

Chancellor's speech
on the occasion of the awarding of
the Prix François Guizot-Institut de France
to Olivier Grenouilleau
for his book
***La révolution abolitionniste*, Gallimard**

Monday, October 8, 2018 at 6 p.m.

Institut de France

Grande Salle des Séances

Distinguished Presidents,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Laureate,

Every two years since 2013 when the Association François Guizot asked the Institute to perpetuate, under the patronage of the three academies of which François Guizot was a member, the tradition of a Prize created in 1993 by the Conseil général du Calvados, the Institute has the pleasure of hosting the François Guizot-Institut de France Prize award ceremony within its walls.

This prize honors the author of a great historical work, and this year we are rewarding Olivier Grenouilleau for his remarkable work *La révolution abolitionniste*, which examines the evolution of the abolition of slavery through its chronological, thematic and geographical dimensions. While the abolition of slavery is often summed up in France as having occurred in 1848, the issue had awakened consciences across time and borders, which is easy to understand. This subject, so quick to stir up people's consciences, was especially provocative in France at the time when Guizot was one of the main actors in political life.

François Guizot is very present among us this evening in this Institute, of which Guizot was a member of three Academies; in this place that awards this biennial prize bearing his name; and with the award-winning book being on a subject that occupied the debates of the first half of the 19th century in France.

First, Guizot belonged to three of the five academies. He was above all at the origin of the restoration of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences in 1832, arguing to the King that "*Moral and political sciences have a direct influence on the fate of society, they rapidly change laws and mores*". He was a member of the Academy from that date onwards, two weeks after his arrival at the head of the Ministry of Public Instruction, and his distant successor, whom I was, can only welcome the action he carried out there, which shaped primary education in small municipalities and teacher training colleges. Very quickly, he joined the Academie Française in 1833, then the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, to which he was elected in 1836.

This prize, through its name, reminds us that if François Guizot was a statesman, he was also, and above all I would say, a historian. This prize, as François Furet and Guizot's descendants have so desired, is a tool for recognizing the essential work of historians. Guizot, who held the chair of

modern history at the Sorbonne in 1812, published his courses under the titles *Histoire des origines du gouvernement représentatif*, *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe*, and *Histoire de la civilisation en France*. He was the author of many historical works of which a number were devoted to the history of England.

It is therefore no coincidence that Louis-Philippe, to whom he was a man of confidence, sent him to London in February 1840, where his writings and his attraction to English history had preceded him. He was one of the architects of the rapprochement between the two nations and the inventor of the concept of *Entente cordiale*. At that time, the United Kingdom was ahead of the rest of the Western powers in abolishing slavery and influenced the philanthropic Christian Moral Society in France—of which Guizot was a member—as well as the French Society for the Abolition of Slavery.

Exchanges between French and British abolitionists were strengthened, particularly in June 1840, when the *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society* held its first international congress in favour of the abolition of slavery. The French delegate welcomed the presence of the French ambassador in these terms: "The *printing and publication[...]* of these debates can only advance in France[...] *as the solution of an issue so*

closely linked to the abolition of trafficking is accepted by all civilized nations [...] I am also pleased to see the French representative at my side, Mr. Guizot, even though his diplomatic status prevents him from speaking publicly [...] his presence says much more than words, declaring that the French Government is sympathetic towards the abolition of slavery, the honourable person I am speaking of chaired the first parliamentary committee that dealt with this question, and he has spoken out in favour of abolition".

As Ambassador to Great Britain, Guizot redoubled his efforts to get an international treaty signed authorizing the boarding of vessels belonging to the participating nations to ensure that they were not carrying human cargo.

Some will notice that it was after Guizot's departure from power that the Republic implemented abolition. The deposed minister, reputed to be a sympathizer of the abolitionist cause, had not succeeded in convincing the King of its immediate usefulness.

Guizot's commitment to the abolitionist cause was authentic, however, and is reflected in a number of his interventions in the House. The hope he expressed in one of them was, however, in vain: *"And the day when all nations have made the same commitment, the crime of trafficking will*

disappear; and on that day, the men who have pursued this noble goal through political storms and party struggles, through the jealousies of cabinets, and through personal rivalries,[...] these men will be honoured throughout the world; and I hope that my name will have the honour to take their place among them". For Guizot, was the architect of a gradual abolition rather than a radical abolition and his stance was seen as too soft.

This is how we arrive at the book that is receiving this prize, dear Laureate, the result of a passionate reflection. While it mentions Guizot only twice and analyses the phenomenon in terms of religious, philosophical and geographical dimensions that go beyond 19th-century France and the United Kingdom, nevertheless highlights the idea that, while there was a radical abolitionist project in some European countries at that time, the method was indeed reformist and gradual.

A hypothesis that only a historian can ponder, is that perhaps the Republic after its reconstitution in 1848 could not have abolished slavery so quickly under the impetus of the Schoelcher, Arago, Ledru-Rollin and Lamartine, if there had not been Guizot and a few others to gradually promote it in previous years. Perhaps you will have the opportunity to say a word about this later.

I am pleased that this ceremony gives us the opportunity to talk about François Guizot, and to highlight the work of a contemporary historian. Thank you to the President of the Association François Guizot, thank you to the President of the Jury for this award, and congratulations to you, dear Laureate!