History

Journalism's Colorful Firsts

When most people think about the beginnings of media in the United States, they often look at Europe as the foundation of both the technology and system of media. Journalism history is often told in terms that emphasize the English-speaking traditions of media but ignore the historical past of other people. Although it may be useful to look to Europe to find some of the roots of media in the United States, a scholar looking there and nowhere else will get only a partial view of the media's rich history. Communication is a basic human activity and people of all races and cultures have taken part in it.

Communication Before the Europeans

Journalism historians Edwin Emery and Michael Emery describe some of the earliest forms of communication.

Around 3500 B.C. the Sumerians of the Middle East devised a system of preserving records by inscribing signs and symbols in wet clay tablets using cylinder seals and then baking them in the sun. They also devised a cuneiform system of writing, using bones to mark signs in wet clay.
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 hieroglyphics. 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 this 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 books. The Tang Tao printed the Confucian classics between 952 and 953 and in about 1045 the artist Pí Shèng 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 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 Rodríguez wrote what has been identified as the first printed news reporting on the American continent. Rodríguez’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 in 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 had 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 war 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 with 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 Siguenza 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 attempt by 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 every written of American journalism, the History of Printing in America, with a 10-page chapter on printing in Spanish America, but that chapter was deleted when his book was reprinted in 1874. Journalism history...
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
El MISISIPI

El Misisipi (1808), the first Latino newspaper in the United States, used both Spanish and English, including a bilingual advertisement for Don Juan Rodriguez, Attorney-at-Law, in the lower right-hand corner, as this 1808 edition shows. (Wisconsin State Historical Society)

dissemination of news, most of the stories the newspaper publishe
were several months old and, at times, differed with each oth
a separate column the editor would comment on the differen
t ports and their possible implications for Spain. The newspaper
also distinctly pro-Spanish, denigrating officials of the puppe
gime established by Napoleon and speculating on the possibilit
England entering the war against France on the side of Spain.

El Misisipi relied heavily on news reports taken from other ne
papers, a common practice at that time, and reports of sea ca
t and sailors arriving from foreign ports. Among the articles in
the surviving issue of the newspaper in the United States, publi
October 12, 1808, are articles from the Boston Chronicle and a ne
paper identified as the Diario de New York (New York Daily). Becu
the Boston newspaper’s name was not translated to the Spa
word Cronica and used the Spanish word Diario in the New Y
reference, there is some speculation that the Diario de New Y
have also been a Spanish-language newspaper. However, no listi
of a newspaper called the Diario de New York or the New Y
d are found in the accepted newspaper references for New York at t
time, although there was a newspaper named the New York Di
Advertiser published in 1808.

The front page of the October 12, 1808, edition carries the rep
of the Madrid uprising in all of its three columns, adding only a bi
notice of its publication schedule (Wednesdays and Saturday
subscription rates (8 dollars a year, half payable in advance), a
language policy (“in both languages or in the one wanted”), an
bilingual advertisement for Don Juan Rodríguez, Abogado (lawy
with a Spanish version on top of an English translation of the sai
message. Rodríguez took the advertising space “to inform his frie
and the public in general that from this date he will reside at I
plantation, better than a league below the city,” but added that
would “still continue to keep his office in town, in the house of Doct
Devez, No. 16 Main Street, where he will execute any business
the line of his profession from ten o’clock a.m. till four p.m.”

Inside the paper, the second page offered the report “of a com
spendent” on the problem of separating facts from the official new
private reports, and rumors emanating out of war-torn Europe.

Misisipi summarized what its editors felt were the latest factu
information, naming the Bayonne Gazeté as the source and calling that periodical "an official organ of the usurpers of the thrones of France and Spain." The newspaper then engaged in some of its own interpretation of the news:

Madrid has long been in the possession of the French and the patriots of Spain are not to be duped by the mockeries of Bonaparte, however solemnized by a recreant minister of religion.

Citing victories against the French in Spain and Portugal, El Mississippi continued:

We think therefore that nothing has yet appeared to discourage the friends of freedom. To hold their own ground is much for the patriots at the commencement of the struggle. Their armies will increase and improve in a far greater degree than those of the enemy. 8

The fourth page was devoted entirely to advertising, almost all in a bilingual format in which the Spanish copy ran in a space above the English text. Everything from ships, to hardwood, to supplies for sailors was advertised in the bilingual format. The advertising reveals something of the commerce and trade taking place in the sea and river port of New Orleans, which had been acquired by the United States from France only 5 years earlier and had briefly been part of the Spanish empire. One company, A. & J. McIlvain, Grocers, No. 43, on the Levee, offered sugar, coffee, tea, and a "general assortment of groceries" along with "2500 lbs. James River Chewing Tobacco, 1000 bushels Indian Corn, 2000 feet Walnut plank." The firm advised ship's captains preparing to sail: "SEA STORES Put up at the shortest notice." Another advertisement advised readers that "Five or six gentlemen may be accommodated with Gentle Boarding in a private family, at the rate of 20 Dollars per month."

The largest advertisements, taking up nearly all of the second and third columns, were for Mrs. Zacharie, who offered "a handsome assortment of DRY GOODS" and La Rionda, apparently a dealer offering for sale two brigantines, the Sophia and the Minerve, each "with all her tackle," two houses on St. Phillip Street, and a long list of goods such as 800 tons of Campeachy Logwood, 40 bales of sarsaparilla, and 22 trunks of "Callicoes."

Even though it was the first Latino newspaper in the United States, El Mississippi exhibited many of the characteristics that were found in the other Latino publications that were to follow it. For it was apparently directed toward a Spanish-speaking audience that had come to the United States because of warfare and poverty in their homeland, a consistent theme in immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean. Second, it was bilingual, recognizing the importance of both the English and Spanish languages in the Latino community. Third, its news content was heavily influenced by events happening elsewhere, just as much of the content of Latino media over the years has been dependent on news from Latin America. And, fourth, like many of the Latino publications that were to follow, it apparently was operated as a business, devoting one fourth of its space to advertising in both Spanish and English.

The First Black Newspaper:  
Freedom's Journal (1827)

A different kind of crisis triggered the founding of Freedom's Journal on March 16, 1827, by the Reverend Samuel E. Cornish and Brown Russwurm. The crisis was slavery, which kept Black property in much of the United States. White Abolitionists favored the ending of slavery and had campaigned against it in the printing accounts of slavery written by freed Black slaves. After the attack on the abolitionists and Black leaders in the New York City quaker, Cornish and Russwurm (who was the second Black person to graduate from a college in the United States) decided it was time for Blacks to start their own weekly newspaper. In the first edition of the four-page newspaper the editors eloquently stated their reasons:

We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentation in their way which concern us dearly, though in the estimation of some mere trifl for although there are many in society who exercise toward us benevolent feelings, still (with some sorrow we confess it) there are others who enlarge upon that which tends to discredit any person of color
History

Freedom's Journal is often described as an aggressive newspaper that agitated forcefully against slavery and for the rights of free Blacks in the North. But the newspaper was not only an Abolitionist: Black civil rights periodical. It also built a sense of Black consciousness and community identity among Blacks throughout the United States. It was able to do this because the newspaper reflected the broad interests of Blacks, some of which continue to the present time. Addition to news and hard-hitting editorials, the newspaper offered information, features, culture, and entertainment to its Black readers. Its first issue reflected the broad interests of its editors and readers, carrying news from Haiti and Sierra Leone; the first part of a series on Captain Paul Cuffee, a Black Boston shipper; a poem entitled "The African Chief"; and advertising for the B. F. Hughes' School for Colored Children of Both Sexes. Throughout its years, Freedom's Journal ran regular columns titled "Foreign News," "Domestic News," and "Summary." These columns, which were based on news taken from other newspapers, were highly sensational. The "Summary" column was especially noted for its exploitation of the staples of sensational reporting: blood and sex.10

The newspaper was virulent in its opposition to slavery and in advocacy of the rights of freed Blacks, however. Its editors also did not hesitate to attack the mainstream media to reinforce the importance of the alternative viewpoint that Freedom's Journal presented on these issues. Walter C. Daniel wrote of Freedom's Journal in 1889:

The editor of the New York Enquirer was attacked in a subsequent issue as one "whose object is to keep alive the prejudice of the whites against the coloured communities of New York City." Other articles disagreed with the platform of the American Colonization Society which advocated returning Afro-Americans to Africa and reported on lynchings. Russwurm believed in universal education as a critical need for Blacks who would be respected by White Americans.11

Russwurm left the newspaper in 1828 to become an editor at the official in Liberia, a part of Africa that the Abolitionist movement had established to return freed slaves to Africa. The newspaper continued to be published by Cornish under the title Rights of Man until it apparently folded in 1829. Lionel C. Barrow, Jr., noted t

Figure 8.2. Freedom's Journal (1827), the first Black newspaper in the United States, carried news of general interest to Blacks, as well as strident opposition to slavery and calls to protect the rights of free Blacks in the northern states. (Journalism History)
important role of *Freedom's Journal* in establishing an important precedent as an alternative to the mainstream press in a 1977 article that closed with the following passage:

*Freedom's Journal* gave Blacks a voice of their own and an opportunity not only to answer the attacks printed in the White press but to read articles on Black accomplishments, marriages, deaths that the White press of the day ignored. Slavery is no longer here, but its vestiges are and today's reporters and publishers—Black and White—could do well to study the *Journal*, adopt its objectives and emulate its content. Blacks still need to "plead our own causes," and will need to do so for sometime to come.12

Like many of the Black and other newspapers for non-White readers that were to follow it, *Freedom's Journal* filled an important void. It did more than take issue with the coverage and editorial positions that were found in the White press and present an alternative to them. It also reported events of interest to Blacks with dignity and pride, demonstrating that its Black readers, though victims of racism, had a broader range of activities and interests than what was presented in the mainstream press of the era. Over the years the Black press has continued to fulfill this dual role to its readers. On one side, they have raised the concerns and protests of Blacks when confronted with slavery, segregation, and discrimination. On the other, they have reported on the organizational, social, religious, and other activities and interests within the Black communities that have too often been ignored by the White media.

The First Native American Newspaper:
*Cherokee Phoenix* (1828)

Like the first Latino and Black newspapers, the first Native American newspaper was born of a crisis, in this case the federal government's efforts to displace the Cherokee Nation from the millions of acres of land it held in North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee. It was because of this crisis that the first Native American newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, was born to unify and express the opinion of the Cherokee people.13

Figure 8.3. *The Cherokee Phoenix* (1828), carried articles in both English and the Cherokee syllabary developed by Sequoyah. (Journalism History)
The Cherokee Phoenix was established by the Cherokee Nation near the current site of Calhoun, Georgia, and printed its first edition on February 21, 1828. It appeared weekly, with a few gaps, for 6 years until 1834, when it folded. Like El Missisipi, it was printed in a bilingual format, making use of both English and the 86-character Cherokee alphabet that had been introduced by Sequoyah (also known as George Gist) after 12 years of work in 1821.14 James and Sharon Murphy write that the newspaper was started out of two needs. One was the desire of missionaries to use print media to spread Christianity among the Cherokees. The other was the desire of the leaders of the Cherokee Nation to unify Cherokees and others in support of the fight to keep their homelands.

The first editor was Cherokee school teacher Elias Boudinot, who also was clerk of the Cherokee National Council. To raise funds for the new newspaper he traveled along the East Coast speaking to philanthropic and religious groups. Financial support for the newspaper came both from Cherokee tribal leaders, who allocated $1,500 to help purchase a press and type before Boudinot began his fund-raising trip, and from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in New England, which helped support the casting of Sequoyah's alphabet into metal type. The missionary funds were requested by Samuel Worcester, a missionary among the Cherokees, who encouraged Boudinot's effort to start the first Native American newspaper. The Cherokees later repaid the missions board for its help.

Boudinot's vision, like that of the editors of Freedom's Journal, was of a newspaper that would accurately reflect the lives of his people and help mobilize public opinion in support of their struggle. In an 1826 speech titled "Address to Whites" at the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia he outlined the goals of the new newspaper as comprising a summary of religious and political events, etc., on the one hand; and on the other, exhibiting the feelings, dispositions, improvements, and prospects of the Indians: their traditions, their true character, as it once was, as it now is, and the ways and means most likely to throw the mantle of civilization over all tribes; and such other matters as will tend to diffuse proper and correct impressions in regard to their condition—such a paper could not fail to create much interest in the American Community, favorable to the aborigines, and to have a powerful influence on the advancement of the Indians themselves.15

In its first issue the newspaper reprinted its prospectus prepared by Worcester that promised that, in addition to local news, the Cherokee Phoenix would report Cherokee laws and customs, cover their progress in education, religion, and culture, print news about other tribes, and "interesting articles calculated to promote Literature, Civilization, and Religion among the Cherokees."16 Subscriptions came from as far away as Germany and the newspaper was circulated widely among the Cherokees, although sometimes only one copy was allocated for each village. In the fourth issue the newspaper carried the first written laws of the Cherokees, with Boudinot's comments that he hoped "Our readers will perhaps be gratified to see the first commencement of written laws among the Cherokees."17 Although the newspaper printed articles in both languages, it was only on rare occasions that the same article was published in both languages. There were generally three columns in English for every two in Cherokee, because the structure of Sequoyah's alphabet devised characters for whole syllables and it took less space to write in Cherokee than in English.

Boudinot has been credited with building the Cherokee Phoenix "into a strong and loud voice of the Cherokee people as they struggled against increasingly insurmountable government opposition."18 His voice was not always strident. In the first issue he promised the paper "will not return railing for railing, but consult mildness." But he made it clear that the newspaper would advocate the Cherokee position in those issues that brought them into conflict with the encroaching Whites and their governments. In the first issue he wrote:

In regard the controversy with Georgia, and the present policy of the Central Government, in removing, and concentrating the Indians, out of the limits of any state, which, by the way, appears to be gaining strength, we will invariably and faithfully state the feelings of the majority of our people. Our views, as a people, on this subject, have been most sadly misrepresented. These views we do not wish to conceal, but are willing that the public should know what we think of this policy, which, in our opinion, if carried into effect, will prove pernicious to us."

At the end of the column he explained how he chose the name Phoenix for the newspaper and looked forward to a time when all
tribes would rise up and put an end to both the physical oppression and negative language to which they had been subjected. He wrote:

We would now commit our feeble efforts to the good will and indulgence of the public, praying that God will attend them with his blessings, and hoping for that happy period, when all the Indian tribes of America shall rise, Phoenix like, from their ashes, and when the terms "Indian depredation," "war whoop," "scalking knife" and the like, shall become obsolete, and forever be "buried deep underground." 19

As Murphy and Murphy point out, in subsequent issues Boudinot used the press to protest attempts by the state of Georgia to include the Cherokee Nation within its criminal laws and fought against federal appropriations to remove the Cherokees from their mineral-laden lands. But, like Freedom's Journal, it is unfair to describe the Cherokee Phoenix as a newspaper that was concerned solely with the struggles confronting the Cherokees. The newspaper also carried advertising for merchants, a boarding school, and other businesses catering to the needs of its readers. The newspaper also campaigned against alcoholism among the Cherokees and the slavery in which Blacks were held, although Cherokee law permitted the owning of slaves and had other provisions discriminating against Black slaves. The newspaper also ran advertisements by owners of runaway slaves and occasionally ran anecdotes in Black dialect.20

A year after it was founded the newspaper enlarged its title to become the Cherokee Phoenix and Indian Advocate, indicating its activist role in the Native American struggles. Over the years the editor and staff continued to protest encroachment of Cherokee legal and civil rights by Whites, including the harassment, arrests, and threats directed toward the newspaper's staff by Georgia officials. As the Cherokees came under intense pressure to move from their ancestral lands, the leaders of the nation itself became divided on the issue. Boudinot resigned the editorship in 1832, after he had been ordered by Cherokee Principal Chief John Ross not to publish reports of the division among the leaders. The new editor was Ross's brother-in-law, John Hicks, who continued to fight against the land grabbing and harassment confronting the Cherokees. But the newspaper appeared less regularly and finally ceased publication on May 31, 1834.

The Cherokee Phoenix, like the other Native American newspapers that were to follow it, found the bilingual format to be an effective way of communicating with both its Native American and immigrant audience. Although the bilingual format is diminishing among Native American newspapers today, it remained a characteristic of Native American publications for a number of years. Like the Cherokee Phoenix, many of the newspapers that followed devoted the majority of their space to news of specific interest to Native Americans, with less attention to national and international events without a specific impact on the Native American population. And, like the Cherokee Phoenix, those Native American newspapers that appear to have had the greatest success have been the tribal newspapers that have an affiliation and receive a portion of their financial support from a specific tribe.

The First Asian American Newspaper:
The Golden Hills' News (1851?)

Although journalism historians point with certainty to Freedom's Journal as the first Black newspaper, Cherokee Phoenix as the first Native American newspaper and (with near certainty) to El Misisipi as the first Latino newspaper, it is with less confidence that the Golden Hills' News is identified as the first Asian American newspaper. There is little doubt that travelers and settlers from Asia were in the territories that now comprise the United States for a long time before what appears to be the first newspaper appeared. There are documented, though disputed, reports of Hui Shen, a Chinese Buddhist priest, sailing down the coast of what is now California following his arrival in what is now British Columbia, Canada, in 458 A.D., about a thousand years before Christopher Columbus first landed in the Americas. Spanish explorers in California reported finding the wreck of a ship that is believed to be of Asian construction on the California coast in 1774.21 People from Asia have been reported steadily, but infrequently, in the United States since at least 1785, when several Chinese sailors became stranded in Baltimore.
The first enumeration of Chinese by the United States census was in 1820.22

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 *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.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 *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 *golden hills*, which was used by Chinese workers coming to California during the Gold Rush, and was a religious publication. Another early newspaper, the *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,24 but pioneer California editor Edward Kemble cited a founding date of 1854 for the *Golden Hills' News* and 1855 for the *Oriental* in his history of California newspapers written in 1858.25

But whatever its starting date, the *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 Misísipi* 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 left-hand side, with an English-language column apparently addressed to the White residents of San Francisco, on the right 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 *toute 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

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CHINESE EXODUS! The great wonder of the century is the astonishing flight of the hitherto immobile Chinamen 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 scorners 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.

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. 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." 29

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 Misisipí, 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. 30

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.