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The Usurper of the Lone Star Flag

Carlos A. Morales-Ramírez

Abstract: This article delves into the historical and cultural significance of flags, tracing their origins to early human civilization and highlighting their diverse roles as markers of administration, hierarchy, religion, and identity. The study underscores the intrinsic plasticity of flags as a crucial factor contributing to their enduring and widespread use over time. Unlike other national symbols, flags can be readily observed by multiple individuals simultaneously, making them potent vehicles for communicating values and transformations across history. Modern vexillologists emphasize the paramount importance of designing flags that are easily recognizable from a distance, in motion, and across varying sizes. The principles they recommend advocate for simplicity, uniqueness, basic colors, and meaningful symbolism. While these principles have gained prominence relatively recently, an examination of national flags reveals their alignment with these design conventions. The article delves into design families, where flags from different countries share similarities, often based on color choices. The article also addresses instances of intentional and unintentional flag similarities, such as the Cuban and Puerto Rican flags, which were inspired by shared historical contexts. The potential for confusion arising from similar flag designs prompts some countries to create variants or regulations to differentiate their flags. The study concludes by focusing on a comparative analysis of the flags of Texas, the United States, and Chile, unraveling their historical connections, shared elements, and broader implications.

Flags have been around for centuries and their use dates to the earliest days of human civilization (Cordero Alvarado, 2014). Although the term vexillology – the study of flags – was not coined until the 1960s by Whitney Smith, humans have used some form of flag as administrative markers, hierarchical rankings, and

religious symbols (Smith, 1975). As Smith (1975) details, the main reason for the extensive use of flags through time is their plasticity. Unlike other national symbols such as a seal or shield, the use of flags is more prominent since these can be seen simultaneously by multiple people (Smith, 1975). Flags serve as a vehicle for

Carlos A. Morales-Ramírez is an Adjunct Professor at West Chester Univesrity. He can be reached at CMorales-Ramirez@wcupa.edu.

communicating a place's values, including its transformation throughout history (Endrst, 1992). They are also used to express cultural traits, political ideologies, and/or important historical moments (Erbez & Balbuena Castellano, 2004). Flags today are more visible and important than ever as evidenced by the recent interest in redesigning or adopting new flags (Lichtgarn, 2023).

According to many vexillologists a flag should be the first representation of a place, organization, or person, and it should be seen at a distance, in movement, and in many sizes (Kaye, 2020). Since its purpose is to attract attention and have mobility, vexillologists recommend some principles when designing flags (Burton, 2015). Although there are many different suggestions for a good flag design, most vexillologists agree on keeping it simple yet unique, using basic colors, and having a meaningful symbolism (Kaye, 2020). These principles or recommendations have been created recently, but if we look at most national flags it seems like they follow these design conventions. This is why we may find flags that are either like another one or the same. Burton (2015) provides some examples of what he calls design families, which are flags that share similarities mainly with the choice of colors. Groups include: (1) India, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ireland; (2) Singapore, Indonesia, Malta, Monaco, Poland, and Peru; and (3) the many Arab state flags with the Pan-Arab colors, among others.

It is known that some flags are similar to others on purpose, while others just coincidentally look alike. Some flag designs took inspiration from others like the Cuban

flag taking the stars and stripes elements from the United States (U.S.) flag as an inspiration, and the Puerto Rican flag being like the Cuban flag but with the colors inverted because the two flags served as anti-Spanish, pro-U.S. emblems (Johnson Barker, 2015). Johnson Barker (2015) also lists some examples of some flag designs being unintentionally identical such as the flags of Chad and Romania, and the flags of Indonesia and Monaco. To avoid confusion between similar flags some countries forbid the draping of the flag or create variants (Johnson Barker, 2015). Regardless, confusion is still inevitable, and it has been seen with the two flags this article reviews – Texas, U.S., and Chile. Throughout this review, the flags of Texas and Chile are studied to gain a better understanding of their history, similarities, and importance.

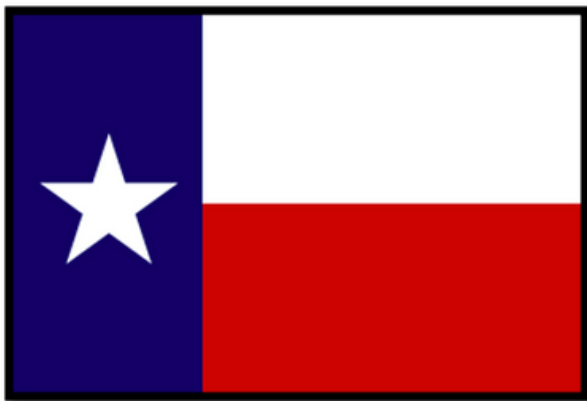
The Flag of Texas

Texas is one of the fifty states in the U.S. Its history includes periods of colonization – French, Spanish, and Mexican –, independence (1836-1845), both the Confederate and United States of America (Calvert et al., 2014). Throughout these periods multiple flags were flown over Texas before the current Lone Star Flag, including The Six Flags Over Texas. These Six Flags portray a picture of the state's colonial evolution before officially becoming a state (Davis, 1897). The flags include the ones of the Kingdom of Spain, the Kingdom of France, the Republic of Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the Confederate States of America, and the United States of America (Gilbert Jr., 1998, Maberry Jr., 2001). Flags play an important role in Texas, as it sheds light

on the state's historic periods (Avraham & Daugherty, 2012). A study by Avraham and Daugherty (2012), showed that the flag of Texas is one of most used symbols in the state. The Lone Star Flag, also used during the Republic period, is also recognized as one of the state's most known symbols (Hinojosa-Smith, 2001) and it came in second in a 2001 survey about North America's best flags (Kaye, 2001).

Figure 1

Texas' Current Flag



Note. Flag adopted in 1839. Image obtained with permission from Flags of the World <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/>.

The Flag of Chile

Chile is one of the 12 countries in South America. Chile's independence from Spain saw three historic periods –each period had its own flags (figure 2)– Patria Vieja [Old Homeland] (1810-1814), Reconquista [Reconquest or Recapture] (1814-1817), and Patria Nueva [New Homeland] (1817-1823) (Villalobos et al., 1974).

While the Chilean flag was designed first, there is no evidence showing the Texas flag copied or took inspiration from it (Hui, 2019). The current flag of Chile (Patria Nueva) was adopted 22 years prior

f the Texas flag in 1817 (Bordeleau, 2014). It is also known locally as the Lone Star Flag, *La Estrella Solitaria* in Spanish. Although the shade of blue is different and instead of vertical rectangle Chile's flag has a square in the first stripe, the resemblance of the Chilean to the Texan flag makes them almost identical. This is also not the first time another flag resembles the Chilean one.

Figure 2

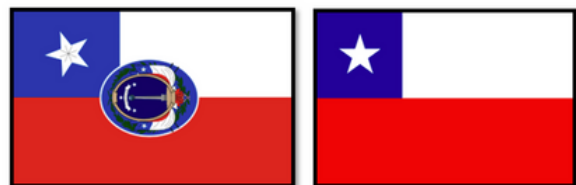
Historical Flags of Chile



Note. "Old Homeland" flag [*Patria Vieja* in Spanish] (left) and "The Reconquest" flag [*La Reconquista* in Spanish] (right). Image obtained with permission from Flags of the World <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/>.

Figure 3

National Flag of Chile



Note. The first design (right) was adopted in 1817. The current design does not have the seal in the center (left). The red represents the blood shed during the Independence war, the blue represents the sky and the Pacific Ocean, the white represents the snow-covered Andes, and the star alludes to progress and honor (Bordeleau, 2014). Image obtained with permission from Flags of the World <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/>.

The first Cuban flag of 1868 and the flag of the province of Catamarca, Argentina also resemble the Chilean flag (figure 4). The historic Cuban flag has a different ratio and the colors red, and blue are

inverted. This flag is the one that started the independence revolution, and it was the flag of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes – the Cuban planter that started the independence movement. The flag was short lived, as it was carried by the Independence Army and was later replaced with the current flag (Ponte Domínguez, 1950). The senate of the province of Catamarca ordered the creation of the flag under Law No. 5.231 in 2011 and Fabián Martinena’s design was the winner of a competition (Perazzo, 2015). Neither of these flags alludes to any inspiration from the Chilean or the Texan flags.

Figure 4

Flags with similar elements



Note. Cuban flag 1868 (left) and flag of Catamarca, Argentina (right). Image obtained with permission from Flags of the World <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/>.

The First 'Usurper' Flag

There is one more flag that Chile and Texas had that is an exact replica of the other – Chile’s “Constituent Flag” *la Bandera Constituyente* of the 1859 Revolution and Texas’ “Burnet Flag” used during the Republic of Texas period (1836-1839). The first flag was designed in Chile in 1859 when the people of the Atacama region rebelled against Chile’s central government during the Constituent Revolution. The idea for the flag came from Pedro León Gallo, a political head of the revolution and sewn by his mother

Candelaria Goyenechea. The flag has been used as the official flag of the region of Atacama since 2003 (CONAVEX, 2017). The first flag of the Republic of Texas was also short lived, and it was created before Chile’s flag. It was approved as the National Standard by the Texas Congress on December 10, 1836, and it served as the Republic’s national flag until the creation of the current Lone Star Flag (Spain Jr., 1992). There is no evidence supporting the inspiration between the flags. At the time both flags were adopted there was no internet or any of the technical devices we have today; therefore, it is very unlikely that either place knew about the other’s flag.

Figure 5

Chilean and Texan historical flags



Note. Constituent Flag of Chile (left) and the Burnet Flag of the Republic of Texas (right). Image obtained with permission from Flags of the World <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/>.

Having similar flags can create obvious confusion. According to some studies, Texans know their flag and recognize it as one of the state’s main patriotic symbols, using it everywhere from car license plates to politics (Hinojosa-Smith, 2001). However, in 2010, Texans started using the Chilean flag as their state flag. This was because of the exposure the Chilean flag had during the 2010 Copiapó mine accident (Grace, 2010). Another example was noticed when individuals were using the Chilean flag emoji when referring to

Texas. This incident made a Texan lawmaker file a “resolution” to make individuals stop using the incorrect flag emoji (Herskovitz, 2017). The reason behind this cannot be attributed solely to lack knowledge about the Texan flag, as there are no current emojis for any of the U.S. states. (Also, the flag emojis are small enough to be easily confused).

The First Flag Lesson

The first exposure to flags and their symbolism in almost every country is in schools. Not only do most social studies and history curricula have a section on flags (more specific patriotic symbols), but in some countries like the U.S. schools start with a ritual that promises our alliance to the country and its flag (Bennett, 2004; Martin, 2014). It is expected that schools teach students how to respect and honor their country through the Pledge of Allegiance (Bennett, 2004). Although Chile does not have a formal ritual in schools, they do have the Pledge to the Flag [*Juramento a la Bandera*], which is considered one of the main military rites in which individuals take a solemn commitment to the patriotic symbols (Jarufe Bader, 2023). The Pledge to the Flag is part of a military ceremony celebrated on July 9. This ceremony commemorates the Battle of Concepción that occurred on July 9 and 10 of 1882 between Chile and Peru during the War of the Pacific. This act highlights the importance of the 77 young Chilean soldiers that fought until the end to defend the honor of their flag (Cuevas Valenzuela, 2014).

The intention of these rituals is to convey

nationalism (Martin, 2014). One of the biggest tools to express national identity are flags. Hence why these often are explored and studied in the social studies curricula as evidence by citizenship curricula across the world (Davidson & Liu, 2020; Osler, 2011; Piattoeva, 2009; Tupper & Cappello, 2012). The study of the symbolism of flags can start in early grades in many countries, where these are used to express cultural representation (Peng, 2009). This sense of national identity starts with a culturally relevant curriculum, which can include something as simple as flags. Flags not only serve as a pedagogical tool for teaching and learning, but they also provide an avenue for students to express their ethnicity and cultural background (Antrop-González, 2006). There is no surprise that even at a state level we will find flags in the state curriculum.

The curricula in Texas have emphasized patriotism and state symbols since the 1990s (Hutchins, 2016). The State Board of Education (SBOE) has adopted the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards to highlight what students should know and learn by subject. In Chapter 113, the Social Studies standards lists all the pedagogical knowledge needed by discipline and grade. Knowledge about the Texas flag starts at the Elementary Level in Kindergarten. Under the citizenship section of the knowledge and skills required at this grade, identifying the flag of the country and the state are listed first. By first grade, students are learning about the state patriotic symbols that include the Texan flag and in second grade students learn the pledge to the Texas flag. In these

standards, the flag is part of the knowledge and skills educators must fulfill until the fourth grade (TEA, n.d.).

The Six Flags Over Texas are part of many pedagogical materials and historical curricula required by the educational standards in Texas (Sutcliffe, 2001). These flags portray a picture of the colonial periods the states and the nations that ruled over it (Davis, 1897; Spain Jr., 1992). Texas has had other flags throughout its history (Alvarado, 2018), that allow educators to intertwine them with the important events surrounding the state (Roberts, n.d.). Along with all the pedagogic standards that support teaching the state flag, the Texas Education Code also requires all charter schools to display both the U.S. and Texas flag under 4 U.S.C. Sections 5-10 of the EDUC § 25.082. School Day; Pledges of Allegiance; Minute of Silence (D'Angelo, 2017). Texas is also the only state that can fly its flag at the same height as the US flag (USCB, n.d.), allowing more visibility.

Education in Chile [K-12] consists of the nursery, basic, and medium levels (*parvularia*, *básica*, and *media*, in Spanish respectively). The nursery education starts at six months and extends until age six, basic education is eight years between the ages of 6-7 and 13-14 (level 1-8), and the medium level is four years between the ages of 14-15 and 17-18 (level 1M-4M) (Ministry of Education, n.d. a). Most of the flags of Chile are part of the National Curriculum at various levels of the basic education. Under the subject of history, geography and social sciences, students learn about the current national flag at

level 1 (ages 6-7), as part of the fourth unit on 'national and local identities' (Ministry of Education, n.d. b). At level 3 (ages 8-9), under the math subject, students learn about the measurements of the different components of the flags, such as the square in the canton of the flag, the red and the white rectangles, and the perimeter of the star (Ministry of Education, n.d. b). Finally, the historic flags (Figure 2) are taught at level 6 (ages 11-12) under the history, geography and social sciences, as part of the second unit about the independence process (Ministry of Education, n.d. b). The Ministry of Education in Chile also promotes events to celebrate activities that commemorate their national symbols (Ministry of Education, n.d. a).

Nationalism [Regionalism] in Texan and Chilean Vexillology

Flags and patriotic symbols evoke values that correlate with nationalism and patriotism (Becker et al., 2017), while enhancing a sense of belonging (Schatz & Lavine, 2007). In the U.S., although the association to the national flag is not all positive, most individuals associate it with honor and egalitarianism (Becker et al., 2017). This was evident after the 9/11 tragedy when individuals started waving the American flag to show support and unity in honor of those who lost their lives (Bratta, 2009). Exposure to the national flag of a country can affect people's attitudes and behaviors depending on the circumstances or time (Shannon & Ledgerwood 2016); and this is also true of regional flags. Guéguen and colleagues (2017), noted that regional flags affect people's behaviors and create a sense of

attachment to the region, the history/culture, and traditions. On a more regional scale, the subnational flag was the most important symbol individuals have (Guéguen et al., 2017). Regional symbols, such as the flag, are positive symbols that allow individuals from an area to identify themselves, while it reinforces the region's internal integrity, and showcases the region's uniqueness (Šifta & Chromý, 2017).

In Texas, the state flag and its components are used for marketing and tourism (Avraham & Daugherty, 2012). Texans are proud of their history prior to becoming a state of the U.S., and their flag is a linkage to it (Spain, 2016). For Texans, the state flag represents their pride, history and strength, even outside of the state (Hutchison, 2006). It is flown throughout the state in various ways. Even the purpose of using the state flag varies depending on the scenario, although the 'Texas pride' is always attached to it (Deering, 2009). The flag is so important to Texans that in her book "How to be a Texan: The Manual" Andrea Valdez (2016) devotes a section on how to handle the Texas flag under the chapter of "Rites of Passage", stating: "There is no better way to showcase your pride than by flying the Lone Star flag in front of your house on the state holidays, but the true Texan knows a thing or two about how to do it correctly" (Valdez, 2016, pp. 46-47). Despite the recent confusions with the Chilean flag, the Texas flag is known worldwide due to the brief period of the Republic of Texas (Spain, 2016).

In Chile, there are many scenarios where nationalism is observed through the flag.

During Chile's Fiestas Patrias [Native Land Holidays] on September 18 and 19, it is expected for everyone to fly the national flag. However, in 2014 it was observed that 7 out of 10 homes, business or institutions were not displaying the flag or were displaying it incorrectly (Dartuwig, 2015). This led to students at the Autonomous University of Chile organizing groups to ensure homes, business and institutions knew how to fly the flag and did so during the Fiestas Patrias (Dartuwig, 2015). In 2010, during the rescue of 33 miners buried in San José, a display of national flags was seen in the streets of Copiapó, the town where the miners would be taken to once rescued (Peregil, 2010). This was seen as an act of national pride towards the engineers working to save the miners, the miners for fighting for their lives, and the Chilean Government (Peregil, 2010). Another event that unified Chileans through national symbols such as the flag was the 2010 earthquake that affected six of the country's regions. It is known that during tragedies societies enhance their cultural values through national symbols, and the flag helped Chileans throughout this aftermath (Korstanje, 2014).

Flags are also displayed during political disturbances. Although rarely studied, the Chilean flag acts as a tool to pressure the government and shame it into action (Benwell et al. 2019). In 2012, the residents of the Aysén Region flew national flags in protest against the government during a social and labor union movement. The flag served as a material symbol of defiance that brought the community together (Benwell et al., 2019). National flags have served as a

national identifier in activities outside of the country such as sports events. In sports, nationalism and national pride have a close linkage with the flag, and Chile is not an exception (Bairner, 2008; Shin, 2014). Chile has a law [Law of Rights and Duties in Soccer, *La Ley de Derechos y Deberes en el Fútbol* in Spanish] that allows for animated objects such as the flag to be used (Prensa Fútbol, 2015). In 2015, Chileans asked permission to display a giant flag during one of the games of Copa America and it was authorized. The giant national flag was displayed at various games (Prensa Fútbol, 2015). These are a few examples of the use and display of the national flag in Chile that shed light to the Chileans' sentiment of pride in their flag.

New Flag Debate

Changing a flag, or commissioning a change, is not as simple as one might think. Mississippi tried to change their flag back in 2001 unsuccessfully and it was not until 2020 when they successfully changed it. The new Mississippi flag is a great example of the power symbols have for individuals (Pereira, 2020). It represented those historical changes flags are intended to show as Whitney Smith (1975) detailed. An update or change to a flag can serve as a positive symbol for unity that can benefit the individuals living there as evident by Mississippi (Pereira, 2020). However, we have also had unsuccessful attempts to change a state flag. Oregon tried to change their flag back in 2009. Despite the state conducting a contest and selecting a new flag it never found a legislator to sponsor it. Without this important step, the referendum to change the state flag could

not be completed and it ultimately did not go anywhere (Kaye, 2009).

Internationally we have seen other failed attempts as changing a flag, as seen with the referendum to change the New Zealand and Fiji flags. In 2016, Fiji was supposed to unveil its new national flag during their national day on October 10; however, after the country's win in the Summer Olympics in Rio, the Prime Minister, Frank Bainimarama, decided to keep the current design (Roy, 2016). In the case of New Zealand, a referendum was passed to change the flag, although between 60-70% of the surveyed individuals voted to keep the current flag (Milne, 2015). Prior to this, it was already known that New Zealanders did not associate the same core values of equality with other national symbols such as the Silver Fern, as they did with the national flag (Sibley et al., 2011). The people did not vote in favor of a new flag after the final referendum and New Zealand kept the current (Annabell & Nairn, 2019). Australia is another country that has suggested to change the flag, but many believe it will never happen (Knaus, 2018).

Given the rich history of both Texas and Chile, there is no need to change their flag designs. Like the case of New Zealand, it seems difficult to persuade individuals from both locations to change it. The Texas pride characterizes Texans in a way that surpasses the state's boundaries (Hutchison, 2006). Like any national flag, the flag of Texas, although sometimes confused with the Chilean flag, is known outside of the U.S. (Spain, 2016), something that may not be the same for

other states. Although more research about the Chilean flag and its association with nationalism and pride are needed, the power the national flag evokes will always be correlated with nationalism and patriotism (Becker et al., 2017). If other countries' pursuit of changing their national flags is in an indicator to follow, Chile will not be a country that will consider changing its flag any time soon. So far neither Texas or Chile has started any significant process or referendum to change or modify their flags, and it may be the case for a long time.

Conclusion

This review highlights the complexities surrounding flags. These serve as the main symbol that identifies a nation or a place. While there are conventions of flag design it is inevitable to find similarities between them. Such similarities can often be overlooked but when confusing a flag for another it can create controversies, as seen with the recent confusion between the Texan and Chilean flags. While both places have had similar flags throughout their histories there is no empirical evidence of one copying the other or taking inspiration from it. To both Texas, U.S., and Chile their respective flag is a symbol of pride, that reminds individuals of their rich history. Its importance is highlighted in educational standards and lessons that include studying the flags. Although there has been some mix up with the flags, it is evident that individuals from both Texas and Chile have great knowledge of their flag and what it represents to them. A careful analysis of current attempts at changing flags suggests that neither Texas nor Chile should change

their flag as each of them already has an established worldwide presence. To conclude, there is no usurper of the Lone Star Flag. Moving forward both Texas and Chile should remain focused on continuing to embrace and promote their flags. This will reinforce understanding and appreciation of both flags and can further deepen and expand our knowledge of them.

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