Condoleezza Rice: History as Herstory

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Abstract: The author discusses the content and context of a classified briefing on Al Qaeda received by President Bush on August 6, 2001, and whether that briefing sufficed as a warning of the subsequent September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Public discourse on a classified briefing received by President Bush on August 6, 2001 is focusing on whether the briefing’s contents were merely an historical update on the Al Qaeda threat or warning about future Al Qaeda attacks. This either-or focus—nurtured by the testimony before the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States of the President’s National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice—is neither necessary nor sufficient as a substantive attribution.

Any warning is based on information that has already occurred, because it defies common models of logic to suggest that the warning comes from that which has not yet occurred. Thus, all warnings are historically based. As well, any historical description has at least the potential for the implications of warning. To advocate that any interpretive something can only be a nothing from a warning perspective belies any adaptive potential of language and its derivatives. Thus, one can make the case that history constitutes not only our past but our present and future besides.