

Jean-Pierre Houël's painting, *Prise de la Bastille*, portrays the important event. The painting depicts the tumultuous day, July 14, 1789, when a mob appeared at the prison and set its captives free. Although there were only seven men imprisoned there at the time, the symbolic notion of this act is what really struck the nation. Houël's scene is set up like a painting of a landscape. However, instead of valleys or mountains, the observer sees the Bastille. His use of color is significant in the painting because it mainly consists of shades of blue and red, two of the main symbolic colors of the budding French nation. Red is the color of St. Denis, the patron Saint of Paris; blue is the color of Saint Martin, a rich Gallo-Roman officer who ripped his blue coat with his sword to give one half of it to a beggar - blue thus symbolizes care, and the duty that the middle class had to help the poor. The interplay of blue and red is thus symbolic of the revolting middle class fighting for equality and the corrupt aristocracy who had a societal stranglehold on Paris and the rest of France. The prison is the largest object in the painting and the tower is nearly the entire height of the canvas. This is a literal representation of the prison towering over the people below. The smoke clouds are another interesting element. They vary in color from blue to gray and provide the greatest contrast to the prison. The clouds are whips and whirls which can be seen by the darkest cloud. It starts small but as it ascends to the air it gets larger and begins to engulf its surroundings. This is much like the Revolution: it started of small but gained momentum as the people rose just like the cloud. The men below resemble the same style seen in art from the American Revolution. Some of them are wearing uniforms but most of them are not which shows the observer that the men were commoners. There is little emphasis on the men's' faces because they are not detailed or simply not shown. This makes the observer look at the entire painting instead focusing on the minor characters. This

provides the viewer a chance to observe a holistic view of the disarray that took place that day.

There is so much chaos created by the gray and white smoke of the scene that the men's identities or what they are feeling does not matter as much as the cataclysmic events that are taking place and the historic action they are engaging in.