“Gathering Vassals Around the Throne:
The Political Economy of Postal Communications in 19th Century Brazil”

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Abstract: “Nothing has His Imperial Majesty so firm in mind as to do away with the distances that isolate Him from his vassals, and even, if possible, to gather them all around His throne”: With these words the Brazilian government justified, in 1841, the adoption of uniform postage as a way of connecting the Brazilian people to their 14-year-old monarch, Don Pedro the Second. This use of its postal institution clearly suggests a governmental effort to embrace the expansion of monarchical authority over territory, market and population – key presumptions to reinforce the State’s monopoly over postal services.

By analyzing regulations and various data documented in Brazilian Ministerial Reports, this session aims to answer the following questions. How did the postal system contribute to the centralization of power in 19th century Brazil? Was the Brazilian postal system more a vehicle for the dissemination of news, a source of revenue or an instrument of political and administrative control?