

Your turn to comment on the Columbus monument

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Columbus monument](#) September 12, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the Columbus monument* 

LETTERS

Leave Bethlehem's Columbus monument alone

Martin Luther King Jr. was an imperfect man. Shall we remove our monuments to him? No. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream. So did Christopher Columbus.

Those who want to remove the Columbus monument from the Bethlehem Rose Garden say it does not belong to "our" community. Who is "our"? Not Italian Americans? How insulting, how provincial.

The protesters say they are acting in solidarity. But they divide.

Natalie Mowrey

Hanover Township, Northampton County

Gadfly's interest over the past several posts on this topic has been to try to make sure we have a more complete picture of the kind of man Columbus was than our historical hagiography has traditionally let on. If we're going to talk about him, if we're going to erect a monument to him, we need to know who he was. He was indeed an "imperfect man." Seriously so.

But conversation about the monument is the kind of conversation, tough as it is, our community should have in this time of national reckoning about race. It can be the subject of that good conversation that builds community. And Gadfly hopes that is going on in the committee Mayor Donchez formed to respond to the concerns of a sizeable number of residents.

The Bethlehem Columbus monument is, Gadfly would surmise, little known and little visible. Gadfly bets many people are surprised that we have a Columbus monument.

The Easton Columbus monument that has been the subject of significant controversy recently is 9ft tall, stands on a pedestal perhaps equally high,

is part of the Karl Stirner Arts Trail, and resides on high-traffic Riverside Dr.

The Bethlehem monument is relatively small and resides in a quiet pastoral spot sort of behind and off to the side of the first home replica along 8th Avenue in the northeast section of the Rose Garden. With its adjacent bench, the monument invites meditation rather than the awe that the Easton monument seems to demand (see April Gamiz's great gallery of Easton photos [here](#)).





The Bethlehem monument would seem to focus on Columbus as navigator.



And here is its inscription: “Presented to the citizens of Bethlehem to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America.”

Our Columbus monument was approved by our Fine Arts Commission and received brief debate at City Council August 4, 1992, before being approved by a 6-0 vote. One resident said, “Columbus left a trail of theft, rape, and murder. You don’t praise criminal behavior.” A second said, “There’s no way that this man should be held up to our young people as someone who should be emulated,” adding the issue was what type of person was symbolized. Councilman Mike Loupos pointed to Thomas

Jefferson as slave owner and focused on Columbus as explorer: “We wouldn’t be here today if it wasn’t for him discovering the New World.” Councilman Otto Ehrsham added, “we’re not alone in honoring the accomplishments of the man.”

The controversy about Columbus was much in the news at the time, so no one could be unaware of it. There was, in fact, an interesting major article in the *Morning Call* about how schools in the Lehigh Valley were dealing with the controversy over Columbus in their curricula. The Bethlehem-area Italian-Americans who created the monument handled the controversy this way: “This monument, [we’re] sure, is going to upset some people. We’re sorry if we’re upsetting anyone. But this is America, which is a beautiful Italian word by the way, and we can thank people like Columbus and the people who followed him for giving us the opportunity to voice our opinions.”

What do you think?

Gadfly knows some of his followers will be at the Rose Garden Farmers Market this morning — why not seek out the monument and give the controversy some thought.

Gadfly invites your responses.