



# The realization of a dream: Spain's role in Humboldt's American expedition



SCIENCE  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Thu, November 14, 2019

## Venue

Former Residence of the Ambassadors of Spain, 2801 16th St NW, Washington, DC 20009

[View map](#)

## Admission

Free, [RSVP required](#)

## Credits

Presented by the Cultural Office of the Embassy of Spain. Image: painting of Alexander von Humboldt by Joseph Karl Stieler, 1843

Science Historian Dr. Sandra Rebok digs into Alexander von Humboldt's linkage with Spain.

The crucial role Spain played in the preparation of Alexander von Humboldt's scientific expedition to Spanish America in 1799 generally does not receive the attention it deserves. What were the reasons for the arrival of the Prussian explorer in Spain? How did he obtain permission from the Court in Madrid for this unprecedented expedition? And what did the monarch Carlos IV expect from him?

The lecture answers these questions regarding the diplomatic negotiations, but also discusses Humboldt's collaboration with the local scientific community, mainly in Madrid. How did this collaboration continue during his expedition in the New World? And under which circumstances did he develop his exploration voyage? Finally, it reflects on the opportunities and risks that opened up through this arrangement, both for Humboldt as well as for the Spanish Crown.

## ABOUT SANDRA REBOK

Dr. Sandra Rebok is a historian of science, author and scientific consultant. She worked for many years at the Spanish National Research Council and was a Marie Curie Fellow at the Huntington Library in California. Her research and publications focus on the globalization of science, intellectual networks and transnational scientific collaborations during the 19th century.

She has over twenty years of experience in Humboldt scholarship; she is the author of several books and numerous articles on Humboldt and is the editor of three of his works in Spanish. Her most recent book discusses his intellectual



exchange with Thomas Jefferson (*Jefferson and Humboldt: A Transatlantic Friendship of the Enlightenment*, 2014) and her forthcoming monograph analyzes his position between the Spanish Empire and the expanding United States (*Humboldt's Empire of Knowledge: From the Royal Spanish Court to the White House*, 2020).

She is currently working on a book project that analyzes the networks of knowledge Humboldt established within the U.S. and his impact on the development of sciences in this country (*Expanding the Frontiers of American Science: Alexander von Humboldt's Networks of Knowledge*). In addition, she has many years of experience in communication of science and has curated several exhibitions in the field of history of science.