

FL 216
Assignment 3
22 July 2010

The extravagance and splendor of the nobility during the time of Louis XIV and the Court of Versailles exemplify a strong extrication between the social classes that eventually fueled the French Revolution. The era of the “Sun King,” which is characterized by unjust and extensive taxation of the lower class and excessive spending and extravagant living of the king, is a great example of how social inequalities can result in violent and deadly actions. Many French people of the time criticized the lavishness of the extensive royal residence that contributed to the absolutist, god-like image of Louis XIV.¹ In effect, this poorly planned and inefficient spending, which only increased the already immense French national debt, created a rift of unprecedented dimensions between the king and his subjects.

The limitless spending and grandiose lifestyle of Louis XIV is very well depicted in the historical tapestry *Louis XIV Visiting the Gobelins Factory* (1667) by Charles Le Brun. From the inception of the Manufacture des Gobelins (a royal tapestry factory), Charles Le Brun, its first director, had the idea of designing a tapestry with a historical subject to promote the glory of Louis XIV. It was to recount the glorious events that occurred in the early years of his reign both at court and on the battlefield.² In this famous tapestry depicting the visit of Louis XIV to the Gobelins we see the French nobility including the king, the French Minister of Finance Jean-Baptiste Colbert and Le Brun himself standing to the left of the image overlooking all of the luxurious items produced for the “Sun King.” Le Brun, who stands with his hand out, shows the glorious products of his establishment. These include massive silver vases, fine sculptures, a

¹ Neal, Lisa. *France: An Illustrated History*. New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc, 2001.

² Tapestry of The Life of Louis XIV. The Louvre. July 19 2010.
http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/detail_notice.jsp?CONTENT<>cnt_id=10134198673225602&CURRENT_LL_V_NOTICE<>cnt_id=10134198673225602&FOLDER<>folder_id=9852723696500786&baseIndex=1&bmLocale=en

small table decorated with delicate ivory inlays, a table mosaic, elaborately carved furniture, and delicate fabrics. All of these items were presented to Louis XIV, which he would use to furnish his apartments at the Château de Versailles.³

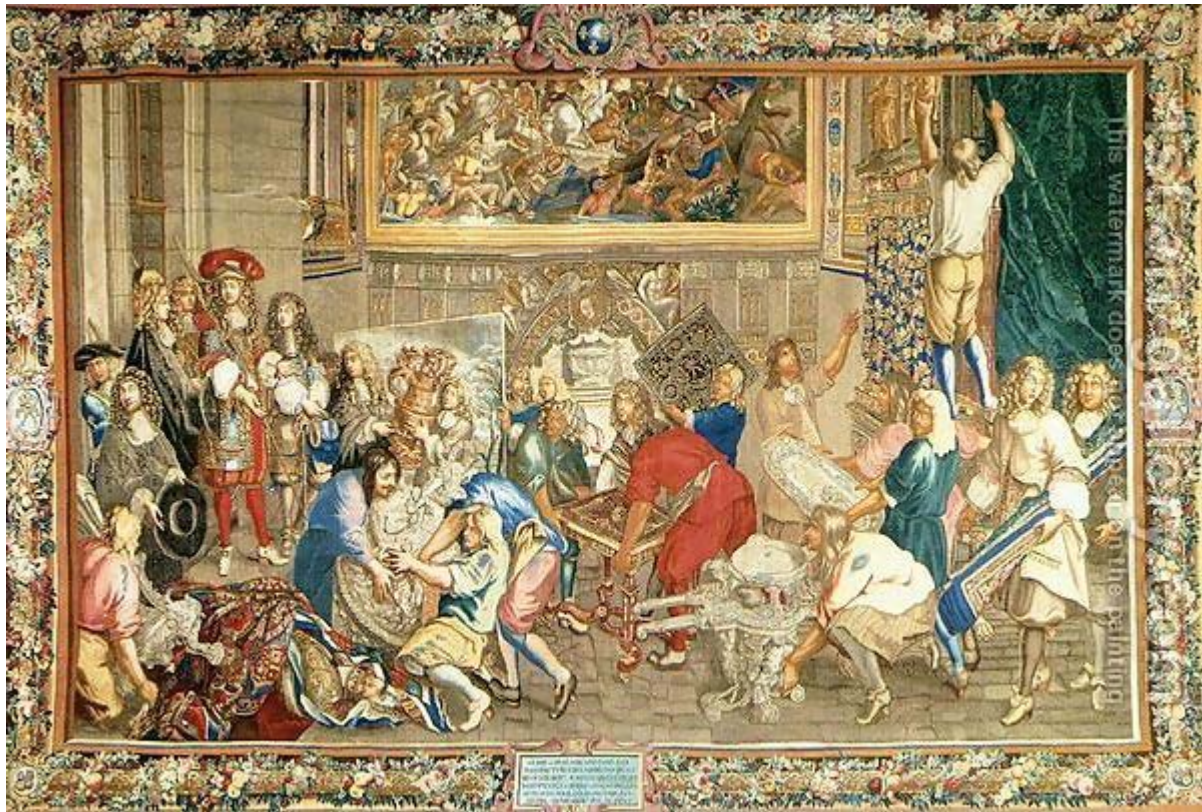
The mood of this image is very chaotic as all of the workers scramble to present all of the extravagant items to the king. This frantic environment depicted is symbolic of the time period and essentially parallels the government of that time. Everyone is scrambling to please Louis XIV and show off their work, and instead of doing so in an organized way, they are getting in each other's way. This series of tapestries depicting the king's glory also have historical significance because of Louis XIV's passion for the arts. He made sure that the Château de Versailles had draped velvet and gold cloth, marble walls, thick Persian carpets, crystal chandeliers, rich tapestries, and gold clocks from the world's most talented painters, architects, sculptors, and craftsmen despite the difficult financial situation prevailing in France at that time.⁴ Although this time period essentially helped the development of French culture and art, the country's finances were used to glorify the magnificence of Louis XIV instead of giving back to the people.

As many people could no longer stand the injustice and inequality of the royal nobility, they overthrew the government in the French Revolution. The lessons of this historical event can be applied to the modern world. As many countries in the world today face a very difficult economic situation, people will look to their governments for assistance. If these governments are not looking out for the well-being of their citizens, discontent will eventually convert to rebellion as it did in the case of the French. "Liberté, égalité, fraternité" along with other natural human rights should not be taken away from the people in order to support the excessively

³ French Art & Literature. Discover France. July 19 2010. http://www.discoverfrance.net/France/Art/DF_art4.shtml

⁴ Arts. Splendor-Versailles. July 20 2010. <http://splendors-versailles.org/TeachersGuide/Arts/index.html>

luxurious lifestyles of their leaders or it may eventually result in violence and tragedy that could have been otherwise prevented.



⁵ Louis XIV Visiting the Gobelins Factory. Charles le Brun. <http://www.lib-art.com/artgallery/3078-louis-xiv-visiting-the-gobelins-fac-charles-le-brun.html>