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Period 3

Environment or Economy?

Mount Everest, in all of its splendor and beauty, has been revered a formidable entity for

centuries, if not longer. The Nepalese call the mountain “Sagarmatha,” which means “Mother of the Universe.” Only in the past sixty years has the summit been conquered. For many years following that, having achieved the peak of Mt. Everest was a redoubtable feat. However, in recent times, more and more people are becoming able to climb the mountain without all of the effort that the first conquistadors made. These guided clients pay mountaineering experts and enlist the help of the native people of the Everest region, the Sherpas, in order to reach the top. The first few mountaineers, on the other hand, went with little assistance. Although many could argue that hosting numerous climbing expeditions on Mt. Everest would be good for not only the climbing industry, but the economies of the surrounding countries, Tibet and Nepal, exploiting the mountain in such a way not only defaces the physical beauty of the mountain itself, but also tarnishes the impressive title of having been to the summit of Everest and back.

The abundance of guided tours on Mt. Everest blemishes the environment and the natural

beauty of the mountain. The more people there are, the more trash there will be on the mountain,

especially since most of the inexperienced climbers on the guided tours discard many bottles of

oxygen. In Jon Krakauer's book, *Into Thin Air*, he notes that “...Everest had been turned into a garbage dump by the ever-increasing hordes, and commercial expeditions were reputed to be the primary culprits” (64). This is no new problem; ever since the first Everest mountaineers, having rubbish on the mountain has been an issue, and the increasing amount of commercial excursions has done nothing to deter it. On page 169 of *Into Thin Air*, Krakauer informs the reader that “the spent oxygen bottles blighting the South Col have been accumulating since the 1950s...” In addition to physical trash left on the mountain, the mountaineers of today's commercial expeditions leave many human waste products. “Three or four stone toilets in the village were literally overflowing with excrement...Huge stinking piles of human feces lay everywhere; it was impossible not to walk in it” says Krakauer on page 8. Thus, arranging too many guided tours on Everest would degrade the environment and the elegance of the mountain.

Having too many amateur climbers on the mountain can cause long lines while climbing, which can be aesthetically displeasing and would annoy the expert mountain climbers. According to the Canadian newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, “...there were too many people to go climb the Everest, that there were too many traffic jams...” (Ha and D'Aliesio 2012). Most people in the lines are from guided tours, and, as they do require guides, have a tendency to climb rather slowly due to their inexperience. This causes lines and does not allow for more experienced climbers to go at the own pace. Not only is having lines frustrating for these climbers, but it is also quite vexing to the eye. Many say that the view of the mountain unadulterated is the preferable sight. *The Globe and Mail* further reports that there

were “...scenes of people who should never have been allowed on the mountain in the first place”

(Connolly 2012). Therefore, the amount of commercial journeys resulting in lines not only is irritating to climbers who wish to move at a faster pace, but does not look very pleasant as far as the natural scene of the mountain is concerned.

The abundance of guided, unskilled climbers on Everest also ruins the title of having been to the top of Everest and back, and therefore these climbers should not be allowed to climb the mountain. As opposed to the earlier climbers of Everest, who did the majority of the work themselves, with the exception of a climbing partner or two, the clients now have the guides and Sherpas do most of the work that is required to reach the peak. Once source communicates that “...in their own way, Sherpas point out that foreign climbers need the Sherpas...” (Baldawf 2003). In addition to being guides as to the dangers of the mountain, “sherpas put in the route, set up the camps, did the cooking, hauled all the loads” (Krakauer 176). Furthermore, these clients use too much oxygen and rely heavily on the guides, so climbing Everest wouldn't really be that hard. Whereas the first who triumphed over Everest were admired and esteemed, people of today believe that those who summit the mountain now should not be thought of so highly. Some say that “...it takes no skill to do what most of the tourists to Everest do. The growing trend in the last 10 years has been to use oxygen almost from base camp onwards...” (Connolly 2012). The earlier climbers only used oxygen from 20,000 ft onward, whereas now people utilize it starting at 17,600 ft, and sometimes even lower. This gives them a sort of “unfair advantage.” Additionally, the clients of commercial expeditions did not train as long or as hard as earlier climbers. Krakauer says that “Traditionalists were offended that the world's highest summit was being sold to rich parvenus—some of whom, if denied the services of guides, would probably have difficulty making it to the top of a peak as modest as Mount Rainier” (26). Because the earlier climbers of Everest did not rely on the guides and Sherpas so much as a crutch as the climbers of today do, it is unfair that the amateurs get the same impressive rank as those who put in more work and effort and had more skill than them.

On the other hand, one could argue that the all of the money spent on equipment and assistance would be good for the Khumbu region, Nepal and Tibet, as well as the climbing industry. Most to all of the people on Everest, especially the guided tourists, will require oxygen and Sherpas to help them. This is very advantageous, as economies of Nepal and Tibet, as well as the Sherpa people are in dire need of the large sums of money gained from the Everest climbing expeditions. This can be illustrated through some statistics of the countries. For example, according to the CIA World Factbook, the GDP per capita of Nepal is $1,200 (USD). With he infant mortality rate of Nepal being 43.13 deaths/ 1,000 live births, 38.8% of children under 5 years of age underweight, and 25% of the population below the poverty line (CIA 2012), it is quite clear that the capital gained from commercial climbing expeditions would no doubt be helpful to the Everest region. As stated by Krakuer, “hard currency from trekkers and climbers...have funded schools and medical clinics, reduced infant mortality, built foot bridges, and brought hydro-electric power to Namche and other villages” (48). Consequently, the money spent on the expeditions by the tourists would undoubtably be helpful to the economies of the countries and societies surrounding the mountain.

The cost of guided tours on Everest can become quite expensive and would no doubt be

beneficial to the countries located near Everest. “The average eight-member expedition team spends about $200,000 in Nepal” (Baldawf 2003). “Some summiteers pay as much as $65,000 per ascent” (Baldawf 2003). "'Khumbu and the Anapurna region are very, very prosperous, and it's because of tourism,' says Ang Tshering, who has done trekking all his life, but never scaled Everest. 'It benefits the local people first, who get employment as guides and porters, who sell food, who provide campsites and lodging. It brings money to an area where roads and industry cannot'.” (Baldawf 2003).

While the economic impact of Everest climbers is beneficial to the financial systems of the surrounding communities, the disadvantages outweigh these benefits. Not only would having many guided tours like Jon Krakauer's deteriorate the environment of Everest, but it would also degenerate the noble title of summiting the mountain and living to tell the tale. After all, if the environment of the mountain becomes too critical and getting to the top becomes too commonplace, then nobody would want to climb it anymore. Thus, there would be no economy to be helped if climbers were completely absent from the mountain due to what previous, unqualified climbers had done to it. As Jon Krakauer says, “...thanks to the commercialization of Everest, the once hallowed peak has now even been dragged into the swamp of American jurisprudence” (26).

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