

# Gadfly closes in on a Columbus decision

The Bethlehem Gadfly Columbus monument September 28, 2020

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

*“The (his)stories we tell shape the lives that we lead”  
Gadfly*

In our role playing exercise, we have mentally taken two options off the Mayor’s list of ways to respond to the resident petition to remove the Columbus monument in the Rose Garden.

- deny the request, allow the monument to stand.
- issue a formal statement agreeing with the negative view of Columbus, disavowing his actions relative the Native Americans, but letting the monument stand as is.
- add additional “educational” information about Columbus and his legacy at the monument site.
- add a monument celebrating Indigenous people to the monument site as balance of perspective on 1492.
- replace the monument with a new one representing the complex nature of Columbus’s legacy.
- replace the monument with a monument to an Italian of less ambiguous heroic stature.
- move the monument to private property.
- remove the monument.

Let’s move on and dispose of two more.

Gadfly thinks it is important that we tell the Columbus story, the whole story.

He believes “the (his)stories we tell shape the lives that we lead,” a soundbite slogan he used in his classes to remind students of the present importance of the past. Gadfly never saw history as dead facts about the past.

To Gadfly, for the one monument in Bethlehem relative to Columbus to portray him only as a great sailor ignores the purpose to which that skill was applied, the end to which that means served. We now recognize that the principal legacy of Columbus was the “destruction of the Indies” — I borrow the title of a frightening book written by a witness whose early life overlapped Columbus’s.

For that reason — if he were mayor — Gadfly would not consider these two options:

- replace the monument with a monument to an Italian of less ambiguous heroic stature.
- move the monument to private property.

For these options skirt the issue, they dodge the need to tell the whole Columbus story.

Though they are politic.

Gadfly perhaps shows here why he would never be a good politician. Too idealistic.

The Mayor could breathe a sigh of relief if UNICO or the Bethlehem Italian American community would willingly fund another statue or find a new place for this one. One would guess that overwhelming opinion would be that the former option is impractical financially even if it were otherwise palatable, but the latter option is appealing because now the controversial monument is on public land. Move it to private property and the petitioners would be satisfied. Ha! he boldly thinks!

But Gadfly prefers not to be politic.

So he would take two more options off his list of actions, though he can certainly see the Mayor using his power of persuasion with the Italian American representatives and his considerable influence with city property owners to find an alternate site for the monument.