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The Making of Paris: Midterm Prompt #2
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Under the reign of King Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715), the world of fashion and luxury commodities in France proliferated into a new marketplace the world over had never seen. It permeated all facets of life, and gave Paris it's identity as the fashion capital of the world—a label that still exists today. This new market's implications for the economy, politics, and culture of France had profound impacts on the country during the 17th and 18th centuries, from the royal court to the streets of Paris. For France's economy, fashion and the new hobby of going shopping helped the empire to dominate the European marketplace in all things fashion and luxury. It became a method of political control for Louis XIV, and conversely a source of ire directed at Queen Marie Antoinette over fifty years later. While other empires of this time conquered from abroad, France conquered from within. Culturally, fashion became a uniquely French—and more specifically, a Parisian—identity. The concept of one's image—conveying status and sophistication through clothing—also evolved during this time. No longer were beautiful clothes reserved for the rich and royal (although they still set the fashions). Now they were available for the commoner to wear as well.

How does one measure the extent of how the fashion and luxury industries shaped France during this time period? It may be best to examine the influence of these new markets from multiple points of view, specifically those of economy, politics, and culture from the late 17th to the 18th century. Hand-in-hand with these topics are the aristocrats who ruled France during this time period, for their role was to lead France in these spheres. As we will see with King Louis XIV and Queen Marie Antoinette, fashion shaped their reputations—in both the royal court and in

public—to varying degrees. However, perhaps the true extent to which early French fashion and luxury industries can be best measured is by comparing these economic, political, and cultural paradigm shifts of this period to today—many forms of marketing, intertwined with cultural and political implications—are practiced contemporarily in all markets of aesthetic goods. Even the selling of practical goods is saturated in the guise of helping the individual to announce who they are to the world. This lifestyle marketing is a concept that originated in 17th and 18th century France, which led to profound implications for the formation of future capitalist societies, including the United States. The French propagation of fashion and luxury became the genesis of a culture of consumerist greed that has since increased exponentially in the economic, political, and social spheres of modern Western society.

During King Henri IV's reign (r. 1589-1610), numerous public works were built in Paris. While original plans for a silk manufactory at Place des Vosges ultimately failed, the well-planned public spaces attributed to Henri naturally gave rise to the eventual development of high-quality stores that sold luxury goods.[1] Prior to the reign of King Louis XIV, the premier source of high quality goods in Europe was Italy.[2] In January of 1664, Louis hired Jean-Baptiste Colbert to the role of Superintendent of Buildings, Arts, and Manufactories.[3] Colbert was charged with reorganizing existing French manufactories and oversaw the creation of new ones. This was another catalyst for the booming fashion and luxury items market that was to come.[4] In fact, Colbert was so successful in his new position that his economic policies became known as *Colbertisme*,[5] whereby high taxes were imposed on

[1] Joan DeJean. *How Paris Became Paris: The Invention of the Modern City* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 156.
[2] Ibid., 21
[3] Ibid., 164
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 163

imports. This in turn boosted the domestic sales of French goods. Additionally, Colbert instructed French manufacturers to merely copy desired foreign goods, with quality control assuring that these French products would be of superior quality to their foreign originals. The eventual cultural impacts of these policies on France and Europe would soon prove this assertion to be true amongst international public opinion. The Galerie du Palais, rebuilt after a fire in 1618, marked the beginning of indoor shopping as a spectacle.[6] Each merchant's stand had a counter, which allowed customers to peruse goods at their leisure. The space in which the merchants' counters were displayed was a singular one—and their proximities to each other gave rise to comparison shopping, a common practice that can be seen today in somewhat modern versions of the Galerie du Palais: malls. The importance of the shop itself as part of the shopping experience as a whole became apparent to merchants, who realized that goods were not enough. They had to sell their products within a specific environment, specifically one that was exclusively French.[7] The last economic innovation that occurred during this period, and that which helped France to dominate the European market, was fashion advertising.[8] In 1672, the first fashion publication emerged out of France. Called *Mercure galant,* and edited by Jean Donneau de Visé, this publication created a new niche in popular press: style and fashion. It was so popular that it soon came to be reprinted in other countries and read all over Europe.[9] The popularity of style and fashion publications persists today on a global scale. And *Mercure galant* was a form of publicity and branding for the French market—in effect, advertising. De Visé understood the importance of this kind of endorsement. In

[6] Ibid., 159-160
[7] Ibid., 168
[8] Ibid., 173
[9] Ibid., 163-164

Mercure galant he melded articles on fashion with brand name promotion.[10] An early example is that of the designer Jean Perdrigeon. The mere mention of his name implied products of superior quality. It was also a symbol of status for consumers; it was here that names became associated with wealth and status in the fashion world. Today, name brands have expanded into markets other than fashion. By donning a certain brand, the wearer overtly implies their socioeconomic status and lifestyle without uttering a single word. And back in Paris, the implications of name brands were much the same.

King Louis XIV contributed heavily to Paris' new identity as the *Capitale de la Mode,* first and foremost in the royal court.[11] The King started to make appearances whilst wearing textiles manufactured by French, state-sponsored workshops.[12] He inaugurated the practice of sampling materials to manufacturers.[13] This type of marketing was hugely important for the reputation of French goods and still remains a commonplace practice today. The King also distributed textiles to members of the court, thereby obligating them to wear French clothing. When a new style of fashion appeared in the royal court, it was immediately copied by the French public. From there it spread to other countries. But by this time, the court had moved onto something else, in effect creating a trend that was impossible to satisfy. This pace of ever-changing style is what kept the market moving.[14] And while Louis used fashion to augment the French economy, he also used it to elevate his own status. During ceremonies, the Sun King would dress up as Apollo "in a fabulous costume,"[15] not so subliminally creating the impression of a god in the flesh, as a reminder that he had

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[10] Ibid., 165
[11] Ibid., 163
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 164
[15] T.C.W. Blanning. *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 34.

permanently superseded the mortal social hierarchy in his own court. Over half a century later, fashion had another profound implication for a ruling aristocrat, this time contributing to the ruin of Queen Marie Antoinette, who held her title from 1774-1791. An Austrian pledged in marriage to King Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette became infamous for her hair and dress.[16] Her hairstyles were extremely expensive (often containing jewels and exotic bird feathers) and for this she was generally regarded by the public as a foreign leech, sucking the French treasury dry with her outrageous spending during a time in which many French citizens could barely afford to eat.[17] Her lavish lifestyle partially contributed to her wretched public image and later execution by guillotine in 1793. Louis XIV and Marie Antoinette's reputations exemplify the extreme power of fashion to elevate or destroy reputations in French politics.

Perhaps the most profound impact of French fashion and luxury goods was within the realm of French culture. By most standards of the time, Paris *was* fashion. And by the end of the 17th century, Europe learned how to be fashionable—from the French.[18] Galerie du Palais was not only an economic spectacle, but a social one as well. Paris turned the previously mundane activity of buying goods into "going shopping"—a new urban experience that combined socializing, entertainment, and spending money.[19] Additionally, the Galerie du Palais was an early public space that encouraged gender mixing.[20] Women sold to men, and men sold to women. By the 1650s, Paris solidified its reputation as the *Capitale de la Mode*—both in quantity and

[16] Desmond Hosford, "The Queen's Hair: Marie-Antoinette, Politics, and DNA," *Eighteenth Century Studies 38* (2004): 190.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Joan DeJean. *How Paris Became Paris: The Invention of the Modern City* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 156.
[19] Ibid., 157
[20] Ibid., 160

quality of products to be found there.[21] Its reputation was greatly augmented by the influx of tourists the city experienced in the 17th century. In Paris, shopping evolved from an errand into a pursuit of pleasure. To outsiders, French fashion also carried the implication that those who bought the right clothes could acquire instant, exclusive status—in effect, immediate social mobility.[22] DeJean writes, "This contradictory double message—that high fashion was simultaneously exclusive and available to all—was the basis from the promotion of Paris as a *Capitale de la Mode*."[23] Today, this message persists. High style implies status but does not confront the wearer to prove as such. So persisting was the cultural impact of this era that Paris today is still regarded as the *Capitale de la Mode.*

The culture, politics, and marketing of fashion and luxury goods in 17th and 18th century France are early examples of how material goods can be used to sell a lifestyle. Today, advertising is virtually always imbued with selling products along with their appropriate lifestyle. The notion persists that if you wear a certain good or brand, you're making a statement about who you are—your personality, socioeconomic status, and personal politics. These conceptions all originated in Paris, and the marketing and culture surrounding the material lifestyle today is proof of how deeply these ideas manifested themselves in early modern Western culture. Modern fashion advertising, political statements through clothing, and specific cultural associations with goods are indebted to France during this era. Without the proliferation of the French fashion and luxury industries in the 17th and 18th centuries, European and American capitalist culture might be profoundly different—perhaps even unrecognizable—in our present day.

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[21] Ibid., 162
[22] Ibid., 176
[23] Ibid.