

Dr. Josh Catalano—Assistant Professor of History at Clemson University

Assistant professor of History at Clemson University, Dr. Josh Catalano describes the events of the 1794 solar eclipse. From this, the discussion continues with the role of Anthony Wayne and lunar eclipses, and how Dr. Catalano's research became focused on this event. The interview concludes with how different individuals interpreted the meaning of an eclipse.

Interviewee: Josh Catalano

Interviewers: Ernest Okine (EO), Alex Eckhart (AE), Nick Bowers (NB), Amílcar Challú (AC)

Date: October 20, 2023

Location: Zoom in Kuhlin Center, Bowling Green State University

[Note: Some tangential discussion from the audio file has been omitted]

[START OF INTERVIEW]

EO: [00:12:09] Hello! My name is Ernest, and I'm here with a colleague...

AE: [00:12:10] and I'm Alex Eckhart. I'm an undergraduate studying history and thank you for being here. And first, first of all, we would like to ask you to introduce yourself?

JC: [00:12:33] Sure. So I'm Dr. Josh Catalano. I'm an assistant professor of history at Clemson University, where I teach courses on, digital and public history. My sort of research area of expertise is actually settler colonialism in Ohio.

AE: [00:12:48] Okay! So what can you tell us about the lunar eclipse that happened in 1794?

JC: [00:12:53] This is actually an interesting story. I had not anticipated thinking about or being concerned with lunar eclipses. But I was doing a research project on the campaign of Anthony Wayne, who, in the late early mid 17 nineties, is tried to conquer Ohio for the United States. He's leading what was then called the Legion of the United States. And as I started thinking about and researching this military campaign. I started to notice patterns. That indicated that a lot more was going on beyond your typical ideas of military strategy, that psychological and symbolic things carried a lot of weight on both sides of the conflict, both the United States and the indigenous coalition of nations he was fighting against and as I was doing this research. I started to notice the significance that these celestial events had for indigenous nations, and how it would actually shape their sort of military strategy. So I sort of stumbled upon this eclipse history by accident, and didn't realize how important it was until I got further in the project but for many of these indigenous nations they interpreted celestial events, sometimes even meteorological events in different ways. For for the Shawnee observers of their culture noted that they seem to have interpreted eclipses as some sort of precursor to war. And if we think about this, this kind of

makes sense. If you think about what a lunar eclipse looks like. The moon sort of turns a reddish hue sort of a traditional symbol of war conflict or blood for other nations. They sometimes interpreted this differently. There's an example of a military campaign that indigenous coalition is putting together, and the members from the Ottawa nation witness an eclipse, and they interpret as a bad omen, and they leave and sort of abandon this campaign. So thinking about What's going on in the sky actually mattered for military strategy among these indigenous peoples. When it came to Anthony Wayne's campaign in 1794 there was a lunar eclipse just a week before the famous Battle of Fallen Timbers. This is more significant when we think about sort of the timeline in that this eclipse happens. And a few days later they were anticipating the battle to actually take place. So the indigenous stations began doing ritual fasting, so they would often fast before war. Wayne may have known about this, and purposely delayed his march. And in the process delayed the conflict a few days. So by the time he faces this coalition they are likely may not have eaten or drank for several days, so he's fighting already depleted force. They also interpreted some celestial and meteorological things going on. There was a sort of prophecy that the Great Spirit might hide its face in the sky behind the clouds. This will be a bad omen, the day of the Battle of Rains. So when Wayne actually goes to fight this battle, he's fighting a force that's not just depleted physically, but also psychologically. So. He had a strategic advantage at this battle that we often just sort of take for granted when we're thinking about military conflicts.

EO: [00:16:18] Right. You, you were talking about that your interest in the war by Anthony Wayne. And I would like to know before that, what was—how did you become interested in this event?

JC: [00:16:32] Sure. So I actually had researched Anthony Wayne a long time ago. During my master's program I was going to write a thesis on the memory, Wayne. Things went in a different direction, and I started looking at other incidents of set their cloning violence in Ohio. But it was always in the back of my mind. And I was working on a different projects, trying to recreate a digital model of Fort Defiance. And in the process I was going through all these primary sources and noticing all these things. That's sort of how I got—I never anticipated rewriting sort of a military history Wayne's campaign, but sort of where it stumbled onto, and I had never anticipated using such interesting source material thinking about weather patterns and celestial events. I was sort of trying to think about those things, though. I had read Gregory Evans. Dow spirited resistance, which sort of looks at the religious and spiritual aspect of a Pan Indian coalition that sort of formed for roughly 4 or 5 decades in the 1700S and early 1800S of which this is sort of in the middle, in which there were multiple profits from different nations. Neoland of Delaware, tense Kitawa, famously of the Shawnee, and these profits often foretold, or would interpret celestial events in different ways. So I knew this was sort of important, but I didn't realize how much it actually mattered on the ground when the events were actually unfolding. So one thing to think about, 'Oh, this stuff matters', It's another thing to see it tangentially play out.

AE: [00:18:11] That's, that's really interesting! Kind of going back—sorry for jumping around a little bit—but this is our last question, actually. You talked about how the prophecy and the eclipse kind of weakened the warriors through their fasting, and just psychologically. Can you kind of elaborate on that like? What exactly did the eclipse mean to them? And like, how did it really play this role?

JC: [00:18:36] Yeah, we don't have a direct documentation of this particular eclipse of how they responded, So we're sort of piecing together the sort of pattern of responses over time. We do have more detailed descriptions of how this Indian coalition responded to the weather events that immediately followed. So it's not entirely certain how this particular eclipse affected them, from written documentation, we just don't have that. We do know from looking at the weather patterns, that it would have been visible, that the range that had been in the area at the time sort of parted. This would have been something that we've seen. I'm what's likely they had discussions about this. It may have even triggered the start of the fasting rituals which sometimes included like ritual vomiting and things. So that was a substantial thing for them to embark on. But we just don't have exact documentation providing English Shawnee, or the Miami, or the one office sort of side of of how they interpret this particular event. So you sort of to rely on how they've interpreted things in the past.

AE: [00:19:44] Okay, thank you so much for all of this information! This is super interesting, it's gonna be really helpful. Is there anything else that you wanted to add, or anything?

JC: [00:19:53] I don't think it's something [INAUDIBLE]. I just wanna say I'm really excited that you all are embarking on this project, it's really exciting. I was glad to see you come through my social media feed and I wish you all the best of luck. Not too long ago I was at Bowling Green as an M.A. student studying history, so it's nice to see it come full circle.

AC: [00:20:13] So Josh, you, you direct actually, a digital humanity product, right? Or a digital. So you can hear 2 majors, and M.A. student who would love to a PhD.

JC: [00:20:21] Yeah, so I came and I did the ACS program with the specialty in history. And then I did the public history certificate at the graduate level before going on to do a PhD at George Mason.

[Note: Some tangential discussion from the audio file has been omitted]

[END OF INTERVIEW]