

## Honors Literature – World History

**TASK:** Read the following text carefully, making all appropriate notations. Identify SOAPStone, DIDLS, PERSIAN, and other information as evidence of your research and analysis of the piece of literature. Answer the related questions on notebook paper or on this document. You may use this information for any written essay on the piece. See the text at the very bottom of these notes.

### **TASK: Comprehension Questions**

1. What sorts of roles does Davie assume that the Europeans must play in the colonies?
2. What benefits accrue to the colonized peoples from their rule?
3. What impression does he convey of the thinking and behavior of the colonized peoples?
4. In what ways do Batouala's views of Europeans conflict with Davie's assumptions about himself and other colonizers?
5. Does Batouala agree with Davie's conviction that colonial rule is beneficial for the Africans?

## Contrary Images: The Colonizer Versus the Colonized on the “Civilizing Mission”

Each of the following passages from novels written in the colonial era expresses a different view of the reasons behind European colonization in Africa and Asia and its consequences. The first is taken from an adventure story written by John Buchan titled *Prester John*, a favorite in the pre-World War I decades among English schoolboys, many of whom would go out as young men to be administrators in the colonies. Davie, the protagonist in the story, is a “tall, square-set lad . . . renowned [for his] prowess at Rugby football.” In the novel, Davie summarizes key elements of the “civilizing mission” credo by which so many European thinkers and political leaders tried to justify their colonization of most of the rest of the world.

I knew then [after his struggle to thwart a “native” uprising in South Africa] the meaning of the white man’s duty. He has to take all the risks, reck[on]ing nothing of his life or his fortunes and well content to find his reward in the fulfillment of his task. That is the difference between white and black, the gift of responsibility, the power of being in a little way a king; and so long as we know this and practise it, we will rule not in Africa alone but wherever there are dark men who live only for the day and their own bellies. Moreover the work made me pitiful and kindly. I learned much of the untold grievances of the natives and saw something of their strange, twisted reasoning.

The second passage is taken from René Maran’s *Batouala*, which was first published in 1921 just after World War I. Though a French colonial official in west Africa, Maran was an African American, born in Martinique, who was highly sensitive to the plight of the colonized in Africa. Here his protagonist, a local African leader

named Batouala, complains of the burdens rather than the benefits of colonial rule and mocks the self-important European agents of the vaunted civilizing mission.

But what good does it do to talk about it? It’s nothing new to us that men of white skin are more delicate than men of black skin. One example of a thousand possible. Everyone knows that the whites, saying that they are “collecting taxes,” force all blacks of a marriageable age to carry voluminous packages from when the sun rises to when it sets.

These trips last two, three, five days. Little matter to them the weight of these packages which are called “sandoukous.” They don’t sink under the burden. Rain, sun, cold? They don’t suffer. So they pay no attention. And long live the worst weather, provided the whites are sheltered.

Whites fret about mosquito bites. . . . They fear mason bees. They are also afraid of the “prankongo,” the scorpion who lives, black and venomous, among decaying roofs, under rubble, or in the midst of debris.

In a word, everything worries them. As if a man worthy of the name would worry about everything which lives, crawls, or moves around him.

**QUESTIONS** What sorts of roles does Davie assume that the Europeans must play in the colonies? What benefits accrue to colonized peoples from their rule? What impression does he convey of the thinking and behavior of the colonized peoples? In what ways do Batouala’s views of the Europeans conflict with Davie’s assumptions about himself and other colonizers? Does Batouala agree with Davie’s conviction that colonial rule is beneficial for the Africans?