During the early years of the United States, newspapers were the output of printing houses. Those who could afford to pay printing costs were the actual and preferred contributors of content. Because journalism was not yet a paid occupation, the printer would collect statements on a particular topic from any variety of interested parties, with no fact-checking or claim verification.

As a business transaction, the printer’s clients were paying for the labor of setting out type, the physical production and subsequent distribution of commercial and political notices -- advertising and advocacy. The subscription model was the dominant form of distribution and subscriptions to these papers (at a cost of $6-8 dollars per year) were affordable only by the affluent classes of merchants and landowners. Only a limited number of individual issues would be available to citizens and one had to travel to the printer’s shop to buy one at a cost of six cents each. Such an expenditure in the context of an average weekly wage of 85 cents would have been a luxury. Papers consisted of four pages; advertising always appeared on the front and back page with other content (listings of ships with available goods, legal notices, political essays, etc.) appearing on the reverse second and third pages. The owner of a printer’s shop handled multiple responsibilities -- typesetting, collection of subscription monies, and limited creation of advertisements that individuals of lesser means might need to place. Two brief examples from The Pennsylvania Gazette are indicative:

FOUND, on Christmas Day last, near St. Peter Church, a Gold Ring. The Owner by applying to the Printer and paying the Cost of this Advertisement may have it again. (Source: The Pennsylvania Gazette, January 30, 1766)

A single Man, that writes a fine round hand, is wanted as a school Teacher in the Academy. Enquire of Benjamin Franklin. (Source: The Pennsylvania Gazette, June 13, 1751)

The operational constraints on these print shop owners were significant. None of the processes required for production were automated. Basic materials -- paper and ink -- were expensive.

The process for producing paper from wood pulp (that is, newsprint) wouldn’t be available until the latter half of the 19th century. Paper, made from cloth rags, was costly due to the scarcity of the fabric materials required and the manual, labor-intensive process. Manufacture at scale of printer’s ink wasn’t economically viable in the United States until 1804. The volume of output from each press (one or two hundred copies per issue, at best) was limited and would continue to be until steam-power in the 1850s was introduced, permitting pressings of 2,000 copies. The need to import such equipment was expensive; to subsequently move such heavy and sizable equipment to the frontiers of the young nation added even greater financial burden. But the challenges did not outweigh the appeal. By the time of Andrew Jackson’s inauguration, there were 650 similar weekly papers and 65 dailies seeking to inform citizens, make them aware of available services, and allow expression of a variety of views on issues of the day.
Despite the expense, newspapers were valued as a means of connecting highly dispersed communities, even those that might not be considered affluent. *Freedom’s Journal*, the first African-American newspaper in the United States, began publishing in 1827. Its black editors, Samuel Cornish and John Rossuwurm launched the publication aimed at other free men of color to ensure that literary voices of black authors were heard, to ensure that black businessmen were offered an equal opportunity to advertise their services, and to articulate the evils of slavery as well as the doubtful benefits of attempts at repatriation (as seen in the British attempts in Sierra Leone).

A review of *Freedom’s Journal*,’s first issue provides a glimpse of the customary content to be found in the publications of the time. There is the Marine List of ships that have arrived in the New York port, a report on Haitian negotiations with the French over the payment of port duties, a brief reference to the loss of a Dutch ship bound for Batavia, as well as references to news from Spain, Portugal and Ireland. Domestic news provided an account of the loss of one ship, The Lady Adams, as well as the prospective launch of a new steamboat. Additional items included an inquest held over the death of an infant, a breach of promise suit, and numerous fires. News of particular interest to the black community that might not otherwise have been covered in papers targeted to other populations included:

A letter from Liberia, Dec. 4th, received at the northward, states that the pirate who robbed Capt. Clough, of Portland, and Walstram, of Baltimore, as noticed some time since, has been taken, with 620 slaves by an English frigate and carried into Sierra Leone. (Source: *Freedom’s Journal*, March 16, 1827.)

And

The House of Delegates of Virginia has passed a vote repealing the law condemning to slavery persons of color for certain offenses. (Source: *Freedom’s Journal*, March 16, 1827.)

As did other contemporary papers of the time, *Freedom’s Journal* carried some literary works. Its debut issue included “The African Chief”, by noted 19th century poet William Cullen Bryant, offering a dramatic glimpse of the difference in status between a free war chief and “a Christian’s slave”.

[Poetry: The scars his dark broad bosom wore,
Showed warrior true and brave;
A Prince among his tribe before,
He could not be a slave.

Then to his conquerors he spoke -
“My brother is a King;
Undo this necklace from my neck,
And take this bracelet ring;
And send me where my brother reigns,
And I will fill thy hands

With store of ivory from the plains,
And gold dust from the sands.”

“Not for thy ivory nor thy gold
Will I unbind thy chain?
That bloody hand shall never hold
The battle spear again.

A price thy nation never gave
Shall yet be paid for thee;
For thou shalt be the Christian’s slave,
In lands beyond the sea.

(Source: *Freedom’s Journal*, March 16, 1827.)

*Freedom’s Journal* published its weekly issues for a relatively short period of only three years, but it succeeded in reaching black communities outside of its initial New York base of subscribers.
EXPLOSION OF ACTIVITY

Andrew Jackson was swept into office in 1828 in large part due to an expansion of the population eligible to vote and his election was perceived as a victory of the common man. By this point, in most states, the requirement that a voter be a landed property holder had been eliminated or was in the process of being so. This led to a certain perception that now opportunity was open to all, regardless of wealth or family position.

Publishing newspapers became a business with a broader reach, due to a variety of factors. The expansion westward meant that even those towns most moderate in size sought to establish a stability and presence by having a newspaper of their own. Very large cities -- Philadelphia, Boston, New York -- had populations with sufficient literacy to read papers, if priced within reason. The introduction of steam-driven printing presses to the Americas allowed for a higher volume of production, bringing down the price of individual copies. The penny press was born just at the time when an interest in progressive reform was strengthening. Like minded individuals united in their interest in changing the ills of society, forming numerous societies and associations. Whether in the interest of temperance, abolition of slavery, or other abusive practices, newspapers served as highly effective communication networks in swaying public opinion and building advocacy for a particular moral position. In the early years of the nineteenth century, owning and operating a newspaper offered most men and some women an opportunity for making a name for themselves.

William Lloyd Garrison was an energetic young man of 25 with a thorough grounding in the printer’s trade. While the two founders of Freedom’s Journal abandoned the newspaper business as a means of improving the status of black free men in the United States, Garrison had the passion for the abolitionist movement to launch The Liberator in 1831 with a similar target audience for his newspaper in mind. According to Christopher Daly in Covering America: A Narrative History of A Nation’s Journalism, black subscribers to The Liberator accounted for the bulk of the paper’s subscription base, “all but 50 of its total circulation”.

The persuasive power of Garrison’s thundering editorial voice is heard in these famous words published in the initial issue of The Liberator:

“I am aware, that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire, to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen; – but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest– I will not equivocate– I will not excuse– I will not retreat a single inch- AND I WILL BE HEARD.”

(Source: The Liberator, January 1, 1831.)

Harriet Martineau, a political activist and reformer, became a staunch friend of Garrison and in 1838 contributed this somewhat idealized paragraph describing the early years of the paper:

Garrison and his fellow-workman, both in the printing-office and the cause — his friend Knapp— set up the Liberator, in its first days a little sheet of shabby paper, printed with old types, and now a handsome and flourishing newspaper. These two heroes, in order to publish their paper, lived for a series of years in one room on bread and water, ‘with sometimes,’ when the paper sold unusually well, ‘the luxury of a bowl of milk.’ In course of time twelve men formed themselves into an abolition society at Boston, and the cause was fairly afoot.

(Source: The Liberator, June 29, 1838.)
Passionate advocacy for a cause was not limited to those presses operating in the East nor was it without its dangers. Elijah P. Lovejoy was the editor of The St. Louis Observer in Missouri, admitted to the Union as a slave state. Prominent local citizens sent a letter to Lovejoy as editor of the paper, requesting that the tone of his editorial support for abolitionism be expressed more moderately. Lovejoy publicly refused to do so and was threatened, having to physically move his press several times -- finally across the river to Illinois, itself a free state, where he established The Alton Observer. Lovejoy’s risky work continued until late 1837 when he was shot defending his printing press from a mob bent on its destruction. His last public speech defending the rights of newspapers to express unpopular opinion was reproduced in another abolitionist paper, *The Colored American*, in June of 1838, just months after his death:

*Mr. Chairman, I do not admit that it is the business of this assembly to decide whether I shall, or shall not, publish a newspaper in this city. The gentlemen have, as the lawyers say, made a wrong issue. I have the right to do it. I know that I have the right freely to speak and publish my sentiments, subject only to the laws of the land for the abuse of that right. This right was given me by my Maker and is solemnly guaranteed to me by the Constitution of these United States, and of this state. What I wish to know of you is, whether you will protect me in the exercise of this right, or whether, as heretofore, I am to be subjected to personal indignity and outrage. - These resolutions, and the measures proposed by them, are spoken of as a compromise; a compromise between two parties. Mr. Chairman, this is not so; there is but one party here. It is simply a question whether the law shall be enforced, or whether the mob shall be allowed, as they now do, to continue to trample it under their feet, by violating with impunity the rights of an innocent individual.*

(Source: *The Colored American*, June 9, 1838.)

Lovejoy is remembered as being the first journalist to die in defense of the freedom of the press in the United States.

Less well-known is Lydia Maria Child who, with her husband, founded and edited the weekly abolitionist paper, *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*. Child saw the disenfranchisement of women and the disenfranchisement of blacks to be equally detrimental to the health of the nation. Through the influence of her newspaper (an official publication of the American Anti-Slavery Society) and on the basis of her other writings, Child’s activism was recognized by her contemporaries as being on par with the likes of Henry Ward Beecher and Frederick Douglass.

Even in those association’s papers where the objective was advocacy for a particular cause, the mundane notices of meetings, marriages and deaths continued to appear. Other penny papers, publishing in larger urban centers and as dailies, fleshed out their content offering to include other forms of local news -- police reports, transcripts of court proceedings, etc. Such an approach to the news created the perception of a shared experience between individual strangers navigating a more complex environment of both poor as well as wealthy neighborhoods. Different papers would serve the interests of different populations in the city; the aforementioned poet, William Cullen Bryant, became editor of the New York Evening Post and sought to shape literary tastes among the respectable middle-class even as abolitionists sought to shape attitudes. The arrival of new technology -- specifically, the telegraph -- further fueled the ability of papers fill pages with reports of events occurring at a distance and with less of a time lag. The larger urban population and needs for goods and services increased opportunities for business advertising of goods and services in newspapers. Entrepreneurs like P.T Barnum were eager to take advantage of newspapers to enhance awareness of theatrical performances.
Frank Leslie (the professional pseudonym of immigrant-engraver, Henry Carter) worked briefly for P.T. Barnum before launching his own *Illustrated Newspaper* in 1855. Leslie's publication had two strong selling points -- attention-grabbing illustrations that broke up text-heavy columns and a certain talent for sensational reporting. The early success of the *Illustrated Newspaper* had to do with its rousing exposé on adulterated milk in the New York City marketplace. In a surprisingly lengthy article for the time (5,000 words) appearing in its May 8, 1855 issue, the paper drew attention to an intolerable situation threatening public health.

We have visited the various distillery milk depots, penetrated into their loathsome pest-houses, and inhaled the sickening stences, until our very being revolted at the thought of “milk,” and our breathing became short and difficult, recovering only when a wide distance was placed between us and the distemper-breeding places. Our artists have endured as much, nay, more, for as soon as the distillery “milkmaids,” with large beards and of excessive dirt, became aware that facsimiles of their dens were being transferred to paper, they dispersed with great freedom that filthy liquid, which our artists only escaped by the exercise of considerable agility. There could be no reason for this vicious assault other than a disinclination to have their low lazar-houses truly depicted by the unerring pencil.

Swill milk came from cows housed in stables in close proximity to whiskey distilleries in New York City. The animals were fed swill mash, a byproduct of the distilling process. In a form of diversification, businessmen were benefiting from the demand for whiskey, but also for demand by families in New York City for what they believed was nutritious fresh milk. Milk actually brought in from the farm country north of the city would sour before it reached poor families. Therefore, milk cows housed in filthy conditions in the city were fed the tainted cereal diet that resulted in a thin blueish milk and ultimately caused the cow to sicken. Before being delivered to the customer, the milk was then further disguised by adding rotten eggs, flour, burnt sugar and other ingredients. Through clearly deceptive marketing, poor families were deceived into buying the less nutritious product.

While other activists had campaigned against the practice, it was the graphic reporting in *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* that successfully awoke public consciousness. Delivery routes were mapped, bringing home even more vividly the local danger. The city was forced by public outcry to appoint a committee to investigate the practices and the companies behind them.

Public hearings were covered by the newspaper in tones of outrage. When a cover-up by three city aldermen responsible for inspecting the conditions -- each with a commercial interest in the distillery-dairies -- was further exposed by the newspaper, a lawsuit was brought against Leslie for libel.

The acrimony and liveliness of the court proceedings is evident:

*Mr. GRAHAM* stated to the Court that he desired to compel Leslie to give $2,500 bail in each case; in two of the cases to keep the peace for twelve months and abstain from publishing any more caricatures; and in the third case to answer criminally to the Sessions. *Mr. Graham* proceeded to say that they intended to show these English scoundrels that they could not libel and caricature respectable citizens with impunity.

*Mr. LESLIE* said, “You had better keep cool, Mr. Graham.”

*Mr. GRAHAM*, who was evidently very much excited, jumped up and said, “Don’t speak to me, you scoundrel, or I shall not be answerable for the consequences. I ask your Honor to note that this is an attempt to intimidate respectable counsel. These fellows intend to caricature the entire court. I’ll neck the first man I see take out a pencil. [At this juncture our reporter took out his pencil and began to take notes.] The first acquaintance I ever had with him showed him (pointing to Mr. Leslie) to be a d—d scoundrel...Within the past seventy-two hours he has sent a shaft to the heart of the only remaining parent I have on earth.” (Source: *Frank Leslie's Weekly*, May 8, 1855).
Newspapers and the individuals behind them were feeling the strength of their influence. In just a few years, the nascent profession of journalist and newspaper industry would change dramatically. A second white paper will further document the impact of the Civil War and the expanded services of newspapers in World War I.

**Accessible Archives Collections Used in Preparing This White Paper**

Accessible Archives provides diverse primary source materials reflecting broad views across American history and culture have been assembled into comprehensive databases. The following collections were utilized in developing this material.

**African American Newspapers:**
This collection of African American newspapers contains a wealth of information about cultural life and history during the 19th and early 20th century and is rich with first-hand reports of the major events and issues of the day. The collection also provides a great number of early biographies, vital statistics, essays and editorials, poetry and prose, and advertisements all of which embody the African-American experience.

**Frank Leslie’s Weekly:**
*Frank Leslie’s Weekly*, later often known as Leslie’s Weekly, actually began life as *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*. Founded in 1855 and continued until 1922, it was an American illustrated literary and news publication, and one of several started by publisher and illustrator Frank Leslie. Leslie’s Weekly followed a tested and proven formula of carefully combining elements of war, politics, art, science, travel and exploration, literature and the fine arts in each issue, enhanced with between 16 and 32 illustrations.

**The Liberator:**
The *Liberator* was a weekly newspaper published by William Lloyd Garrison in Boston, Massachusetts. William Lloyd Garrison was born in Newburyport, Massachusetts in December 1805. At thirteen years of age he began his newspaper career with the *Newburyport Herald*, where he acquired great skills in both accuracy and speed in the art of setting type. He also wrote anonymous articles, and at the age of twenty-one began publishing his own newspaper.

**The Pennsylvania Gazette:**
The *Pennsylvania Gazette* was one of the America’s most prominent newspapers from 1728—before the time period of the American Revolution—until 1800. Published in Philadelphia from 1728 through 1800, it was first published by Samuel Keimer and was the second newspaper to be published in Pennsylvania under the name .

**Notes**

1 Daly, Christopher B., Covering America: A Narrative History of A Nation’s Journalism, 2012, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, MA, Page 74,