They wrote,

Pictographs or ideographs—drawings of animals, commonly recognized objects, and humans—were popular in the Mediterranean area, China, India, what is now Mexico, and Egypt, where they became known as hieroglyphs. There is evidence that a system of movable type was devised in Asia Minor prior to 1700 B.C., the date of a flat clay disk found in Crete. The disk contained forty-five different signs that had been carved on individual pieces of type and then pressed into the clay.¹

The Phoenicians created an alphabet in 1500 B.C. and used colored fluids to outline its symbols to produce the pictographs. About 1,000 years later the Egyptians began using reeds from the Nile River to make papyrus, on which scribes using brushes or quills would mark with hieroglyphics. The different sheets of papyrus were then joined to form scrolls, which were stored in centers of learning. Around A.D. 100 parchment made from animal skins was used for special manuscripts or scrolls. But it was the Chinese who made the greatest two inventions leading to modern communication, paper and printing. Emery and Emery describe their contributions.

“At about the same time (A.D. 100) the Chinese invented a smooth, white paper from wood pulp and fibres and also discovered a way to transfer an ideograph from stone to paper after inking the surface,” they wrote.

Wang Chieh published what is considered the world’s oldest preserved book from wood blocks in A.D. 868. Large blocks could be carved so that one sheet of paper, printed on both sides, could be folded into thirty-two pages of booksize. Feng Tao printed the Confucian classics between 932 and 953 and in about 1045 the artisan Pi Sheng was inspired to devise a set of movable clay carvings—a sort of earthenware “type”—that could be reused.²

The technology of wood-block printing was not introduced in Europe until Marco Polo returned from China in 1295. But the Asian technology sped ahead, Emery and Emery write. Movable metal type of copper or bronze came into use in Korea in 1241.

Record keeping and communication were also important in what was to become Latin America before the arrival of the Spanish in

1492. The native Incas, Aztecs, and Mayans all had elaborate systems of recording, transferring, and storing records, including scribes who wrote on bark tablets and artisans who recorded information and pictures in stone carvings. The Incas, governing a territory that rose precipitously from the ocean to the mountains, used an elaborate network of runners to transmit messages of importance throughout their empire. The Aztecs, who developed both a university and libraries, used an early form of mass communication by hanging colored banners on the main public square of their capital city of Tenochtitlán, which is now known as Mexico City.

Although Hollywood movies have popularized the image of North American natives communicating through tom toms, war drums, and smoke signals, the intertribal communication systems were actually more complex and systematic than the movie image. A complex network of trails and footpaths spanned the continent and was traversed by specially trained couriers authorized to carry messages between tribes. James E. and Sharon M. Murphy described communication between tribes before the arrival of the Europeans.

“A complex system of native communications covered most of North America before white contact,” they wrote.

It was a unique network of trails and footpaths that crisscrossed the continent, passing through dense forests, over rivers and streams, across mountains and meadows. Traversing these trails were Indian runners, known as tribal messengers, who were officially recognized by governing systems such as those of the Iroquois in the East, the Cherokees in the South and Southeast, the Yuroks in the Northwest, and the Eskimos in present-day Alaska. Other tribes, having less complex tribal governing structures, named and trained young men, and sometimes young women, to act as messenger communicators carrying news from tribe to tribe. Their extraordinary strength and endurance, their fleetness of foot, and their intimate knowledge of the land amazed early European immigrants.³

Africans south of the Sahara Desert, divided into three chief groups and many tribes, also developed systems for recording and communicating information. Like the natives of North America they also used “talking drums” to communicate from village to village and transferred information between tribes and other parts of the world along land and water trade routes. Rock painting was a key activity
for the ancient residents of the Kalahari Desert near the Southern tip of Africa, as well as in the Sahara Desert in the north. Literature, often in the form of folk tales performed with music, passed along folk tales and important events from generation to generation. In some tribes special persons known as griots memorized the history of the tribe and passed it along to younger members, as well as those who would carry on the telling of history after they died.

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**Early Printing in America**

Like the history of communication and printing in the world, the history of printed media in the Americas starts with a group other than the English-speaking colonists. The first printing press to come to the Americas was brought from Spain to what is now Mexico in 1535, more than 100 years before the English colonists brought their first printing press to Harvard University in 1638. The earliest printing in the Americas, which was licensed by the Spanish royalty to printer Juan Cromberger of Seville, was built on the native languages and alphabets of the indigenous peoples. The Spanish saw the main use of the press in printing government notices and proclamations, as well as catechisms to be used in converting the Aztecs and neighboring tribes to Catholicism. Therefore, the first booklets produced on the printing press were bilingual, using a European language such as Spanish or Latin in one column next to the same text in a native language, such as Nahuatl or Tarascan, in the next column. Armed with this bilingual format, the Spanish continued on their mission of conquering and converting the native tribes.

But the press was used for more than printing government documents and religious texts. In 1541 a terrible storm and earthquake struck Guatemala City, south of Mexico City. After the storm a notary public by the name of Juan Rodriguez wrote what has been identified as the first printed news reporting on the American continent. Rodriguez’s story of the storm and its destruction of the city was taken to Mexico City, where it was printed in an eight-page booklet by the operator of Cromberger’s printing house, Juan Pablos, his pressman, Gil Barbero, and a Black slave whose name was not recorded. The front page of the booklet, giving readers a foretaste of the news reporting that would follow it, began with an attention-getting headline.

"Report of the Terrifying Earthquake Which Has Reoccurred the Indies in a City Called Guatemala," the news report blared in large type. "It is an event of great astonishment and great example so that we all repent from our sins and so that we will be ready when God calls us." The actual report began on an inside page that began with a dateline and gave Rodríguez’s first-person account of what happened.

The news report, which was distributed in Mexico City, was the forerunner of what was to become a popular form of news reporting in New Spain, as the Spanish colonies were then called. Based on the European model, they were called hojas volantes (literally, flying pages or bulletins) and relaciones (reports) and were issued when major news occurred, when the government had a major announcement, or when ships bearing news of world events docked at Veracruz.

More presses arrived in New Spain, more printers took up the practice of printing and selling these irregularly issued news booklets. Mexican historian Julio Jiménez Rueda wrote that it was through the hojas volantes that “people knew of the death and coronation of kings, wars in Europe, earthquakes and calamities.”

By 1600, nearly 40 years before a printing press had even arrived in the English colonies, the presses of New Spain had produced at least 174 books. An additional 60 books have been identified without dates or verification. The booklet format was also used in the first regularly issued printed news reports in America, the four volumes of the *Mercurio Volante* published by Carlos de Siguencia y Gongora in Mexico City in 1693. Among the news covered in one of the issues of the *Mercurio Volante* was an account of the unsuccessful attempts the Spanish to conquer and colonize the native inhabitants of what is now New Mexico.

Although the Latino roots of communication media were largely overlooked or ignored by media historians, it has not always been that way. In 1810, Isaiah Thomas began the first history of American journalism, *The History of Printing in America*, with 10-page chapter on printing in Spanish America, but that chapter was deleted when his book was reprinted in 1874. Journalism histori...
Frank Luther Mott mentioned the 1541 Mexico City news report in a footnote reference to his 1941 journalism history text, but claimed that “no regularly published newspaper on the continent antedated the earliest Boston papers.” In 1984, however, the fifth edition of Emery and Emery’s *The Press and America* included a new two-page section on the Spanish influence in American journalism, including a reproduction of the 1541 news report. In addition, in 1977 and 1979 *Journalism History* devoted the cover and several articles to the contribution of Latinos and the Latino press in the evolution of news media on the American continent. These Latin American roots have influenced the development of the press in the United States, as well. Newspapers were published for the Spanish-speaking residents of Texas and New Mexico in the years before those territories were acquired by the United States in the 1840s.

As important as the contributions of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans have been in creating and developing their communication systems and media in other civilizations and countries, the focus of this book is to examine these groups as they have interacted with communication media in the United States, with an emphasis on commonalities and differences among the groups. All groups have had active media addressing the needs and interests of their communities in this country for more than a century. But there is far more description and analysis of the Black, Native American, and, to a lesser extent, Latino press than there is of the historical roots of media directed toward Asians. For this reason, and to avoid possible generalizations that are not supported by evidence, this chapter will describe the commonalities in the history of media directed toward Latinos, Blacks, Native Americans, and Asians.

The first newspapers for Latinos, Blacks, Native Americans, and Asian Americans all began in the 19th century. They were preceded by media targeted to other groups, most notably the Polish- and German-speaking residents of the English colonies and the new nation. They developed in the same era as the first mass circulation press pioneered by Benjamin Day, the *New York Sun* in 1833. But, despite the closeness of their chronological beginnings, there is another, more meaningful, commonality drawing together these different newspapers started at different times in different cities for four different racial groups. They were all started as a response to a crisis. The four newspapers (in chronological order) are the first Latino newspaper, *El Misisipi*, founded in New Orleans in 1808; the first Black newspaper, *Freedom’s Journal*, founded in New York City in 1827; and the first Native American newspaper, *Cherokee Phoenix*, founded in New Echota, Georgia, in 1828; and what apparently is the first Asian American newspaper, *Kim-Shan Jit San-Luk, The Golden Hills’ News*, founded in San Francisco in 1851 or 1854.

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**The First Latino Newspaper: *El Misisipi* (1808)**

*El Misisipi* was founded in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, when France had conquered much of the European continent, including parts of Spain. New Orleans, a major seaport built where the Mississippi River flows into the Gulf of Mexico, was the port of passage for commerce and travelers coming in and out of the United States from Europe, as well as the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean Sea, Central America, and South America. The newspaper was a four-page publication printed primarily in Spanish, but with English translations of many of the articles and almost all of the advertising. It was started by an Anglo firm, William H. Johnson and Company, and was printed on the press of the Louisiana *Gazette*. Although the newspaper is cited in a number of journalism history sources, not much is known about its founders, and only two copies remain from its 2-year printing run.

A translation of the one copy remaining in the United States, however, reveals the crisis under which the newspaper’s readers were living. With Napoleon campaigning in Europe and attempting to establish a puppet regime in Spain, *El Misisipi* is filled with reports from other newspapers and sea captains of events in Europe, including a story on the uprising of citizens in Madrid against Napoleon’s forces. The newspaper also speculates on the possibility of England ending its hostilities with Russia and entering the war on the side of Spain against France. All the news is from outside of New Orleans and almost all of it concerns the war in Europe, including a long commentary on the events. Because there was no wire or electronic