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Sir Francis Drake - I

Lead: Part scoundrel, part tyrant, part patriot, Francis Drake, for generations of his countrymen, was the symbol of England's greatness.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Drake was born in Devonshire, southwestern England in the early 1540s, the last years of the reign of King Henry VIII. His father was a tenant farmer, but also an ardent Protestant lay preacher. In 1549 the family had to flee to southeast England during one of the Catholic uprisings common to the West

Country. In those the years the nation was struggling over whether to stay with Protestantism or return to the Roman Catholic Church. Drake's lifelong and enthusiastic commitment to the Protestant faith and apparent delight in tweaking the tail of Catholic Spain may be traced to the experiences of his troubled youth.

Apprenticed at the age of 13 to an old sea captain, Drake got his first taste of saltwater plying the treacherous ports and waters of the North Sea coastline. When his master died, he left the little ship to his apprentice, and there in the coastal trade Drake probably would have remained were it not for an accident of kinship. His family was distantly

related to the powerful seafaring Hawkins family of Plymouth, and young Francis, seeking new challenges, sold his ship and volunteered for service in his cousins' fleet.

He first encountered the Spanish in a series of early voyages to the West Indies, one of which was in the company of his relative John Hawkins, slave trader, future treasurer, and controller of the Royal Navy, and one whose exploits had earned him the undying hatred of Spain who considered him a pirate. The little fleet was ambushed by the Spanish at the island of San Juan de Ulua off the coast of Veracruz, Mexico and limped home with Drake in command of one of the ships. The skirmish left him with

a growing reputation for coolness under fire and first brought him to the attention of Queen Elizabeth I, who had invested in the expedition. In 1572 Drake obtained from the Queen a privateer commission which was little more than a license to loot. Next time: Around the world with Francis Drake.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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