

## THE TOURISTS I MEET

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[Assignment: Because we use division or classification as a means of understanding what, at present, we don't understand or what we want someone else to understand, carefully chosen detail has obvious importance. How interesting and informative our analysis is depends, of course, on the kinds of categories we choose to engage a particular audience for a clear purpose.]

Every day of the summer, tourist after tourist leaves mainland Michigan to visit Mackinac Island, located near the top point of the lower peninsula of Michigan in Lake Huron. Its green grass, always trimmed, and its nationally known lilac trees amaze any visitor. The island captures history because it goes back in time to the 1800's, operating with only four motorized vehicles -- two fire engines, an ambulance, and a police car -- besides the yard up-keep vehicles. Bicycles and horses provide the only other transportation besides walking. Staff, dressed to look like soldiers in the wool uniforms of the time period, re-enact rifle shooting, court martials, cannon firings, and craft demonstrations in the island's main attraction, Fort Mackinac.

For one week of each summer, I greet the tourists as they make the climb up a steep hill to enter Fort Mackinac. I meet people from all over the world with various attitudes and personalities, making my job very exciting and interesting. Each group of tourists has its own reasons for visiting the island, yet not until they climb up the hill can I tell you what those reasons are.

About half of the tourists come to Mackinac Island with one purpose -- to see the fort. These Hard-Cores, usually young couples or groups of friends, are dressed in preppy outfits: men in khaki shorts, polo shirts, and brown leather loafers without socks; women in long, cotton sundresses with brown leather, buckled sandals. As they briskly walk up the hill in front of me as if they were late for a meeting, they laugh and joke to each other, ignoring anyone else around them. Surprised passersby jump out of their way as the Hard-Cores walk without considering who they may run into. As they approach me, I smile, only to be ignored. Just as they almost walk past me, they suddenly stop to ask, "Do you take our tickets here?" Once I begin to answer, "No, they will take them . . .," they continue walking up the hill to the fort. Only because I have my own love for the island can I keep my experiences from being spoiled by the rude and condescending Hard-Cores.

Only a little better are the Primitive Mini-Hulks. These tourists come to Mackinac Island probably not even knowing there is a fort. Twenty to thirty year-old men and women, both with little bodies made of all muscle, wear spandex biker shorts, waist-length t-shirts describing environmental problems, and running shoes. The category they embrace is so obvious that the experience is a little like reading the message from a billboard: clear, loud, and predictable. With their fannypacks on, the

Primitive Mini-Hulks bike quickly up the steep hill without once faltering or losing a single breath. When they stop near me, still straddling their bikes, I can hear them discussing the fact that Fort Mackinac must be a tourist trap because it charges admission. Never do they even look at me, but after only a couple minutes of discussion, decide to go on the the back trails of the island and bike. That is the last I see of the Primitive Mini-Hulks.

Because of the variety of attractions, families come to the island in hopes of having a positive bonding experience. These are the Sacrificers, and they tend to not want to go into the fort at all. The parents, with matching sweatshirts and mangled hair, almost literally dragging the children up the hill, are only going into the fort because they think the kids will like it. Yet, only because they think their parents are forcing them do the kids go into the fort. I can always see the Sacrificers coming. The children, with sweatshirts tied around their waists and little white Keds on their feet, walk slowly, looking down while dragging their feet. The parents walk ten feet ahead, sometimes pushing a smaller child in a stroller. Once in awhile, they yell back in a resentful tone, "Come on, let's go. You're the one who wanted to do this!" As they slowly pass by me, I smile sympathetically for both the parents and the children. The father and the oldest child smile with a look of appreciation for the sympathy while the mother grows tense, nagging the father about the cost of admission. As I watch them continue up the hill, I can see the Sacrificers bickering the whole time, probably continuing in the fort. They do not remind me of a Norman Rockwell painting of "American Family at Play."

The Relaxers, however, make my day with their pleasant smiles and funny questions. Usually elderly people, these tourists wear white pants, brightly-colored shirts, walking shoes, and strapped around their necks, they have cameras. By the time I see them, they are looking at me from under their sun visors, getting ready to ask me questions. When they finally get near enough for them to hear me, I give them a cheerful, "Welcome to Fort Mackinac!" Most often they are out of breath, and they jokingly ask if instead of climbing the hill to the fort there is an elevator. Then after many more questions about the fort and the island in general, the Relaxers decide they will go in since they have come so far up the hill. Yet, before going any further, they always ask me to take a picture of them by the 10-foot tall wooden Fort Mackinac sign. After this, they cheerfully wish me a happy day as they move slowly up the hill. The Relaxers are a group of tourists I always look forward to greeting because their appreciation for life and all it has to offer separates them from everyone else.

After seeing all of these tourists all day long, my emotions are drained. When the day comes to an end and the sun begins to go down, I find myself seeing all of the tourists again. The Hard-Cores leave the fort, laughing and joking among themselves without saying good-bye as they pass me. From the direction of the back trails of the island, I see the Primitive Mini-Hulks biking their way back to their hotels. They do not stop to talk, and I don't expect them to. The Sacrificers leave, all of them obviously exhausted as they are still arguing about such issues as where to eat dinner or what to do that evening. The children are carrying little American flags on plastic sticks as they ask, "Can we get ice cream?" Yet,

most pleasantly, the final greetings I receive are from the Relaxers. They come out of the fort last because they usually can't walk very fast. After making a joke about how much easier it is for them to walk down the hill instead of up, they always wish me a happy day and give me a huge sincere smile. I smile in part because of their sincerity and in part because, finally, the day is complete.