

# Gadfly's train of thought on the Columbus issue productively interrupted

The Bethlehem Gadfly Columbus monument September 27, 2020

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

Gadfly goes slow, showing you the process of his thinking.

Which invites you to think along.

And which allows you to interrupt that process.

Gadfly's flow of thinking on the Columbus issue was productively interrupted yesterday by comments on his posts by Peter Crownfield ([here](#)) and Bud Hackett ([here](#)).

Let me explain before moving on.

## **Peter's comment:**

In a previous post Gadfly made a point of saying that he read so-called banned books like *Mein Kampf* and was glad to have the opportunity, the freedom to do so, was glad that they had not been “removed” from his consideration. He was using the analogy of a library where you had access to information for explication, for balance, for perspective, for context, for refutation of the bad books. But Peter made me think about the difference between an offensive book quietly closed on a library shelf that you have to seek out and an offensive statue in public — perhaps in a very public place, maybe an unavoidable public place — and therefore whose disturbing presence and aggravating effect is out of your control, a continual irritant, because it's literally in your face. That difference hadn't registered with me till Peter called attention to it. But having done so that new awareness of the difference between book and statue triggered a nagging doubt that you saw Gadfly express yesterday about the secluded nature of our Columbus monument. It is not in anybody's face. Most definitely. Put this together with a point made by Anthony Kronman (in the book noted below that Bud recommended) about keeping a “sense of proportion” in raising issues so as not to waste your capital with potential allies. Are the petitioners wasting their capital on a

monument not in the public eye? In a practical sense, is this Bethlehem issue, for instance, on a par, say, with the 18-20ft. Columbus statue on busy Riverside Drive in Easton?

**Bud's comment:**

Bud asked us to read Anthony Kronman's *The Assault on American Excellence* (2019). By the magic of Amazon one-day delivery, Gadfly was able to get the book yesterday. Kronman's chapter on "Memory" is provocative. Now it's important to note that he is talking about offensive statues (and building names, etc.) on college campuses not in cities, and he's talking about the responsibility of college presidents to the students entrusted to them for the kind of education a democratic society requires not the responsibility of a mayor whose job is to provide public safety and pave streets, etc. for city residents — utilitarian services. But Kronman articulates better what I was trying to get at in arguing that the Columbus statue shouldn't be removed (except in extreme circumstance) because it is a teachable moment. Kronman's counter-intuitive, suggesting you can do more good by leaving such displays alone. He suggests, for instance, that removing a monument like the Columbus one is counter-productive. By masking the past, removing a monument obscures the legacy of oppression rather than addressing it, and retaining such a monument continually forces us to confront what human beings just like us are capable of and what we might do again — fostering humble recognition of our own human weakness and a resolve not to repeat that or similar activity. Removing a statue, he suggests, erasing a visible representation of past evil, may, like removing a thorn from your side, give you temporary comfort, but, he goes on, facing the past rather than running from it produces strength, "a community with the courage to live with its past."

Tip o' the hat to Peter and to Bud for the mental exercise.