

Alexander von Humboldt

Fall 2024

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

I. IF POSSIBLE, PLEASE TRY TO READ THE BOOK BEFORE SEPTEMBER 10th. IF NOT, READ ALL THAT YOU CAN.

General Questions for discussion during the first (September 10th) and last (November 12th) classes.

1. In reading Andrea Wulf's book, what struck you most?
2. How normal do you think Humboldt was? How do you assess him?
3. What did you personally like about him?
4. What did you find incredible?
5. What remains mysterious or unexplained about him? What's your guess?
6. What in your mind were his most important achievements, contributions, inventions?
7. 'Nature is the domain of liberty,' Humboldt said, because nature's balance was created by diversity which might in turn be taken as a blueprint for political and moral truth." (Wulf, Chapter 8,) In your opinion, what are the implications of this quote?

II. LEAD A TEXT DISCUSSION

For Text Discussions #1 - 4* (Weeks 2, 4, 7, and 9) Coordinators will provide quotes and discussion prompts, which discussion leaders may curate and improve. Please sign up to moderate/lead one of these discussions.

III. GIVE A MINI-TALK THAT SHARES YOUR FINDINGS ON A HUMBOLDT TOPIC

In addition to leading book discussions, please look for "footprints" that Alexander von Humboldt left. His footprints are everywhere. See TOPICS, below. Feel free to combine several related topics, and you are not limited to one topic.

| Week | HOUR I | Discussion Leader/ Moderator | Hour II | Discussion Leader/ Moderator |
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| #1 September 10 Humboldt's early life and Setting the Table for Alexander von Humboldt | Introductions and reactions to the text. See the seven questions on Course Assignments page | Chuck and Sidney | Video: Attenborough Documentary Discussion | Chuck |
| #2 September 17 | Text Discussion #1. Chapters 1-7 See selected quotes for #1 Coordinators will give Moderator/discussion facilitator suggested discussion prompts. | Karen Klingon | Humboldt Topic/s shared by classmates -Humboldt's times/the 18 th century/The Age of Enlightenment | David Wood |
| #3 September 24 | Humboldt Topic/s shared by classmates -Goethe, the man, and the world through his eyes -Goethe's concept of the marriage of art and science | Barbara August | Video/Topics: Smithsonian Humboldt Exhibition -The French and American Revolutions -The Industrial Revolution and the growth of literacy -Inventions of the 18 th century -Prussian Mining Academy and work in the mines -Galvanism -Aime Bonpland -Slavery and indigenous peoples -Connecting and mapping the two river basins -Humboldt's shortcut across the Andes to Chimborazo -Who was Carlos Montufar? -Naturgemalde -Lima and ancient civilizations -Magnetic equator -Humboldt Current | |

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| #4 October 1 Humboldt and the United States of America | Text Discussion #2/4* Chapters 8 and 19 See selected quotes, attached. Coordinators will give Moderator/discussion facilitator suggested discussion prompts. | Class Member | Humboldt Topic/s shared by classmates -Thomas Jefferson – esp. The National --- Parks -John Muir | Patricia Becker |
| #5 October 8 | Humboldt Topic/s shared by classmates -Church paintings (Peale’s paintings) | Mike Boday | Smithsonian Video: Mammoth -Smithson -Peale’s paintings | |
| #6 October 15 Humboldt, Emerson, and the Transcendentalist poets | Humboldt Topic/s shared by classmates Kant and <u>The Critique of Pure Reason</u> -Emerson – esp. “Nature” -Whitman – esp. “Leaves of Grass” -Thoreau – esp. <u>Walden</u> -Rationalism v. Empiricism (Goethe, Kant); transcendentalism -American Transcendentalists (Emerson, et al) | Class Member Sidney | Humboldt Topic Peale and Humboldt | Karen Klingon |
| #7 October 22 Networking and Influencing | Text Discussion #3 Chapters 9 – 13 See selected quotes Coordinators will give Moderator/discussion facilitator suggested discussion prompts. | Class Member Chuck | Humboldt Topic/s shared by classmates -Rachel Carson’s <u>Silent Spring</u> -Charles Darwin, <i>The Beagle</i> , and <u>The - Origin of Species</u> | Class Member |
| #8 October 29 | Humboldt Topic - <u>Cosmos</u> (especially Book Two) | Bill Hollinshead | Humboldt Topic/s shared by classmates -Galvanism – “animal electricity” -Organic versus Inorganic matter -“Formative drive” – the “Gordian knot of | Class Member |

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| | | | <p>the processes of life”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Views of Nature -Cosmos (especially Book Two) -Isotherms and Isobars -Collaborative Model of Scholarship | |
| <p>#9 November 5 A Lasting Legacy?</p> | <p>Text Discussion #4 Chapters 14 -17 See selected quotes Coordinators will give Moderator/discussion facilitator suggested discussion prompts.</p> | Class Member | <p>Guest Speaker - Humboldt Award Recipient</p> | |
| <p>#10 November 12 Finale</p> | <p>Revisiting questions from Week I</p> | All Class Members | | Chuck and Sidney |