



## The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World

by Andrea Wulf

Before I started reading this book, the only thing I knew about Alexander von Humboldt was that Frederick Law Olmsted found him worthy enough to name one of the parkways connecting his Buffalo, NY park system after him. And being active in the Sierra Club, I should have heard of his name somewhere in the past. But I, as well as most people in North America, was totally unaware of his existence.

After reading, I consider this book is a **MUST READ** for anyone who wants to know the full history of the environmental movement. Von Humboldt **STARTS** the movement. He is the first one who puts all the pieces together to show the interdependency of life on this planet, as well as the now established concept of climate zones based on climate and altitude that do not vary across the globe. This is a man who conversed with Thomas Jefferson, was a friend and advisor to Simon Bolivar, and was the rock star of 19th century European society (so much so that advisors to Napoleon Bonaparte talked him out of deporting von Humboldt from France due to the prestige he brought to the Parisian science community).

The book follows his adventures through South America (where he formulated his climate zone ideas), through to his days in high society (while publishing the results from his adventures for both scientific and common readership), interspersed with his interdisciplinary forays with literary giants like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The final chapters focus on the effects of his writing on people like Charles Darwin, Henry Thoreau and John Muir. Written out of history in Anglophile lands during the German culture purge during WWI, his stature as one of the giants of scientific history has been obscured. This book does homage and justice to a man who deserves to be placed back on the pedestal as the spark that led to the subsequent scientific discoveries of the modern world.

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