

**AWARDING OF THE PRIX GUIZOT-INSTITUT DE FRANCE
TO OLIVIER GRENOUILLEAU**

*Mr. Chancellor of the Institute,
Honorary Chancellor
Mr. Vice President of ASMP
Mr. Permanent Secretary of the AIBL,*

*Mr. President of the Association François Guizot,
My Dear colleagues,
My Dear colleagues of the jury,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Olivier Grenouilleau,

Since 2014, the prize we award has been known as the "Prix François Guizot-Institut de France". This is the third time the prize has been awarded under this name and the thirteenth time it has been awarded since 1993—we can therefore be pleased with its longevity. The last recipient was Alain Besançon, whom I salute.

Since our last meeting, in this room of the Institute, Françoise Melonio has kindly joined our jury. She replaces Mona Ozouf, one of the founders of the prize, alongside Catherine Coste and François Furet.

On behalf of the jury that I preside, I will try to explain our choice of honouring Olivier Grenouilleau's book, *La révolution abolitionniste*, published in 2017 by Gallimard in the Bibliothèque des Histoires collection headed by our colleague Pierre Nora, whom I also salute.

Slavery today in the West is but a memory, a painful memory of an injustice whose remorse we carry. When slavery was accepted and present in our antiquity, whether Greek, Roman, Jewish or Christian, it seemed obvious and necessary, but it was already thought of as an injustice. Aristotle wrote that learned lawyers considered it unjust and Ulpian, in Rome, affirmed that if slavery existed in civil law it remained contrary to natural law since all men are free. When Seneca surpassed slavery by affirming that we are all slaves of nature anyway, he proceeded like Saint Paul who proclaimed that there are no longer free men or slaves, Greeks or Jews, men or women, because "*we all are one in Jesus Christ*". The Stoic, the Jew or the Christian did not abolish slavery, but they managed it, they contributed to making the lives of slaves less harsh in a society that accepted them.

Europe and America, whose origins lie in these antiquities, would gradually abolish this institution that was always recognized as unfair in their heart of hearts. Only one true hero in antiquity (according to scholarly writers) spoke about slavery as we would today (though with less merit). It was St Gregory of Nyssa who, in the fourth

century A.D., commenting on a passage of Ecclesiastes (*I acquired male and female slaves and maidservants, I had slaves born in my household*), listed all the arguments in favour of abolition, which would only be accomplished, first in Europe and then in the world, in the last centuries.

I will be forgiven this rather evident prologue that aims to bring attention to the fact that your book, as well as your previous work, deals with an important question, a question of philosophical history—as it was so called in this Institute upon the recommendation of Voltaire. You have indeed published three books that belong to this genre. They are also books of global or world history, as we say nowadays, but these terms are not synonymous. Let us remember this term, while noting, by the way, that world history is not new. When we use it, we return to its origins: Gibbon or Voltaire, Renan or Ranke, Toynbee or Pirenne. National history had in fact reduced historical studies by restriction.

The first of your books, entitled: *La traite négrière: Essai d'histoire globale*, was published in 2004. It was a great success, a work that synthesizes and illuminates an immense body of literature. It also aroused emotions and provoked controversy.

These were legitimate emotions: the subject remains painful. In France, Nantes and Bordeaux in particular, our ships participated in the slave trade; the descendants of the slaves transported to our American colonies have become our fellow citizens and compatriots today. We inherit their sufferings and relive them alongside them. To relive this past, to explain it, we risk hurting those for whom the wounds will never heal and for whom condemnations are never rigorous enough.

But the polemic did not come from that angle. You show that this immense historical phase was divided into three elements that were necessarily intertwined: black Africa was a full-fledged actor in the trafficking process, divided into two parts: the western trade of Christian countries, and the eastern trade of Muslim countries.

Your opponents want history to arouse contrition and regret, and, even more so, for the guilty to be constantly denounced and struck with infamy rather than being understood and studied, and moreover the guilty should be exclusively European, just like the victims should be exclusively in Africa. At this point, the polemic becomes unfair, especially when it becomes threatening, and remains untrue. Let's move on.

These controversies have at least contributed to your reputation, even if they have very legitimately upset you. But you did not get discouraged. You have not given up on your subject. Your other works were greeted with serenity. It was admitted in the end that the greatest reparation that the historian can make for the faults of past times is a scrupulous search for the truth.

The second of your books would be published in 2014, with the title: *Qu'est ce que l'esclavage ? Une histoire globale*. First of all, slavery had to be defined in order to think about it and fight it, you note. To reveal its uniqueness, it must therefore be compared with other forms of exploitation of man by man, since slavery has existed from Neolithic times to almost the present day.

The slave must always be a person transformed into another—who is not a person, a person whose humanity is put into parentheses ("on hold" you wrote). Hence these tensions: suffering, the slave's desire for freedom and escape, uneasiness, fear, violence in the master. They are perceived wherever the slave is a man or a woman, without being so but being so.

You write: "*Slave societies can hardly disappear on their own. They generally only disappear along with the societies in which they were born.*" And you add: "*With one exception: in the last third of the 18th century, an international abolitionist movement*

emerged that was capable of commanding States to incorporate a certain number of humanist norms considered to be universal into positive law. Henceforth, it became possible to impose the abolition of slavery within established and stable slave societies from the outside."

You were thus announcing your third book, the one that has earned our prize, and which itself crowns this cycle of your work, which I hope will continue on such a vast and essential subject.

This third book, as I have already noted, is entitled: *La Révolution Abolitionniste*.

You write that slavery has never been a given, and, as Roman history shows with its servile wars and African history with its revolts, slaves have never easily accepted their condition—they ran away, they rebelled, they had to be guarded, threatened.

In Europe, for various reasons specific to our history, between late antiquity and the Middle Ages, slavery gradually disappeared and was prohibited. However, it survived outside Europe. Europeans as early as the 16th century (English, Spanish, French, Dutch and Portuguese in particular) had developed and preserved it in their overseas colonies, in America and in the East. Some of the states that made up the future United States banned slavery before the end of the 18th century but it was maintained in the early 19th century in the Caribbean, the southern United States and much of Latin America until the abolitionist revolution wiped it out. For it to disappear, for its prohibition to become widespread, a total rupture was necessary, in a word, indeed, a revolution, but a revolution that took time.

This revolution began in people's minds at the beginning of the 18th century, and came into reality in the 1780s, continuing on until the beginning of the 20th century and including the first abolitions, the ban on the slave trade, the American civil war and many other events.

The reasons, the intellectual causes of this revolution were philanthropy, the enlightenment, Christianity—mainly Protestant, political and economic liberalism. As far as France is concerned, our entire liberal tradition participated in this movement: with Montesquieu, Madame de Staël, Constant, Say, Guizot, Broglie, and Tocqueville. Your nuanced pages show that the causes have been complex and that the paths have been multiple and convergent. If certain countries, such as in the Americas, the North of the United States and, in Europe, England, were historically essential to the first abolition and condemnation of the slave trade, the movement was indeed born in Europe, particularly in France, where slavery, which had long been prohibited, had spread to the colonies and had been codified there. There were, as you write, "national paths and a global dynamic" at the heart of the West, which then inspired the rest of the world until it became formalized with the universal imperatives of the 20th century.

While refraining from summarizing your book depicting this revolution, which represents all of its depth and complexity, in front of an audience that knows and appreciates your works, I will simply conclude my remarks by stressing that the merit in our eyes of your last book lay in two elements: the moral and historical importance of the subject and the strength and finesse of your analysis.

On the importance of the subject: the abolitionist revolution is part of what Tocqueville called the democratic movement that has dominated world history for three centuries. This is one aspect though there are others: the generalisation of suffrage, the emancipation of women, and the political redistribution of income.

On the finesse and strength of your analysis: they always complemented and reinforced each other, showing prowess because there was no more difficult subject—a subject in which the heterogeneity of peoples and the homogeneity of their aspirations

are intertwined, the relations between colonies and metropolises, the complementarity of maritime trade and continental production, the diversity of climates and agriculture, the evolutions and struggles within political regimes, the rivalry of powers, the radicalness of ideas and the slowness of reforms, the strength of the ideal and the prudence of action.

These are the reasons, dear Sir, why our jury chose to award our prize to your book. Here, ladies and gentlemen, are the explanations we felt bound to provide you.

Jean-Claude Casanova