

## Drake's Real History With Slaves Is Complicated

To all the people who are lobbying to remove the Larkspur Landing sculpture as well as the street and high school name of Sir Francis Drake in Marin County, I feel that it's very important that they know the whole story of his personal evolution in relation to his brief, early years in the slave trade.

According to research, Drake intensely disliked the practice. But, at age 26, he was offered his first chance to become a ship's captain. As a Drake historian, here are my findings:

Although Drake's first captainship was in assistance to his cousin John Hawkins' moving of African slaves to Spain's New World, I'd like to note that Drake later befriended many runaway slaves, known as "the Cimarrones" in Panama during his raid on a Spanish mule train in 1573. One of those men, a man named Diego, became a trusted friend of Drake's for many years. He was with Drake during his voyage of circumnavigation that brought him to Marin County.

Later, Drake was one of the very first ship captains to bring black sailors aboard his ships with the promised commitment of equal pay for equal work.

There is much to learn about this remarkable man who visited Marin and peacefully bonded with the Miwok people for five weeks in the summer of 1579. I welcome those who are interested in truly knowing more about Vice Admiral Sir Francis Drake to visit the website [SFDrakeFoundation.org](http://SFDrakeFoundation.org).

— Duane Van Dieman, Mill Valley



## Drake Jewel Signified His Bond With Africans

In my letter posted here last month, I noted – as a Sir Francis Drake historian – that, while in Panama shortly after his early, brief experience in the slave trade, Drake developed a close friendship with "this Cimarrones", a group of runaway slaves. One was a man named Diego, who accompanied Drake on the voyage of world circumnavigation that brought him to the shores of Marin in 1579.

While here, Drake and his crew bonded peacefully with the native Miwok people (who made Drake and honorary chief). He also was one of the first sea captains to bring Blacks aboard his ship's with the promise of equal pay for equal work.

I like to add that a few years after Drake's knighthood in 1581, Queen Elizabeth I presented a beautiful ornament known as the Drake jewel to Sir Francis. On the jewel's front is an image of the Queen. On the reverse is a bust of an African, in profile, superimposed over the profile of a European. It was Drake's most valued possession.

The Queen understood that the struggle against Spain's increasing control of Europe, and in the New World, required the working together of the Anglo and African – two races who both shared a hatred of Spanish tyranny. The jewel symbolized the Queen's recognition of Drake's alliance with black people, working together for a common cause.

Drake learned from his early mistakes and matured to become a major force against oppression. He also became a vice admiral, and key figure in the defense of England during the attack of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

*English author and foremost Drake historian, Dr. John Sugden ("Sir Francis Drake"), commented on the above letter: " You are spot on with your observations about Drake, and very right to highlight the importance of the Drake jewel, which was sent to Drake by the Queen as a New Year's Gift, and which paid due regard to his advocacy of the equality of black and white allies. The figures stand side by side as equals. It is a remarkably modern image, and astonishing in that this is an Elizabethan artifact from the 1580s. I know of no Elizabethan other than Drake who would have caused such an image to be made, and he was proud to wear it."*

