Sir Caucasian,
Perhaps southern gentleman,
I, marked a “whelp,” am moved
To prize that muttered admission.

But listen, please:
The wonder is – the greater one –
That from Lexington to San Juan hill
Disloyalty never **smirched**
His garments, nor civic wrangle
Nor revolutionary **ebullition**
Marked him its follower.
A “striker”? Yes!
But he struck the insurgent
And raised the flag.
And ingrate?
Tracherous?
A violator?
When – oh, spectacle that moved the world!
For five bloody years
Of **fratricidal** strife –
Red days when brothers warred –
He fed the babe,
Shielded the mother.
Guarded the doorsill
Of a million southern homes?
Penniless when freedom came? Most true;
But his accumulations of fifty years
Could finance a group of principalities.
Homeless? Yes; but the cabin and the hut
Of Lincoln’s day – uncover at that name! –
Are memories; the mansion of today,
Dowered with culture and refinement,
Sweetened by clean lives,
Is a fact.
Unlettered? Yes;
But the alumni of his schools,
Triumphant over the handicap
Of “previous condition,”
Are to be found the world over
In every assemblage inspired
By the democracy of letters.

In the casting up what appears?
The progeny of lust and helplessness,
He inherited a mottled soul –
“Damned spots” that biased the looker on.
Clothed a freeman,
Turned loose in the land
Creditless, without experience,
He often stumbled, the way being strange,
Sometimes fell.
Mocked, sneered at from every angle,
Spurned, hindered in every section,
North, south, east, west,
Refused the most primitive rights,
His slightest mistakes
Made mountains of,
Hunted, burned, hanged,
The death rattle in his throat
Drowned by shouts and laughter
And – think of it! –
The glee of little children.
Still he pressed on, wrought,
Sowed, reaped, builded.
His smile ever ready,
His perplexed soul lighted
With the radiance
Of an unquenchable optimism,
God’s presence visualized,
He has risen, step by step.
To the majesty of the home builder,
Useful citizen,
Student, teacher,
Unwavering patriot.
This of the Other Fellow.
What of you, his judges and his patrons?
If it has been your wont
In your treatment of him
Not to reflect,
Or to stand by in idle unconcern
While, panting on his belly,
Ambushed by booted **ruffianism**,
He lapped in sublime resignation
The bitter waters
Of unreasoning intolerance,
Has not the hour of his deliverance,
Of your escape from your “other selves”
Struck?
If you have erred,
Will you refuse to know it?
Has not the time arrived

To discriminate between
Those who lower
Those who raise him?
You are shamed by your abortions,
Your moral half growths
Who flee God's eye
And stain his green earth,
But you are not judged by yours;
Should he be judged by his?
In his special case – if so, why?
Is manhood a myth,
Womanhood a toy,
Integrity unbelievable,
Honor a **chimera**?
Should not his boys and girls,
Mastering the curriculum of the schools,
Pricked on to attainment by the lure
Of honorable achievement,
Be given bread and not a stone
When seeking employment
In the labor mart,
At the factory gate
Or the office door?
Broadened by the spirit of the golden rule,
Will you not grant these children of **Hagar**
An even break?
Is the day not here, O judges,
When the Other Fellow
May be measured in fairness,
Just fairness?

It is written men may rise
“On their dead selves to higher things;”
But can it be that this clear note of cheer
To sodden men and smitten races
Was meant for all save him?
Chants an immortal:
“He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.”

Source: Sweeney, W.A. (1919). *History of the American Negro in the Great World War*. Chicago, IL: G. G. Sapp.

Glossary of Terms:

Whelp – a young animal; a young boy or girl;

Lisp – to speak falteringly, childishly;

Foursquare – squarely and solidly;

Connivance – complicity; willingness to secretly be involved in wrongdoing;

Variegated – exhibiting different colors; marked by variety;

Sullen – bad-tempered and sulky;

Surety – a guarantee; that state of being sure or certain of something;

Smirched – make dirty; discredit; taint;

Ebullition – sudden outburst of emotion or violence;

Fratricidal – relating to conflict within a single family or organization;

Dowered – to give as a gift;

Ruffianism – a violent or lawless person;

Chimera – a thing that is hoped or wished for but in fact is illusory;

Hagar – Old Testament Egyptian maid of Sarah, who bore Ishmael to Abraham;

Questions about the Poem

1. “The White Man’s Burden” by Rudyard Kipling is about the burden on the White man to spread civilization and democracy to “backward” people groups in the world. The poem became a justification for imperialism and colonization of the 20th century. According to Sweeney, what is the “Other Fellow’s Burden”? Who is the “Other Fellow”? Lastly, what ideas or practices could this perpetuate and begin to justify?

2. Analyze the following excerpt from the poem:

Is it a cause for wonder
If beneath his skin of many hues –
Black, brown, yellow, white –
Flows the **sullen** flood
Of resentment for prenatal wrong
And forced humility?

What is the author referring to in these lines?

3. What wars are mentioned in this poem? How is African American participation in the wars portrayed?
4. Analyze the following excerpt from the poem:

What of you, his [“the Other Fellow”] judges and his patrons?
If it has been your wont
In your treatment of him
Not to reflect,
Or to stand by in idle unconcern
While, panting on his belly,
Ambushed by booted **ruffianism**,
He lapped in sublime resignation
The bitter waters
Of unreasoning intolerance,
Has not the hour of his deliverance,
Of your escape from your “other selves”
Struck?

5. How does this poem reflect the African American soldier experience during, and after, World War I?