

The Edition

The research Alexander von Humboldt amassed during his five-year trek through the Americas in the early nineteenth-century proved foundational to the fields of botany, geography, and geology. But his visit to Cuba during this time yielded observations that extended far beyond the natural world. *Political Essay on the Island of Cuba* is a physical and cultural study of the island nation. In it, Humboldt denounces colonial slavery on both moral and economic grounds and stresses the vital importance of improving intercultural relations throughout the Americas.

Humboldt's most controversial book, *Political Essay on the Island of Cuba* was banned, censored, and willfully mistranslated to suppress Humboldt's strong antislavery sentiments. It reemerges here, newly translated from the original two volume French edition, to introduce a new generation of readers to Humboldt's astonishing multiplicity of scientific and philosophical perspectives. In their critical introduction, Vera Kutzinski and Ottmar Ette emphasize Humboldt's rare ability to combine scientific rigor with a cosmopolitan consciousness and a deeply felt philosophical humanism. The result is a work on Cuba of historical import that will attract historians of science as well as cultural historians, political scientists, and literary scholars.

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