

Marin County's "Drake Debate"

As a local Sir Francis Drake historian, the subject of this current controversy is very dear to me. While I am a strong supporter of the Black Lives Matter movement and acknowledge Francis Drake's involvement with his cousin, John Hawkins, short-lived slave trade in Drake's early life, I sincerely feel that a more complete view of the achievements and motivations of his full and remarkable career should be much better known before any decisions are made regarding the future of his name being publically displayed in Marin. Because of Drake's peaceful, five week, stay in Marin during the summer of 1579, we have an amazing and incredibly important historic tie to Elizabethan England here in the county.

I'm a 68-year native of Mill Valley and researched the life of Sir Francis Drake since 2001. I've really been taken aback by much of what I've heard and read about Drake here in the county recently. Included on this webpage are three letters and an op-ed article that I contributed to the Marin Independent Journal and sent to the Marin County Board of Supervisors, City Mayors of Marin And the Tamalpais Union High School District. The website version of the second letter includes a comment about it by England's foremost Drake historian, author Dr. John Sugden ("Sir Francis Drake"), who has favorably reviewed my research. **Dr. Sugden's thorough research is featured on this webpage in an important, detailed article about Francis Drake's treatment of Blacks and Native American people entitled, "UP FROM SLAVERY: DIEGO AND FRANCIS DRAKE". Other important contributions by Sugden are also available on this web page.**

The letters and op-ed are brief and informative. They are designed to put into perspective the common accusations that Sir Francis Drake was a "slaver". It should be noted that Drake was a junior officer on the two slaving voyages and made no decisions regarding the ship's contents or destinations of Hawkins' fleet. I have rarely heard any reference pertaining to Drake's close ties with many Blacks, his friendly relationship with Native Americans, or his many great accomplishments that began shortly after that chapter in his young life was behind him. Of the over 40 years as a sailor, only about two were with Hawkins.

In reference to some of the things I've recently read, I'd like to also point out that Francis Drake never owned slaves and was never historically shown to be a "rapist", a "murderer"... or even a "pirate", except, perhaps, to the Spanish. Working covertly with Queen Elizabeth I as a "privateer", he became a man on a life's mission of confronting tyrannical, Spanish aggression. During his lifetime, Sir Francis Drake became a knight, a master navigator, a world circumnavigator, a leader against Spanish tyranny, a Vice Admiral, a major defender of England, a great explorer, a mayor of Plymouth, a member of Parliament, and one of the most inspiring and forward thinking men of his era.

I sincerely believe that, if Drake's major accomplishments and personal motivations were commonly known to the people here in Marin, the memory of Vice Admiral Sir Francis Drake would be celebrated, not condemned. Worth noting is that in all of Drake's raids against Spanish in South America (during his voyage of circumnavigation that brought him to Marin), no one was killed. The one Spanish sailor that was injured was invited to Capt. Drake's table. Drake only used force when absolutely necessary.

The discovery I claim to have made regarding Drake's true California landing site is irrelevant to my current efforts. Thank you for taking the time to take a serious look at Dr. Sugden's contributions as well as my personal research. I'm hoping that the information I've provided here on my website will be important reading for those who will be making the final (and potentially very costly) decision of the future of Sir Francis Drake's name being publicly displayed in Marin County.



~ Duane Van Dieman

