

Center and Periphery in Communications and Culture

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While the centralization of state power has long been a focus of research, the centralization of capacities for communication has received less attention. Yet just as there are deep-set continuities in political institutions, so there have been persistent patterns in the historical development of literacy and schooling, postal service, periodicals, book publishing, telecommunications, and broadcasting. For this project, the question is to what extent, and with what consequences, have communications centers dominated the periphery - the metropolis over the hinterland, cities over rural areas and small towns - in the United States compared to Great Britain, France, and Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From early republic, communicative capacities in the United States developed on a more widely distributed basis than in European societies; my hypothesis is that this had wide political and economic ramifications. But a comprehensive, systematic analysis comparing the various societies is not available, and it is that lacuna this research aims to fill as part of a wider study of the comparative history of communications.