Galveston Island from 1816 through 1820 was inhabited by freebooters and filibusters who flew different flags. Luis Aury and Jean Laffite, the two principal corsair chieftains on the island, sailed under letters of marque from Cartagena and Mexico and flew their respective flags. Intent on freeing Mexico from Spain, filibuster Xavier Mina would have raised the Mexican Republican flag. James Long, hoping to carve out a private kingdom, had designed his own flag, the first lone star banner to fly over Texas.

One modern chronicler wrote, "In the old days vessels at sea did not fly their national flags, which were reserved for special events or for battle. When two strange ships met at sea, and after examining one another and deciding at last to fight, the flags went up as the first broadside boomed, not before. It would have been considered the height of rashness for a master to show a stranger at sea who he was before they were within speaking-trumpet distance. It was the custom to carry on board ship the flags or colors of several nations. For example, any master sailing in waters controlled by the Spanish, and thinking an approaching vessel Spanish, would run up the Spanish flag. If the ship was hailed in Spanish someone on board who spoke the tongue would answer." When the red banner was raised by a corsair it signaled that the other ship was to be boarded. Grappling irons appeared and if the targeted vessel was obviously out-manned it surrendered then and there.

New Granada, a loose federation of Spanish provinces, declared its independence in 1810. Cartagena, a province of the Granadine viceroyalty, declared her independence as a republic on November 11, 1811, and designed a flag of three concentric oblongs of red, yellow, and green with an eight-point white star on the green center field. New Granada adopted this flag on April 26, 1814, as her naval emblem. This was the flag which flew on the privateering fleets of Aury and Laffite. Writing to Governor W.C.C. Claiborne in 1814, Jean Laffite stated, "I have never sailed under any flag but that of the Republic of Carthagena [sic]." Did Laffite fly a blue pennant as his personal emblem as well?

One of the first flags of the new Mexican Republic was a blue and white checkered flag bordered in red created in about 1815. This was the flag flown on Galveston Island by Aury, Laffite, and Mina when they represented the Republic of Mexico.

Filibuster James Long designed his own flag of independence. It sported thirteen stripes of red and white and, in the upper left hand corner, a red square centered with a white star. It was made of silk bordered with a red fringe by Mrs. Jane Long and her sister, Mrs. Chesley Miller, in Mississippi.

In a letter dated July 7, 1819, Jean Laffite wrote to James Long, "They tell me, sir, that you have hoisted a flag. I please myself in believing, sir, that it is the same one which already exists, for it would be inconvenient to take another than the one for which we have been fighting for eight years; that would show a sort of inconsistency, indecision, and instability which would only produce a bad effect. Furthermore, our flag is recognized at Buenos Aires and Venezuela, and our corsairs who carry it are received as friends by the authorities of those two provinces. Such is sufficient reason for keeping the colors." Of course, Laffite was referring to the Cartagena flag and his letter had no apparent effect on Long's decision to fly his own flag.

Thus three flags, Cartagena's, Mexico's, and Long's, and not the official Spanish banner, flew over Galveston from 1816 through 1820.

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3 Stanley Faye, "Types of Privateer Vessels, Their Armament and Flags in the Gulf of Mexico," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* (January 1940), p. 128.
5 J.O. Dyer: "Some Sidelights on Buccanneering" (Galveston Daily News, April 30, 1920); "Laffite a Schemer as Well as an Executive" (Galveston Daily
Laffite Society members enjoy hors d'oeuvres and drinks aboard the River Barge during its stop at Galveston on the maiden voyage of an itinerary retracing the marine meanderings of Jean Laffite.

News, May 14, 1922.


4 Letter from Jean Laffite to James Long, July 7, 1819, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.