

Lanier County**News**

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OPINIONS & VIEWPOINTS



HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

current events through a historical lens

Dr. James Finck, USAO History Professor

Eclipses that Changed the Trajectory of U.S. History

By James Finck, Ph. D.

On April 8 our nation finally unified around a cause important to us all: posting pictures of the solar eclipse on social media.

This was a huge event as people planned a year ahead to get hotels that were in the path of totality. Even if you were not able to travel, schools across the nation passed out special glasses and communities celebrated this celestial phenomenon that will not be repeated for another 20 years. While this eclipse was fun to watch, historically speaking there are at least two eclipses that changed the course of history as we know it today.

The first example deals with Christopher Columbus. While Columbus is controversial for many of his actions, he was also brilliant. It was he who convinced the Spanish that he could sail west and reach Asia. Most of Europe believed such a trip was impossible—not because the world was flat, only people today believe that—but because Earth was too large to sail around. At that time, any voyage of such magnitude would run out of supplies and the crew would die.

Columbus disagreed with the circumference of the globe, wrongly believing the Earth was much smaller. Had it not been for the New World, he and his crew would have died painfully. Instead, Columbus did find the New World and began exploiting it.

On Columbus' first voyage he landed on San Salvador in the Caribbean where he set up a colony for Spain as he searched for riches. After a year he left a few men behind and took back some gold and natives he thought would make good slaves. The Crown was impressed and later that year sent Columbus back. When he returned to San Salvador, he found his men dead and decided to retaliate against the natives by killing many of them.

It was about this time that natives as well as his own men began to find Columbus' actions repugnant as he was making himself into a small dictator. He did not stay around long. After conquering and colonizing Hispaniola, Columbus left his brother in charge and returned to Spain again with more wealth.

Columbus returned a third time but found his brother had been overthrown because of his cruelty. Columbus tried to reclaim power but was arrested, chained and sent back to Spain being told he would be killed if he ever returned. Yet threats did not deter him. He received permission to return one more time in an attempt to find a passage to the Pacific Ocean but was told not to return to Hispaniola.

On his fourth journey, he eventually shipwrecked in Jamaica. Columbus sent some of his crew back to Hispaniola asking to be rescued. Not wanting to help, it took a year for Columbus to be rescued.

While in Jamaica, his knowledge of the stars served him well. Columbus had survived by being fed by the natives, but after some of his men went on a rampage against the locals killing many, the natives

decided Columbus should die. However, like all good sailors of his time, Columbus carried an almanac written by Johannes Müller which predicted an upcoming lunar eclipse.

He told the natives that God was upset with them and would show his wrath by blocking the Moon. When the eclipse happened as predicted, the natives feared Columbus' god and continued to supply his needs until he was finally rescued.

A second grim example from American history deals with an eclipse in 1831 in Southampton, Virginia. A slave and self-proclaimed prophet and preacher named Nat Turner believed the Holy Spirit told him, "The time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first." He was told there would be a sign given that would signal Turner to throw off his oppressors and begin a slave revolt.

Over the next couple of years Turner plotted with a few trusted conspirators on how best to follow through with their plan. The idea was to start small, with just a few men so as not to arouse suspicion. They would kill their owners with their own weapons then start to move on killing more while gathering more slaves along the way until they grew an army.

The revolt was scheduled for July 4, 1831, but at the last moment Turner backed out, fearful of its success. However, on Aug. 13, 1831, a solar eclipse occurred convincing Turner that it was a sign from God to commence His work. On the night of Aug. 21, 1831, Turner killed his owner's family and with the few recruits he had would go on to kill 55 white men, women and children.

Turner's plan failed as most slaves refused to join and some even protected their masters. Eventually the white population raised the alarm, gathered a militia and tracked down the small slave army.

Over the next week more than 30 Blacks were killed over suspicions of their violent intent. Eventually the government cracked down on the indiscriminate killings and began to hold trials. About 30 slaves and some free Blacks were convicted and sentenced to death; about a fourth of those were eventually pardoned by the governor.

Turner's Rebellion was the largest in American history and an important part of our story. It scared whites so badly that Virginia debated outlawing slavery. It confused slave owners who believed their slaves were happy if treated with kindness. Yet Turner said he had kind owners but killed them anyway because he did not want to be a slave. It both cases, if not for the eclipse, then a major part of history would never have occurred. Columbus would have probably died on his last voyage and Turner may have never started his rebellion.

James Finck, Ph.D. is a professor of history at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma and writes for the Southwest Ledger. You can follow Historically Speaking on Facebook or at Historicallyspeaking.blog.

Keeping Georgians Informed

Senator Reverend Ralph Warnock (GA)

GEORGIA – On Thursday, May 16, members of Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock's (D-GA) constituent services team, in conjunction with the Atlanta Passport Agency, will host an in-person, one-day-only Passport Services Day in Atlanta, Georgia. Staff from Senator Warnock's office and the Atlanta Passport Agency will be able to assist eligible Georgians with passport renewals, and help first-time applicants take the needed steps to obtain a passport. It will be held at the Atlantic Station; 201 17th St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30363

Last week, U.S. Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock, a member of the Senate Commerce committee, lamented the culture of outsourcing regulatory oversight in aviation—and its implications on consumer safety—while questioning a panel of aviation industry and safety experts. The April 17 hearing followed a recent series of high-profile safety incidents in the aviation industry, on the ground and in the air. During his questioning, the Senator highlighted the issue of companies outsourcing key oversight and manufacturing responsibilities that could potentially lead to aviation accidents.

On Saturday, April 20, U.S. Senator Reverend Raphael G. Warnock had the honor of meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican. As a faith leader, Senator Warnock has long admired the Pope's efforts to center humanity in public life, and during their conversation, the Senator and the Pope discussed global issues like Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan and the need for peace, as well as what it means to be a faith leader operating in the public square. The Senator was accompanied to the Vatican by U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See Joe Donnelly.

"The thing about Pope Francis is that he centers human dignity, particularly the dignity of the most marginalized members of the human family," said Senator Reverend Warnock to MSNBC following his Papal visit. "That is something that I've tried to do in my ministry and in my work in the United States Senate. And it's so important at this moment, in which our country is so divided. We're seeing worldwide the rise of antisemitic sentiment, Islamophobia, bigotry, authoritarian voices that are trying to take advantage of the deep distress that people are feeling in a moment like this."

Last week, U.S. Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock, a member of the Senate Banking and Housing committee, questioned top federal housing officials on how Congress can act decisively to close the racial homeownership gap and support first-generation homebuyers achieve the American Dream of owning a home.

Also last week, U.S. Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock issued a statement ahead of a Senate vote on bipartisan national security funding legislation to aid American allies in Ukraine, Israel and the Indo-Pacific, and provide crucial humanitarian relief to the people of Gaza.

"There is no substitute for American leadership in the world—protecting our nation's security, the democratic values we hold dear, and the freedoms we enjoy as Americans requires it. Standing with our friends and allies against Putin and his brutal campaign in Ukraine, against the Chinese Communist Party's hostilities toward Taiwan, and against the unconscionable terrorism of Hamas and its Iranian backers in the Middle East is critical to defending the global alliance for freedom that has helped protect democracy here at home and around the globe.

"That's why I strongly support the national security funding legislation passed by the House and am deeply frustrated it took so long for Washington Republicans to advance this critical funding package, which also includes desperately needed support to help our ally Israel defend its people against unwarranted attacks from its neighbors, address the dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and keep American troops abroad safe. It was only a few months ago that Georgia lost three of our brave service members while they were serving overseas, and as a nation we have a sacred duty to do everything in our power to ensure we don't let that happen again.

Following the recent collapse of Baltimore's Key Bridge that halted operations at the Port of Baltimore, U.S. Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock urged state and federal leaders to deploy all necessary additional resources to support the Georgia Ports Authority's (GPA) operations during this disruptive time for maritime trade and commerce. In separate letters to Governor Brian Kemp and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Assistant Secretary Michael Connor, Senator Warnock highlighted how Georgia's ports in Brunswick and Savannah are well-positioned to temporarily accept additional cargo and help minimize disruptions to the supply chains that historically rely on the Port of Baltimore, thanks to an influx of federal investments through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Congressional appropriations championed by Senator Warnock.

U.S. Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock announced over \$15 million in federal investments for clean energy and infrastructure projects at the Port of Savannah. The federal funds were provided through the Department of Transportation's Reduction of Truck Emissions at Port Facilities grant program and were made possible by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for the investments in Georgia.

U.S. Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock is one of three senators who demands answers from Novo Nordisk on why the company discontinued the production of Levemir after taking a public relations victory lap for lowering the cost of Levemir and other insulin products. After announcing the discontinuation of Levemir, Novo Nordisk does not plan to offer a price discount on any alternative form of long-acting insulin, the most prescribed and common form of insulin. Notably, Novo Nordisk discontinued Levemir before the announced price reduction took effect. The manufacturer's public relations stunt came shortly after Senator Warnock exerted public pressure on the insulin manufacturer to cap out-of-pocket costs of their insulin products at \$35 a month or less. The Senators pushed Novo Nordisk on how the company plans to ensure patients have access to affordable medication.

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