

# Thinking about Columbus in Bethlehem (1)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Columbus monument, Uncategorized September 10, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts on the Columbus monument 

*“What right had the first discoverers of America to land, and take possession of a country, without asking the consent of its inhabitants, or yielding them an adequate compensation for their territory?”*  
*Washington Irving’s “gigantic question”*

Gadfly misses the classroom. He really does.

Such fun, such serious fun. Exercises like this.

We have granted Columbus the title of Founder of our country. He is our hero. We celebrate him with a holiday. Bethlehem has a monument in his honor. Is Columbus worthy of all these accolades?

A large group of our residents don’t think so and want the Bethlehem monument removed. How can we decide such an important question?

Well, you know what Gadfly always says, don’t you? Go to the primary sources.

Here from his journal/diary are Columbus’s exact words on the day of, on the moment of “discovery.”

What do you see? What can you tell about the man?

## **Columbus’s *Diario*, October 11, 1492**

“I, that we might form great friendship, for I knew that they were a people who could be more easily freed and converted to our holy faith by love than by force, gave to some of them red caps, and glass beads to put round their necks, and many other things of little value, which gave them great pleasure, and made them so much our friends that it was a marvel to see. They afterwards came to the ship’s boats where we were, swimming and bringing us parrots, cotton threads in skeins, darts, and many other things; and we exchanged them for other things that we gave

them, such as glass beads and small bells. In fine, they took all, and gave what they had with good will. It appeared to me to be a race of people very poor in everything. They go as naked as when their mothers bore them, and so do the women, although I did not see more than one young girl. All I saw were youths, none more than thirty years of age. They are very well made, with very handsome bodies, and very good countenances. Their hair is short and coarse, almost like the hairs of a horse's tail. They wear the hairs brought down to the eyebrows, except a few locks behind, which they wear long and never cut. They paint themselves black, and they are the color of the Canarians, neither black nor white. Some paint themselves white, others red, and others of what color they find. Some paint their faces, others the whole body, some only round the eyes, others only on the nose. They neither carry nor know anything of arms, for I showed them swords, and they took them by the blade and cut themselves through ignorance. They have no iron, their darts being wands without iron, some of them having a fish's tooth at the end, and others being pointed in various ways. They are all of fair stature and size, with good faces, and well made. I saw some with marks of wounds on their bodies, and I made signs to ask what it was, and they gave me to understand that people from other adjacent islands came with the intention of seizing them, and that they defended themselves. I believed, and still believe, that they come here from the mainland to take them prisoners. They should be good servants and intelligent, for I observed that they quickly took in what was said to them, and I believe that they would easily be made Christians, as it appeared to me that they had no religion, our Lord being pleased, will take hence, at the time of my departure, six natives for your Highnesses that they may learn to speak. I saw no beast of any kind except parrots, on this island."

Gather your thoughts, and Gadfly will compare notes with you later.