

On a clear Hill Country morning, the wind can trick you into thinking you're hearing voices. White oaks rustle and a line of banners snaps smartly against the sky. In that sound you can almost hear the layered story of Texas, six governments over five centuries and an argument that never really ends about what to remember and how to remember it. Flags are not neutral cloth. They are signals to neighbors, shorthand for pride and pain, and sometimes they are simply beautiful design with a job to do.



I grew up with sun-faded nylon along the fence and a stack of Heritage Flags folded in a cedar chest. We put them up for holidays and we put them up for funerals. I have two calluses that came from cinching halyards during a norther that rolled in at 35 miles per hour. When you handle flags you learn quickly that the past is heavy. You learn to respect that weight, not by pretending everything under those banners was noble, but by being honest about the people who lived under them, what they built, and what they broke.

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What "Six Flags of Texas" really means

Six national banners have flown over parts of the land we now call Texas. Some waved for centuries, others for just a handful of years. Together they explain why the highways carry Spanish names, why French cartographers mangled Karankawa words into maps, why Tejano families fought on both sides of a revolution, and why some front porches still spark debate. When you see the shorthand 6 Flags of Texas, you are looking at a condensed timeline.

Here is a compact reference for those six, with dates and straightforward identifiers. The designs varied by period, so I note the versions most often displayed in museums, schools, and parks.

| Flag | Dates Over Texas | Common Version Displayed | Notes | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Spain | 1519 to 1685, 1690 to 1821 | Burgundy Cross of Burgundy or later Royal Flag of Spain | Spanish presence came in two long spans, mission building and presidios across East, Central, and South Texas. | | France | 1685 to 1690 | Bourbon white flag with fleur-de-lis | Short-lived at Fort St. Louis on Garcitas Creek, but a cartographic legacy lasted. | | Mexico | 1821 to 1836 | Mexican tricolor with eagle and serpent | The 1823 version is most common, with the eagle crowned early on, then not, depending on year. | | Republic of Texas | 1836 to 1845 | Lone Star flag, blue vertical stripe with single white star, horizontal white over red | Adopted in 1839 and still the Texas state flag today, identical in design. | | Confederate States | 1861 to 1865 | Usually the First National, the Stars and Bars, or battle flag in a square | The national flags changed three times, and the square battle flag was a field sign, not a national banner. | | United States | 1845 to 1861, 1865 to present | American flag, current 50 stars since 1960 | Texas entered as the 28th state, left during the Civil War, and rejoined in 1865. |

That table hides the human edges. Spanish missions at San Antonio de Valero, later called ***sewn Navy flags*** the Alamo, stood within a mile of Apache and Comanche hunting paths. Mexico's flag flew while enslaved Black people were marched into cotton fields under Anglo settlers who ignored Mexico's gradual abolition laws. The Republic of Texas carried debt that would make a modern city council blanch. The United States flag covered the Indian Wars, the oil boom, and astronaut families in Clear Lake. None of this sits comfortably under a single narrative. That is exactly why we fly Historic Flags, to remember the texture.

The Spanish and the French, maps and missions

If you have not walked Mission San José early, with the sun low and the swallows tracing loops through the cloister arches, you might think of Spain in Texas as abstract. In stone and irrigation ditches, you see Spanish policy on the ground. The Cross of Burgundy banner signaled empire, a web of presidios and missions that claimed and shaped land through faith and labor. Those flags marked cattle brands, canal gates, and church bells. They also marked smallpox outbreaks and the coerced reordering of Native life.

France left lighter footprints but big ripples. René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, tried to plant a colony in 1685, overshot the Mississippi, and put a French flag in Matagorda Bay instead. Fort St. Louis failed within a few years, but it spurred Spain to tighten its grip. The fleur-de-lis still shows up on municipal banners from Port Arthur to the Sabine, a visual echo from a short chapter.

Mexico's eagle, a tricolor over Tejas

The Mexican tricolor flew over Texas for barely 15 years, and those were contentious ones. When you study property records from the 1820s, you see a complicated arrangement. Mexico welcomed Anglo settlers under empresarios like Stephen F. Austin, but expected conversion and a degree of assimilation. Conflicts grew over language, tariffs, and slavery. Flying the Mexican flag now, in a Texas setting, can honor Tejano leaders like José Antonio Navarro and Plácido Benavides, who risked their lives to push for rights within Mexico and later within the Republic. It also recognizes that the revolution of 1835 to 1836 did not pit Anglo versus Mexican in clean lines. Families split. Loyalties were not simple.

In practical terms, if you are sourcing a Mexican flag for a historical display, be precise with the emblem. The 1823 arms show an eagle on a cactus devouring a snake, sometimes with a crown in earlier imperial models,

then without under the republic. Mexican law specifies colors and ratios different from many imported flags. For authenticity, look for the right shade of green, closer to a medium forest than lime.

The Lone Star, a republic and a state

No banner in Texas triggers as much immediate recognition as that single white star. The Lone Star was not just graphic flair. It identified a breakaway republic struggling to be taken seriously by neighbors and creditors. The Republic of Texas adopted the current design in 1839, after experimenting with other standards, like the Austin or Zavala flags. When the state joined the Union in 1845, it kept the Republic's design as the state flag, making it both a Heritage Flag and a living emblem.



I have watched people in Houston argue more loudly about the ideal Pantone for Texas blue than they argue about property taxes. Pro tip for buyers: the state's guide recommends a deep, almost naval blue. Cheap imports tend toward a washed royal that fades in a single summer. Spend a little more on solution-dyed acrylic or heavyweight nylon if you plan to fly it in August. If you are staging a set of the six, I like a 3 by 5 foot standard on 20 foot residential poles. In gusty areas, drop to a 2 by 3 foot to save the fabric and your halyard clips.

Confederate flags, memory and judgment

This is the hard one, and it should be. The Confederate States flag appeared in Texas from 1861 to 1865, during secession and civil war. The national flags changed from the Stars and Bars to the Stainless Banner, then the blood-streaked last version that tried to fix a design issue with battlefield confusion. The square battle flag you see everywhere now was not a national flag, it was a field sign used by certain Confederate units.

Ultimate Flags Inc.

Address: 21612 N County Rd 349, O'Brien, FL 32071

Phone: [\(386\) 935-1420](tel:(386)935-1420)

Email: sales@ultimateflags.com

Website: <https://ultimateflags.com>

Google Maps: [View on Google Maps](#)

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When people include a Confederate banner in a six flags display, some do it to acknowledge political control over the land for those years. Others fly it to signal a current allegiance, which is why neighbors object. Here is judgment born of awkward conversations on porches and at VFW halls. If your goal is Honoring Their Memory and Why They Fought, widen the frame. Men on both sides bled under bad leadership and under bad ideas. The Confederacy fought to preserve slavery and a racial order. That is not opinion, it is documentary evidence in secession declarations and legislative acts.

Ways to remember without celebrating: visit battlegrounds with context-rich tours, read letters from Texas units that talk more about mud and hunger than glory, and consider displaying a regimental roll or casualty list rather than a battle flag. If you do include a Confederate national flag in a six flags set, pair it with dates, a small interpretive plaque, and a gesture to those enslaved under it. That is honest. It does not erase. It does not gloat. It asks for quiet.

The United States flag, continuity with change

The American flag came to Texas with statehood in 1845, left during the Civil War, and returned in 1865. From 1845 to 1861 it had between 28 and 33 stars, depending on year. Since 1960, we have had the 50 star field. This banner means different things in a refinery town than it does on a ranch fence. For a family with a Gold Star window during the Flags of WW2 era, it meant the price of a telegram you never wanted to open. For a newly naturalized neighbor in El Paso, it means promises held out by law and occasionally met by people.

If you fly American Flags at home, basic etiquette matters more than many realize. Illuminate after dark or bring it down at sunset. Keep it clean and mended. If you retire one, do not toss it. Many American Legion posts will help with respectful disposal. Wind ratings are not just marketing. A 40 mile per hour gust can snap a cheap grommet in two minutes. If you live along the Gulf Coast, consider a two-ply polyester with reinforced header. It will outlast nylon by a season.

Pirates in the Gulf, skulls, commerce, and myth

Drive down to Galveston Bay and you will see more Jolly Rogers than you see pelicans on a busy weekend. Pirate Flags are a different category from national banners, but Texas has a genuine pirate chapter. Jean Lafitte occupied Galveston Island from 1817 to 1821 under a letter of marque from Mexico, which made him more privateer than pure pirate, depending on who was judging. His men raided Spanish shipping and traded enslaved people illegally. Their flag was likely a variant of the skull and crossed bones, or crossed swords, black field for fear and identity.

Why fly a pirate flag on a skiff now? For some it is a shrug at rules, for others it is maritime kitsch. In a historical collection, it can mark a chapter where Texas was a hideout, a gray zone between empires. If you pair it with the Mexican tricolor and a British ensign in a teaching display, you can talk about privateering, the

blurred ethics of wartime commerce, and why certain symbols endure because they are graphic and simple, not because they are noble.

Flags of 1776, George Washington, and a deeper thread of design

Texas tells its story, but it sits inside a larger American strand of iconography that started with colonies fumbling toward union. Those early banners did not match modern myths. The so-called Betsy Ross circle of stars is unproven in that exact form, though circles appeared later. The Grand Union flag, with British Union Jack in the canton and 13 red and white stripes, almost certainly flew at the start of 1776. George Washington's own headquarters standard was a plain blue field with six-pointed stars in patterns that changed. He understood the power of consistent symbols, even while the army stitched whatever they could with available cloth.

When people fly Flags of 1776 on Texas porches, they often want to point to foundational ideals. If you do that, know what you are raising. The Gadsden with its rattlesnake has shifted meanings across centuries. The Pine Tree flag spoke to New England maritime rights. In a Texas context, the Bonnie Blue with its single star predates the Civil War and shows up in the 1810 West Florida revolt, a banner that later influenced the Lone Star. These connections give depth. They also keep us from reading modern politics into every stitch.

World War II flags and the memory of service

Some families display service flags with blue stars for members in uniform or gold stars for the fallen. These Flags of WW2 did not always follow strict formats at first, but their meaning stabilized quickly. In Texas, with its training bases in San Antonio, Wichita Falls, and Abilene, nearly every city had blocks with three or four blue stars in a row. My grandmother kept a scrapbook of envelope fronts with six foreign return addresses and a small flag with a single blue star in the front window from 1943 to 1945.

If you want to honor that era, you can hang a reproduction service flag indoors, fly the American flag outside, and add a small plaque with the names and units. Unit guidons and divisional patches can be framed under UV glass. Some towns will still read the names aloud on Memorial Day. Patriotism, Pride, and Freedom to Express Yourself need not be loud to be true. Sometimes it is a single name spoken clearly to an audience of eighty.

Why fly historic flags at all

Why Fly Historic Flags, and why now, in a state that does not agree on barbecue styles, let alone history textbooks? Because the act of raising a banner can start a conversation where a bumper sticker would end it. Because kids learn dates better with pictures. Because the output of a healthy civic culture is not uniformity, it is argued memory.

I have seen front yards that handle this with grace. A family in New Braunfels mounted six short poles along a fence line, at equal height, evenly spaced, each with a small plaque. They do not fly them every day. On San Jacinto Day in April, or on statehood day in December, they raise the set. Cars slow. People who disagree on plenty nod at the care, not just the choice.

If you fly Heritage Flags, think in seasons. The Texas sun and wind are ruthless. A spring rotation for cotton or commemorative cotton-linen blends, a summer rotation for heavy-duty polyester on the main pole, and a winter run of nylon does two things. It protects the budget and it keeps the colors bright. **US Navy Flags**

The tricky stuff, conversations at the fence line

You will be asked what your flags mean. That is part of the deal. The hardest talk I had came after we put up a six flags set for a church's Texas history fair. A neighbor asked if the Confederate flag meant we endorsed it. We walked the row together. Spain, France, Mexico. We paused at the Lone Star and told a story about Juan Seguín. We stopped at the Confederate national flag and read dates and a little brass tag that said, simply, 1861 to 1865, four years, and a cost not yet counted. Then we pointed to the United States flag and a photograph of three parishioners in uniform from 1944. It was not perfect. She was still uneasy. That is okay. Symbols that never make anyone uneasy are usually empty.

Practical care and etiquette, so your flags honor their subjects

It is one thing to have good intent. It is another to have your flag tear itself free in the first storm because you chose the wrong clip. A little experience goes a long way.

- Choose the right size to pole height ratio. A 20 foot pole pairs well with a 3 by 5 foot flag. If winds often exceed 25 miles per hour, drop to 2 by 3 to reduce strain.
- Prioritize fabric for conditions. Nylon shows color and flies in light wind, good for calm days. Two-ply polyester survives coastal gusts and winter fronts.
- Use marine-grade snap hooks and a braided polyester halyard. Cheap zinc clips and cotton rope will corrode and rot quickly.
- Inspect monthly. Look for fraying at the fly end and loose stitching at the header. Trim frays and resew hems before damage spreads.
- Add context where needed. A small weatherproof plaque with dates under a historic banner invites learning and lowers misreadings.

If you host a public display, check city ordinances. Some municipalities limit total pole height or the number of flags per property. Most allow a national and state flag at any time. If you raise Patriotic Flags for holidays, plan for Memorial Day, Flag Day on June 14, Independence Day, San Jacinto Day on April 21, and Veterans Day. Keep rope quiet at night. A halyard slapping a pole in a north wind is the fastest way to sour a neighbor on your love of history.

Local places that teach through flags

Good museums do a better job than a backyard can. The San Antonio Missions National Historical Park displays Spanish and indigenous symbols together, which matters. The Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin often includes flag cases with original or period-correct reproductions. Coastal towns like Galveston host reenactments that include Lafitte era flags, with the correct pirate motifs for the time. Plenty of county courthouses still fly combinations of the six outdoors. If you see them, notice placement. The United States flag always holds the place of honor, typically highest or to its own right from the viewer's perspective. The Texas flag comes next, then other banners by local rule or custom. Etiquette exists to reduce arguments before they start.

When memory meets marketing

Theme parks popularized the phrase Six Flags of Texas for modern audiences. That is not a criticism, just a fact. Commercial spaces tend to sanitize. They trim years that are hard to stage. They choose the crispest, most symmetrical versions of designs. That is fine for a ride queue. At home, or in schools and libraries, we

can go deeper. Use dates that match real control, not just presence. Include Tejano voices under the Republic. Explain that the United States flag over Texas changed star counts. Describe why some Civil War Flags provoke pain and what responsible context looks like. If someone asks why a pirate flag sits in a case with Mexican and British ensigns, talk about privateering laws and how nations outsource violence at sea.

A personal coda, cloth and conversation

My favorite flag story is small. One July I helped a neighbor replace her tattered American flag. She was eighty-two, a nurse who had followed her Air Force husband from Laughlin to Lubbock and back. We took the old flag down at dusk, folded it as best as our imperfect training allowed, and set it aside for the Legion. We raised the new one, the halyard sang a little, and she said, almost to herself, I like when it snaps, it sounds brave.

That sound comes from air, cloth, and a line under tension. It comes from people who choose to remember fully, not comfortably. When we fly Historic Flags in Texas, when we line up the six or add a seventh to speak to a particular chapter, we are choosing to be caretakers of memory. We are choosing to show our kids that Patriotism is not one color and not one decade. It is the discipline of Never Forgetting History, the grace to face what was wrong, and the courage to carry forward what was right.

The wind will keep coming. The cloth will wear. That is fine. Replace it. Keep the halyard tight. Keep the stories open. And let the sky do what it does best, hold color without taking sides.

