

9/11: How Failure to Communicate Led to Disaster

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Process Paper

In July of 2020, I met with my teacher, Christine Pritt, at the park with a couple of other people that were doing National History Day with her to discuss the theme and topic. After leaving there, I pondered upon the topic of *Communication in History*. A number of different things came to mind; the telephone, the famous “Red Phone” in Fort Detrick, a direct line from Moscow to the United States, and numerous other things. In early August, I remembered hearing about a sort of failure in communication between the United States intelligence agencies leading up to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. And from there I pursued that, with a brief pause looking into satellites in the Vietnam War. This topic relates to this years theme as it details the communication barriers, and lack of communication inside of the United States intelligence community leading up to the attacks on 9/11.

Most of my research based off of finding the 2002 Congressional hearings into the attacks, seeing multiple names and documents being referenced oftenly. I found the Phoenix Memo, and warning for the Federal Bureau of Investigation of a possible aviation threat against the threat by al-Muhjiroun, an Islamic extremist group, with links to Osama bin Laden. I found the writer of the memo, Kenneth Williams, and interviewed him about the memo itself, as well as communication policy at that time. Many of the documents I did find were hard to analyze, as the most useful ones were very heavily redacted.

Since early August, I have been working on compiling a range of documents, news articles, and Congressional hearings in my bibliography for use in my documentary. September 11 was the worst terror attack in American history, and modern world history. I would argue through primary source documents and transcripts that with the amount of intelligence the Intelligence Community had, they could potentially have stopped the attack if they had shared it with other intelligence and law enforcement agencies. 9/11 was significant in history, as it changed the way the U.S. Intelligence Community operated, and was one of the deadliest days in modern American history.

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