

## **Captain Richard Drake, Revelations Of A Slave Smuggler**

Source: Philip Drake (1860). *Revelations of a Slave Smuggler* (NY: Robert M. Dewitt, 1860).

The preface to this book describes the author as elderly and living in poverty in one of New York City's worst communities. The narrative was supposedly "dictated" by Drake, but its legitimacy has been questioned. The slave traders he describes are actual historical figures, but historians do not know whether the events of Drake's own life are fact or fictional. Some suspect the book was written by abolitionists to arouse opposition to slavery. Read and discuss these passages and then draw pictures or create three dimensional dioramas to illustrate the text.

### **Questions**

1. How did Drake's uncle acquire Africans for the trans-Atlantic slave trade?
2. What were conditions like for Africans who were being taken into slavery?
3. In your opinion, why would some historians suspect that this story was written by abolitionists opposed to slavery?

A. My uncle was making up a kaffle of slaves from several lots brought in by hunting parties. A kaffle is the common name for a train of slaves driven to the rivers or sea-coast. My uncle had a standing bargain for supplies, so there was no chaffering concerning prices. He bought by the twenties allowing so much merchandise for each score of picked negroes. A thirty-gallon keg of brandy, a half dozen pieces of colored cottons, and twenty-five pounds of gunpowder, were given for any prime lot. Different articles, such as iron spear-heads, coral beads, tobacco, and gilt trinkets, were exchanged proportionately for other lots. When the slaves were brought in by the hunters, they were fastened to stakes driven in the ground, by couples. Every morning my uncle went out to inspect a new batch driven in during the night. A mulatto overseer was his principal examiner - a burly, savage fellow, who knocked the poor blacks about without mercy. He would fell a negro senseless on the slightest provocation, and was constantly lashing them with a knotted leather whip. I ventured to remonstrate with my uncle about such treatment of the slaves, and was told that this mulatto was considered the best kaffle-driver on the coast. . . .

B. The business of inspection and choice of stock was done in a shady wood, near the centre of the town, where my uncle's quarters were. Shakoes whip cracked a signal for each squad's arrival and my uncle, in shirt and duck trousers, with a palm-leaf hat, walked up and down the fettered line, smoking his cigar. Shakoe was a sort of negro doctor as well as overseer, and could tell an unsound slave almost by a glance. He handled the naked blacks from head to foot, squeezing their joints and muscles, twisting their arms and legs, examining teeth, eyes, and chest, and pinching breasts and groins without mercy. The slaves stood in couples, stark naked, and were made to jump, cry out, lie down, and roll, and hold their breath for a long time. Women and girls were used no more gently than the men by this mulatto inspector.

C. The day before we were to start from Gambo, the branding was done. . . . The slaves were fetched up singly, made to lie down on their faces, and thus held by a big negro, whilst another kept the branding irons hot in a fire close by, and a third applied them between the shoulders of the shrieking wretches. At first there was horrible yelling, for the poor people expected to be tortured to death and I was called upon to talk to them in their own lingo, though my assurances had not much effect. Shakoe plied his leather till it became actually crusted with blood. . . .

D. Our march to the river was a painful one. Shakoe and his assistant " devils," as the slaves, no doubt, considered them all, marked their way with blood. When we reached the Qua, and marched along its banks to the Calabar depot, I let the whole kaffle pass me, and the slaves presented a deplorable appearance as they moved along, scarred and bleeding. . . .

E. Our kaffle numbered one hundred and fifty full-grown males and females, and about a hundred youths of both sexes. . . . Dr. Maxwell and the two skippers of the vessels were at the station to receive us. Here the kaffle was overhauled and barber's work done. The heads of all slaves, without distinction of age or sex, were shaved, and they were scrubbed with sand, standing in the water. The schooners were fitted with bulkheads, in the fashion of regular slavers, and the sexes divided on each side.