

# OPINION

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## The LEADER

34 W. Pulteney St., Corning, NY 14830  
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### COLUMN | MARK ANTHONY ROLO

## How Native Americans mark Columbus Day

For American Indians, Columbus Day is not a typical holiday. We don't celebrate 500 years of being dominated, exploited, enslaved and nearly exterminated by Europeans. But we do celebrate our survival.

Diana King is an enrolled member of the White Earth Indian Nation in northern Minnesota. For the last 12 years, she has taught at the Waubun High School, which is located on a reservation. "Columbus Day is a chance to teach about who we once were, what has become of us since Europeans arrived on our shores and who we are today — a struggling but surviving people," King says.

Each October, King creates a bulletin board that illustrates a rich display of indigenous life on the American continents circa 1492.

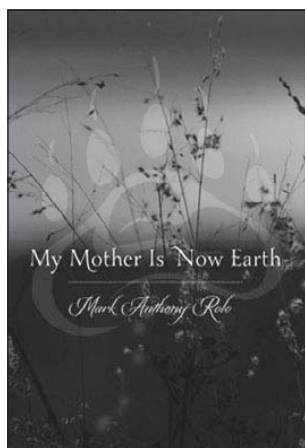
"One of my favorite displays is on the diversity of food (American Indians) harvested," she says. "From corn, coffee and squash, our foods are now on the world's dinner tables. Columbus and other 'explorers' may have taken our foods and other resources, but I like to look at it as a contribution from indigenous people."

King works closely with teachers at the school, especially in the area of history.

"I want teachers to teach more about Indian civilization just like they do with Egyptian or European history," she says. "Our history did not begin with Christopher Columbus."

And King also works with teachers on ways to integrate Ojibwe Indian cultural values in their curriculum.

"Even though 70 percent of our students are Native, most of our teachers are non-Indian," she says. "When I started here there were no Ojibwe language classes and there was no after-school program for Native students."



Working with teachers to help educate them about our students about their culture and the issues they face living on the reservation is critical to promoting success."

King is quick to point out that one of the most devastating realities about living in a post-colonial world is the shame that has been forced on American Indians.

"When students learn about how advanced our cultures once were, they get a great feeling of pride," she says. "It validates them. And they also realize their culture is important to the world."

Survival is a key word in King's efforts to take advantage of the annual recognition of Columbus.

"We should have been wiped out," she says. "It's a miracle Native people still exist. I have never liked the word 'conquered.' We are still here after 500 years."

And maybe every time Columbus Day comes around, we should rethink who the real heroes are: the explorer or the survivors?"

The answer depends on who is writing the story. More and more American-Indian people, like Diana King, insist on writing our own, especially on Columbus Day.

*Mark Anthony Rolo is an enrolled member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. He teaches at the White Earth Tribal and Community College and is the author of the memoir, "My Mother Is Now Earth."*

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### POLITICS | TOM O'MARA

## 3 decades of tracking rural New York

Here are a few words worth recalling for Columbus Day, directly from the journal of Columbus' first voyage to the New World, "I have come to believe that this is a mighty continent."

Little could he have imagined. Our annual Columbus Day observance typically inspires all sorts of reflections on the continent's discovery and, especially, on where we've been over all these centuries — and where we're headed.

"We cannot escape history," Lincoln told the Congress in 1862, and Americans have long demonstrated this need to reflect on what we stand for as a nation as the guidepost for what we want to be.

So I thought I'd go ahead and add my own two cents this Columbus Day by turning to the 2010 Census data released earlier this year. I'll just note here that if you spend any time at all browsing the nation's once-a-decade

Census ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)), it's an unbelievable trove of information — something akin to a Guinness Book of World Records in the sense that you're in for a surprise page after page after page.

Earlier this year, for example, the highly anticipated unveiling of the latest Census data produced this headline, "Census: 8 of 10 Americans now urbanites."

To quote from the Census Bureau news release, "Urban areas — defined as densely developed residential, commercial and other nonresidential areas — now account for 80.7



TOM O'MARA

percent of the U.S. population, up from 79.0 percent in 2000. Although the rural population — the population in any areas outside of those classified as 'urban' — grew by a modest amount from 2000 to 2010, it continued to decline as a percentage of the national population."

Maine and Vermont, respectively, are billed as America's most rural states in terms of percentage of population. According to the Census data, 61.3 percent of Maine's population lives in rural areas, compared to Vermont's 61.1 percent.

But I was curious to know where New York State stood in this regard? The answer is that as far as rural population percentage goes, we're a ways down the list at roughly 12%. But if you take a look at the actual rural population figures (in other words, the specific number of citizens classified as rural), we're a Top 10 rural state with approximately 2.3 million rural New Yorkers (the state of Texas, by the way, tops the list with more than 3.8 million rural residents).

My point is that it's no surprise that the New York State Legislature saw fit to create one of the Legislature's longest-standing institutions — the joint,

10-member bipartisan Commission on the Development of Rural Resources — exactly 30 years ago this year. Even today more than two-thirds of New York's 62 counties are designated as rural, including all of the counties comprising my Senate District, and it's been a constant challenge to raise the state Legislature's awareness of traditionally upstate, small city, rural issues. As our state and America as a whole become increasingly urbanized, according to the latest Census, the challenges for rural legislators keep getting tougher. We've witnessed it time after time right here in New York during the ongoing debates over state tax policies, economic development priorities, infrastructure allocations and in so many other ways. So it's been the mission of the

Rural Resources Commission to pay attention to issues like farm preservation, telemedicine, broadband access, volunteer recruitment and retention, water quality, education and transportation, to name just a few items on a much more comprehensive rural New York agenda.

I was appointed as a member of the Commission in 2011, and I'm especially grateful to be joined on it by area Assembly representatives Phil Palmesano and Barbara Lifton. It's worthwhile, and important, work.

In particular, the Commission periodically issues a publication called Rural Futures that's a good read if you're interested in

staying up to date on rural affairs locally, statewide and nationally. It's a publication that the Commission's been extremely proud of over the years, one that offers valuable information on state legislation, interesting and insightful trends in rural communities throughout New York and around the country, as well as summaries for local leaders and officials on grants, publications, useful websites and upcoming events. The Fall 2012 issue has just been published (you can find a copy on my Senate website, [www.oma.nysenate.gov](http://www.oma.nysenate.gov)) and it features updates on new rural-related state laws, the increasing trend of farmers using manure-based technology to generate electricity, the Allegany/Western Steuben Rural Health Network, and a new publication from the United States Department of Agriculture titled "Federal Resources for Sustainable Rural Communities."

On this 30th Anniversary of the Rural Resources Commission, then, I'm proud to say that the commission has long been noted as the voice of rural New York within the state Legislature.

The latest Census may be telling us that 8 out of 10 Americans are urbanites. But it's important to remember that New York remains a prominent rural state, a state where more than 2.3 million citizens are considered residents of rural New York.

*Tom O'Mara is a Republican state senator from Big Flats.*

### ANOTHER VIEW



### COLUMN | ED MORALES

## Stop using 'illegal' to describe undocumented immigrants

The mainstream press should stop using the adjective "illegal" to describe immigrants.

Tagging this label on immigrants without proper documentation has become part of the American lexicon. But the word has long-lasting repercussions not only on undocumented immigrants living in the United States, but the ethnicities usually associated with them. Immigrant-rights groups have urged the media to drop the label, but there has been some pushback.

Recently, veteran New

York Times reporter Julia Preston published a post about immigration where she asserted that the term "illegal immigrant" was "accurate," and that we "shouldn't be banning an accurate term."

While her statement certainly meets the requirements of journalistic objectivity that those in the profession should aspire to, it ignores the politically charged context in which the term is used. "Illegal" is certainly not a term that undocumented immigrants chose for themselves. It has been imposed on them (and the reading public) as

a defining term. This definition, long advocated for by the most virulent of the anti-immigrant crowd, i.e., the Joe Arpaio of the world, is arguably biased.

In legal terms, "illegal immigrant" is contradictory, since an "immigrant" is defined as one who has been lawfully admitted for permanent residence. If you have broken the law by overstaying your visa, for instance, you cannot be considered an immigrant in the eyes of the law.

What's more, the phrase "illegal immigrant" has been used in history as a way to stigmatize desperate

people who are forced to leave their own country for economic or political reasons. In the 1930s, for instance, the British used it to refer to Jews fleeing Nazi persecution and entering Palestine "illegally."

In the strict sense of the word, "illegal" can be used to describe someone who is making a prohibited left turn or who knowingly makes a false statement on a federal or state income tax return. These illegal acts don't seem to hound the offenders as they try to live their ordinary lives, and no one complains that emergency rooms have to

treat careless drivers using taxpayer money.

The term "illegal" also overlooks the circumstances that drive many undocumented workers here. A new documentary based on "Harvest of Empire," a book written by New York journalist Juan Gonzalez, makes the case that many undocumented people come to the United States as a result of our country's foreign policy.

Should the United States be tried for its part in causing the immigration of millions of Latin Americans who fled dictators friendly with Washington? How

illegal are our own actions abroad?

Well, maybe that's going too far. And that's exactly the reason the mainstream media, and the rest of us, should refrain from using "illegal" to describe people whose story we don't even know. Last I heard, in this country, we believe in the presumption of innocence.

*Ed Morales is the author of "Living in Spanglish." He wrote this for Progressive Media Project, a source of liberal commentary on domestic and international issues; it is affiliated with The Progressive magazine.*