The first enumeration of Chinese by the United States census was in 1820.\textsuperscript{22}

But it was the need for cheap, hardworking labor in California, both before and during the Gold Rush, that brought the first in a series of waves of immigration from Asian countries to the United States. The \textit{Alta California}, a leading English-language newspaper in San Francisco, made what one scholar has called "editorial humor" of the Chinese, including its own "Chinese letters" to ridicule Chinese literature. On a more serious and commercially lucrative side, English-language newspapers made use of lithography to insert Chinese characters into advertisements and in reports on the inscriptions on Chinese graves.\textsuperscript{23} It is in the time, place, and context of the 1849 California Gold Rush that what is apparently the first Asian American newspaper is found.

Although there is some disagreement about the date of its founding, the first reported Asian American newspaper in the United States appears to have been a Chinese-language newspaper \textit{Kim-Shan Jit San-Luk, The Golden Hills' News}, reported in some sources as beginning publication in San Francisco as early as 1851 and being printed thereafter on an irregular schedule. The newspaper took its title from the phrase \textit{golden hills}, which was used by Chinese workers coming to California during the Gold Rush, and was a religious publication. Another early newspaper, the \textit{Oriental}, is reported as having begun publication as a weekly in 1853 and also had a religious beginning. These founding dates were cited in a 1939 federal report on the history of foreign journalism in San Francisco,\textsuperscript{24} but pioneer California editor Edward Kemble cited a founding date of 1854 for the \textit{Golden Hills' News} and 1855 for the \textit{Oriental} in his history of California newspapers written in 1858.\textsuperscript{25}

But whatever its starting date, the \textit{Golden Hills' News}, like the other newspapers that preceded it, was born in crisis. In this case it was the trauma faced by Chinese workers as they left their homeland, crossed an ocean, and came to the United States with hopes of making their fortune in the goldfields of California. Instead, they found a country that was not only vastly different than their own in language and culture, but often learned that they would have to do the hardest labor at little, or no, pay to repay the cost of their passage. Perhaps worst of all, they found themselves treated as outcasts in a
state newly populated by immigrants; subject to legal, economic, and social discrimination in a strange land. Both the *Golden Hills’ News* and the *Oriental* had their foundation among the Christian groups with missionaries in China and outposts in the Chinatown then developing in San Francisco. The groups offered support to Chinese immigrants in the hostile land, hoping to convert them to Christianity in the process.

In his history of the Chinese in the United States from 1850 to 1870, Gunther Barth notes that the first issue of the *Golden Hills’ News*, which he cites as appearing in April 1854, stated the paper would appear twice weekly and that it was published by William Howard, with Chinese characters lithographed by F. Kuhl. But by July of that year it had begun weekly publication. In an article the day after the first edition appeared, the *San Francisco Herald* compared appearance of the typography in Chinese newspapers to a spider crawling out of an ink bottle and onto a white sheet of paper. The paper sold for 25 cents a copy, with a monthly subscription costing 75 cents. Charges for advertising were $1 for less than 25 characters, $2 for between 25 and 50, and 3 cents apiece for more than 50 characters. Barth describes most of the content as being in colloquial Cantonese, with most of the news coming from California and advertising coming from sales and auctions. Like *El Misisipi* and the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the newspaper also used a bilingual format.

The front page of the May 27, 1854, edition features Chinese characters on about two thirds of the page on the right-hand side, with an English-language column apparently addressed to the White residents of San Francisco, on the left side. The Chinese characters reported commercial news and other business notices of interest to the paper’s Asian American readers. The English column was apparently directed toward non-Asian Americans and argued for better treatment of the Chinese in California. The article noted that the Chinese were one of many groups coming to California and compared the treatment of Whites in China with the discrimination against Chinese in San Francisco:

But the California picture is unique—their tout ensemble is the history of Civilization. The “Eastern States” have their Irish exodus, their German exodus, and hordes of Saxons, Danes, Celts, Gauls and Scandinavians, but we have all of these, and the most wonderful of all a

History

CHINESE EXODUS! The great wonder of the century is the astonishing flight of the hitherto immobile Chinenex across the Pacific ocean, to seek refuge and liberty in the bosom of “The Golden Hills.”

The writer quoted missionaries in Shanghai who wrote that Americans could “wander unmolested” 40 miles into the Chinese interior and claimed that Chinese who saw Americans would “look up to them with profound respect.” That behavior was compared with the treatment that Chinese immigrants were subjected to in San Francisco and made an appeal for better treatment of Chinese to the English-speaking readers:

“No Chinaman sneers at you in the streets; there is no hindrance whatever to your study of their character and habits; they always look at you with an expression of good will,” says Bayard Taylor. Is it too much to ask of a Christian population “to do unto them,” at least what it seems “they do to us,” in their own land? Is it too much to ask of this Cosmopolitan state, in the veins of whose population flows the blood of a thousand tribes, to give freedom of growth and fair play to the Mongol element? Is it too much to ask of a Commercial People to give a generous aid and liberal encouragement to any means, that assist the Chinese to a knowledge of our laws and habits, and a sympathy with our interests? Surely not. Therefore Merchants, Manufacturers, Miners and Agriculturists, come forward as friends, not scorers of the Chinese, so that they may mingle in the march of the world and help to open for America an endless vista of future commerce.27

The English-language editorial was incorporated into the newspaper’s format. Later issues continue to advocate the rights of Chinese in California and demonstrate the willingness of Chinese to take part in the traditions of their new country. Two July editorials were headed “Is there No Help for the Chinese in California” and “The Fourth of July and The Chinese Race.” Barth writes that the English-language editorials set a precedent that was followed by other Chinese newspapers in California. It was primarily concerned with discrimination and other civil rights violations against the Chinese, while always pointing to evidence of their adaptation to the ways of the United States. The Chinese columns on the other hand continued to be filled with commercial notices and other business-related news.28 By all accounts the *Golden Hills*’ News did not publish for a lengthy period. Writing in 1858, Kemble concluded
his three-line paragraph on the newspaper with the sentence, "It did not live long." 

Like the other racial publications discussed in this chapter, the Golden Hills' News established some precedents that have been followed in other Asian American newspapers. One was the use of a bilingual format, which continues in some periodicals today. Another was a column directed toward the English-speaking readers that argued for fairer treatment of the Chinese and pointed to the contributions they were making to the overall society. There are, no doubt, other precedents that will be discovered as students and scholars continue to study and analyze the history of the Asian American press in the United States.

Similarities in the Forgotten First Newspapers

The first Latino, Black, Native American, and Asian American newspapers in the United States are important for more than chronological reasons. Although it is important to establish and record the founding dates of the first media for these groups, it is even more interesting to examine the similarities among these different newspapers begun for different groups at different times and places.

One similarity has already been established, they were all founded in a period when the members of each group were facing a crisis of unusual stress or pain that was not being experienced by the majority population. But it is also interesting to note that three of the newspapers, El Misisipi, Cherokee Phoenix, and the Golden Hills' News, were also bilingual, using both their native language and the language of the majority population. Two of the periodicals, Cherokee Phoenix and the Golden Hills' News, were founded with the support of religious missionaries and a third, Freedom's Journal, was co-founded by a Black minister. All of the newspapers were especially attuned to the news and information needs of their target audience and, like media for these communities today, no doubt delivered both news and analysis that was unavailable in the mainstream press. For example, two newspapers, Freedom's Journal and Cherokee Phoenix, were established for the primary purpose of providing a voice that would be an alternative to the established press, and a third, the Golden Hills' News, appeared at a time when the mainstream media were playing an active role in ridiculing and disparaging members of that group. These three newspapers also all appeared in periods of time when the members of their audience were victims of legal discrimination, social subjugation, and violent oppression.

The racial press did not end with the founding of these four newspapers. In fact, each of these groups continues to have a broad range of newspapers, magazines, and broadcast stations targeted to them. Although many of these media have become increasingly commercial in their content and less fiery in their voices, these media have continued to fulfill the tradition of providing news, entertainment, and information that is an alternative to what is available in the media directed at the mainstream White audience.

This frustration with the mass audience press has long been felt and, in fact, was directed at the first mass circulation newspaper in the United States, the New York Sun. In the 1840s a Black man, Willis A. Hodges, took exception to editorials in the Sun opposing voting rights for Blacks. So he first tried the access approach, writing a reply to the editorial, which the newspaper published for a fee of $15. When the newspaper published his message, however, it was modified and carried as advertising. Hodges protested, but was advised "The Sun shines for all White men but not for Colored men." Told that the mass circulation newspaper would be closed to the views of Blacks, he started a Black newspaper, the Ram's Horn, in 1847.

As long as there is free access to the establishment of print media in the United States, members of all races will be able to follow the avenue of Hodges and the founding editors of the first Latino, Black, Native American, and Asian American newspapers by starting publications for their own groups and presenting alternatives to the news and viewpoints expressed in the mainstream media.