On May 18, 1818, Spanish authorities in Monterrey interrogated three black men whom they had apprehended. The three had been prisoners of Jean Laffite on Galveston Island. The men had escaped from Galveston three or four months before their apprehension and interrogation. This article paraphrases their testimony.

The three men - Juan José María Castro; Iorca; and Ennalt Calvin - were asked to tell who they were, what they did, and what they had heard and seen on the Island.

Castro said that he was born on the island of Anguilla under the English flag and had been trained as a ship's cook. His ship, a Spanish schooner loaded with powder for the king, was taken by a French pirate near the coast of Campeche. Castro was brought to Galveston Island, kept a prisoner, and made to labor building log houses for three months.

News came to him that Mr. Laffite, commandant of the Island, wished to send all the Negroes and other colored prisoners to New Orleans for sale. Fearful of the future, Castro agreed with Iorca and Ennalt Calvin to escape. One night, they seized a launch and fled, taking with them two small-caliber muskets, a little meat, half a handkerchief of rice, one dozen small copper pans, and one-half pound of powder.

After Castro had been on Galveston a little while, "General Charles" [Allemande] arrived in a large schooner with one hundred French and German soldiers. Castro heard it said that General Charles was waiting for another, greater general commanding two thousand men, and that they would go toward Mexico.

Castro's statement continues, saying that there were six schooners of importance with artillery in the bay. On the Island there was a cannon of a pound and a half that gave the stroke of a hammer. The blacksmiths were making shovels, bars, picks, and adzes and repairing musketry. The shoemakers were making bearskin caps with brass stars on the front. The tailors were making uniforms. Inhabitants of the neighborhoods came to the Island to trade the most eatable things.

Iorca, a boy, declared that he was born on the coast of Guinea. Three years earlier the pirates seized him as a prisoner and carried him to Galveston. He was unable to give any reasonable account as he has only a limited knowledge of the English language.

The deposition of Ennalt Calvin declared that he was born on the island of Antigua San Juan of the English possessions. He had been a soldier since the age of seven years. He was brought to Galveston Island as a prisoner by the French pirate Captain Dampness who captured the Spanish merchant ship Dandy. The commander of the Spanish ship, Captain Doer, was headed for Havana when Dandy was seized near the Moore Castle.

When Calvin first came to Galveston as a prisoner Mr. Aury was the commandant. Calvin went with Aury to Matagorda in a convoy of one large and five small boats. The cargo of all the boats was armament. They stayed two months at Matagorda, where they built seven log dwellings and two large campaign shops, quarters for the soldiers. Aury lived separately with a mulatto woman.

While at Matagorda the pirates brought in two medium-size Spanish ships, one loaded with sugar candy, the other with ballast stone and brick. Aury learned from these ships that Mina was defeated. He was then joined by more than thirty Frenchmen with carbines and a small bronze cannon. Aury advised the Frenchmen to go no further but to rejoin him by land so that they could return to their homes.

A very strong wind carried three of Aury's ships on shore, where they remained. Burning the dwellings that he had made, Aury withdrew from Matagorda in the largest boat which remained, only to run aground with this vessel. Laffite sent a ship for the prisoners after Aury requested that he do so.

Calvin remained in Galveston and was used as a hunter and in unloading ships. A commandant or general arrived there with one hundred soldiers, a woman, and two children, a boy and a girl. Calvin did not know the name of the general. The general brought many iron shovels, bars, pickaxes, hoes, powder, and musketry. They began immediately making for the dragoons many green uniforms with red ruffles, bearskin caps, and deerskin slings for canisters of water. They had cannon and many wheels for moving the cannon. Four drummers
assisted the soldiers, who paraded every day.

They prepared to go toward Mexico and planned to land at the great bay near the mouth of the Rio Grande. Calvin had seen their map. The general and Laffite began attempting to get men to enlist for soldiers, and the blacks who did not enlist were to be sold in New Orleans. Fifty men, black and white, joined the general. As he did not wish to enlist, Calvin planned to escape from the Island.

Calvin related that a man named McFarland, a trader to all the Indian Nation, and others whose names he did not know, went to hunt horses with the Indians to mount the dragoons. When a large herd was gathered on the coast of the bay, McFarland made a big fire as a signal and the horses were ferried across to Galveston. This man also went about persuading people of all the neighborhoods to join the general.

The Spanish official Felipe Roque de la Portilla recorded these declarations on the eighth of May with great labors and delays because the interpreter, Don Joseph Maria Henderson, a doctor and resident of Monterrey, said that the prisoners spoke very bad English.

Source: Bexar Archives; "Robert Bruce Blake Transcripts," Volume 8, Green Cover Set, Clayton Library, Houston, Texas.