

Source: Will and Ariel Durant, *The Age of Napoleon*, 1975

The Road to Empire: 1804

... Napoleon wondered why he had to his work under constant threat of assassination, while the rulers who were repeatedly leagued against France ... could expect to maintain their supremacy till their normal death, and could rely on the orderly transference of their sovereignty to their natural or designated heirs. ... Apparently the secret of their security lay in their "legitimacy" - the sanction of heritable rule by a public opinion formed to habit through generations and centuries.

... Napoleon dreamed of absolute, consecrated, transmissible authority, even of a dynasty that might acquire the seal and aura of time. He felt that the tasks he longed to accomplish required the stability and continuity of absolute rule. ...

Strange to say, many groups in France heard without resentment the rumors of an impending crown. Some 1,200,000 Frenchmen had bought, from the state, property confiscated from the Church or from emigres; they saw no security for their title deeds except in preventing a return of the Bourbons; and they saw in the permanence of Napoleon's power the best protection against such a calamity. The peasants reasoned likewise. The proletariat was divided; it was still fond of the Revolution as having been so largely its work, but with a fondness fading as it enjoyed the steady employment and good wages that the Consulate had brought; and it was not immune to the rising cult of glory, or to the glamour of an empire that might surpass in splendor any of those that contended with France. The bourgeoisie was suspicious of emperors, but this would-be emperor had been faithfully and effectively their man. ... Even the royalists, if they could not have a pedigreed Bourbon, would think it a step forward if monarchy should be restored in France. The clergy, though they knew that Napoleon's piety was political, were grateful for the restoration of the Church. Almost all classes, outside of Paris, believed that only a monarchical government could control the individualistic passions and class divisions that rumbled under the crust of civilization. ...

On May 22 the registered voters of France, by ballots individually signed, approved this *fait accompli* by 3,572,329 yeas to 2,569 nays.