

**WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY
THE FREDERICK DOUGLASS INSTITUTE**

*The Fifth Annual Dr. Clifford E. DeBaptiste
Frederick Douglass Institute Lecture*

*Distinguished Speaker: Rev. Dr. Kyle Boyer
Pastor, Mount Carmel Church of God in Christ*

America's Alternative: Embracing the Prophetic Possibilities of Frederick Douglass



**Thursday, October 10, 2024
3:00 – 5:00 pm in Philips Autograph Library
Philips Memorial Building**

Program Schedule

Welcome Remarks

Dr. Chris Awuyah-Professor/Director
Frederick Douglass Institute

FDI Annual Report

Dr. Eleanor Shevlin- Professor/FDI Board Member

Brief Remarks on Frederick Douglass Statue

Dr. James Trotman
Professor Emeritus of English/Founding Director, Frederick Douglass Institute

Song Selection

Lift Every Voice and Sing
Sung by the West Chester University Gospel Choir

Invocation

Dr. Zachary Wooten
Assistant Professor Honors College

Mayor Introduction

Dr. William Lalicker
Professor/FDI Board Member

Greetings from DeBaptiste Family

Honorable Lillian L. DeBaptiste
West Chester Borough Mayor, and Daughter of Dr. Clifford E. DeBaptiste

Introduction of Dr. Davenport

Dr. Francis Atuahene
Professor/FDI Board Chair

Remarks on behalf of the President

Dr. Zebulan Davenport
Vice President for University Advancement and External Affairs

Piano Interlude

Speaker Introduction

Mr. Chancey Page
Assistant Director and Coordinator of
Diversity Initiatives Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, FDI Board Member

Speaker

Rev. Dr. Kyle Boyer
Pastor, Mount Carmel Church of God in Christ
America's Alternative: Embracing the Prophetic Possibilities of Frederick Douglass

Closing Remarks

Dr. Tracey Robinson
Vice President for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
and Chief Diversity Inclusion Officer



The mission of the Frederick Douglass Institute at West Chester University of Pennsylvania (FDI) is to maintain the legacy of the great abolitionist, orator, and statesman Frederick Douglass before the campus community, local community, region, and the nation through the highest quality of academic

programming that promotes excellence in scholarship, teaching, and institutional advancement. Consistent with its mission, and with the mission, vision, and values of the university, the Institute is an educational and cultural resource for advancing multicultural studies across the curriculum and for deepening the intellectual heritage of Frederick Douglass, the former slave, distinguished orator, journalist, author, and statesman. Douglass, who was a frequent visitor to the West Chester area, gave his last public lecture on West Chester's campus on February 1, 1895, just nineteen days before his death.

Guided by the spirit of Douglass and his legacy, the Institute aims to create opportunities to build a better community for all of us to fulfill our destiny as human beings. Perhaps Douglass himself put it best when on October 1, 1865, at the inauguration of an Institute named for him in Baltimore, Maryland, Douglass said that the mission of that Institute was, in part, "to be a dispenser of knowledge," and "a radiator of light." As Douglass also declared in his remarks, "In a word, we dedicate this Institution to virtue, temperance, truth, liberty, and justice." Through the leadership of WCU, there are Frederick Douglass Institutes at all campuses of the Pennsylvania State Universities System (PASSHE). Collectively the Frederick Douglass Institutes at all campuses of the State System are known as the FDI Collaborative.

The programs listed below are examples of how we continually work to keep the spirit of Douglass alive.

The DeBaptiste/Douglass Lecture: The past speakers, Dr. James Trotman, Rev. Dr. Wayne Croft, Senator Andy Dinniman, and Dr. Brenda Allen. The future speaker is Dr. Christopher Fiorentino (2025).

The Lunch (En)Counter Series: The series takes its name from the famed Lunch-Counter Protests of Civil Rights era, aims to provide campus forums for discussing topical issues related to race, equity, and civil rights. This academic year FDI's focus is on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

The FDI Educational Outreach: This project connects 3,000 elementary students at Coatesville and 800 high school students at Coatesville and Norristown school systems with an expansion to Chester Upland and other school districts.

The FDI Debate Team: In spring of 2024 the FDI Debate Team became repeat champions of the PASSHE FDI Debate Tournament.



Dear Friends,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the fifth Dr. Clifford E. DeBaptiste Frederick Douglass Lecture.

It's fitting that just beyond the walls of the Philips Autograph Library is a statue of Frederick Douglass. This statue, unveiled in 2013, commemorates Douglass' final public lecture —delivered on this very campus. The impact of that moment continues to echo through the halls of our University.

This annual lecture is hosted by the Frederick Douglass Institute and made possible through the generous gift of Dr. Clifford DeBaptiste. As West Chester Borough's first African-American mayor, Dr. DeBaptiste's commitment to education and justice mirrors Douglass' own convictions, and we are deeply grateful for his dedication to ensuring that this powerful legacy lives on.

Frederick Douglass stands as a monumental figure in American history, forever a champion of education and social justice. Born into slavery, Douglass defied the constraints of his time by teaching himself to read and write — an act that not only transformed his life but also changed the lives of countless others.

He believed that education was the true path to freedom, a belief that resonates deeply with the values we uphold here at West Chester University. His final public lecture reminds us of the power of knowledge to confront oppression and inspire lasting change.

As we come together for this lecture, we continue his mission by using learning as a tool to create a more just and equitable society. Thank you for being part of this important event. I hope that the insights shared today deepen our collective commitment to the values that Frederick Douglass fought for and inspire us to continue working toward justice and equality for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laurie Bernotsky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

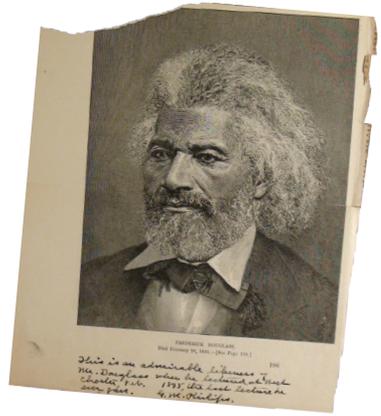
Laurie Bernotsky, DPhil
President, West Chester University

ONCE IN A WHILE, A MOMENT IN HISTORY CHANGES THE LIFE OF AN INSTITUTION.

On October 1, 2013, West Chester University unveiled the statue of Frederick Douglass. The statue continues the study and the creative uses of the life and legacy of Frederick Douglass that began in the classroom. Students discovered that Frederick Douglass had been in the Borough of West Chester every decade after his escape from slavery in 1838 on his way to becoming a champion in the fight to end slavery. The former enslaved man who devoted his life to liberating others rose to become the most photographed American in the nineteenth century. He gave his last public lecture on the campus of West Chester University nineteen days before he died on Feb. 20, 1895.

THE DISCOVERY

In the fall 1990, Dr. C. James Trotman assigned students in the African American Literature class to look at different buildings and libraries on the campus as a way of familiarizing themselves with campus history. Some of the students went to the Phillips Autograph Library where they discovered that Harper's Magazine had a picture of Frederick Douglass on the cover. Inside of it, Principal George Morris Phillips wrote that "This is an admirable likeness of Mr. Douglass when he lectured at West Chester" It was his last public lecture 19 days before he died. The information from this classroom assignment was validated and became the starting point for what is now the Frederick Douglass Institute at West Chester University under Dr. Trotman, founding director.



*Engraved Image of Frederick Douglass
from Harper's Weekly (1883)*

THE SCULPTURE and the STATUE

Richard Blake, WCU professor and esteemed sculptor, was invited to draw a sketch of what a Douglass sculpture would look like. The image was approved by the board of the Douglass Institute and the campus president, Dr. Greg Weisenstein. By the time the new semester started in 2010, the sculptor had the approval of all the signatories required to develop and install the Douglass statue. Dr Clifford E. DeBaptiste, the former Mayor of West Chester, was the first major donor.

THE SETTING

The location for the statue happened when the administration was redesigning the Quad. The statue's steering committee (John Baker, Chris Awuyah, Richard Blake, Mildred Joyner, and James Trotman) met with the campus grounds planners to determine the best location for the statue. Its current location was a decision that took into account visibility, lighting, and accessibility to all.

Finally, the dedicated benches surrounding the statue were contributions from families who wanted to show their support for West Chester University and its journey with one of the nation's champions of freedom.

Dr. C. James Trotman



Dr. Clifford Evans DeBaptiste

The life and legacy of Dr. Clifford E. DeBaptiste is defined by four equally important pillars. The worlds of business, civic engagement, education, and philanthropy are the pillars around which he has continually built his life. Having visited West Chester often as a young man to see his Aunt Louise, he fell in love with the Borough of West Chester. Following

Clifford's discharge from the United State Army, serving in both WWII and the Korean conflict, he made the bold decision to move to West Chester, PA. It was here in West Chester in 1954 that he opened his first funeral home.

This single proprietor business would grow to two sites. Under his visionary leadership he acquired four additional mortuaries across The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. As a licensed Funeral Director, he continued to operate them until their sale. In 1964, with his wife Inez, he constructed the first funeral home to be built in West Chester. It was named the DeBaptiste Funeral Home, Inc. In 2008 he opened Milestone Events LLC, a reception center, which expanded the business model to allow a place for receptions and other life changing events to be held.

Since 1949, Dr. DeBaptiste has diligently served his profession as Past-Chairman (13 Years) of the PA. State Board of Funeral Directors Association, Past President of Pennsylvania Funeral Directors Association, Past President of Chester County Funeral Directors Association, and Past President of Quaker State Funeral Directors Association. He remains active in funeral services at the DeBaptiste Funeral Home, Inc. mentoring and inspiring others to join the funeral service profession.

Dr. DeBaptiste's civic, social, and community engagement is legendary, from the very first African- American award he received in 1956 to over five hundred awards later in recognition of his many leadership roles. Through the years he has served on numerous boards. These boards include but are not limited to the Board of Trustees for West Chester University. As a trustee, he promoted the university's expansion and advocated for enhanced student opportunities and diversity programs. Dr. DeBaptiste also served for 35 years as a Director of the First National Bank of Chester County (1975-2010). His participation in a plethora of organizations included Rotary International, Corporate Board of the YMCA, Chester County Private Industrial Council, Chester County Art Association Board, and membership in two of the oldest

fraternities for Black men: Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Sigma Pi Phi (Boulé). He has been Past Exalted Ruler of Captain Levi Hood #159 Lodge, I.B.P.O.E. of West Chester, along with being 33rd. Degree Member of the Martin Luther King Jr. Consistory #86 of Freemasonry working, collaborating, and strengthening communities across the Borough of West Chester and in Chester County. Between 1994-2002 he became the first Black Mayor of West Chester, PA. As Mayor, Dr. DeBaptiste united people. As a catalyst for change he transformed the Borough of West Chester into the well-known and respected community we know today. The pinnacle of his administration was to lead the yearlong Bicentennial Celebration in 1999, commemorating the 200th Bicentennial of the Borough of West Chester.

Educating himself, his children, and making education possible for countless others has been a hallmark in Dr. DeBaptiste's life. His first goal, after successfully raising three college educated daughters, was to return to school himself. In 1984, he received his Master's in Human Services from Lincoln University. Recognizing the importance of education towards achieving a purposeful life, he provided opportunities for others to achieve their dreams. Dr. DeBaptiste began a lifelong habit of philanthropy with scholarships across many platforms. These scholarships have been established in the West Chester School District, at the College of Education and Social Work at West Chester University, and a scholarship for aspiring funeral directors with Pennsylvania Funeral Directors Association, as well as The Inez DeBaptiste Scholarship at the Woman's League for Minority Education. Finally, he provided seed money for a number of scholarship initiatives. These scholarships, many in the names of other individuals, are held by the Community Foundation of Chester County. This selfless giving to others for their academic pursuits has been a life-changing opportunity for many.

Dr. DeBaptiste's love of education and belief in giving back to the community led him in 2010 to make the initial \$50,000 commitment towards the Frederick Douglass statue on the campus of West Chester University. This tribute was in recognition of the 19th century author, orator, and civil rights leader who gave his last public speech on the campus of West Chester University on February 1, 1895, nineteen days before he died. In addition, in 2018 Dr. DeBaptiste established the Frederick Douglass annual lecture series for others to continue to learn about the impact of Frederick Douglass on our lives today.

This magnificent bronze sculpture of Frederick Douglass, created by WCU Professor Richard Blake, looks over the academic quad of WCU in the Clifford and Inez DeBaptiste Plaza. This space on the campus is a location where everyone can reflect on our local and national history while contemplating their own future.

Dr. DeBaptiste's life has been filled with God's blessings. Through the years both grassroots and prominent organizations, churches, and clubs have honored him. In 1984, he was named Outstanding Citizen of the Year. In 1994 he received both the Presidents Medallion and an Honorary Doctor Laws. In 2001 he became only the fourth recipient to receive the rarely given Founders award by Chester County Historical Society. Assigned by the United States State Department to the Far East during his military tour of duty, he was honored in 2009 by the National Purple Heart Association. In 2013 he was one of seven to be inducted into the West Chester Walk of Fame. In 2014, he was honored by the Quaker State FD with the Guiding Light award. In 2022 he was the recipient of the Doctor of Humane Letters from Lincoln University.

These awards along with countless others encompass a lifetime of overcoming obstacles, determination, tireless work ethic, perseverance, but most importantly a commitment to faith, faith in God and belief that there are good people in this world who can be encouraged. This confidence has sustained his efforts to bring a spirit of unity to his beloved community of West Chester.

His faith, principles, and values were modeled by his mother, Lillian. Widowed at an early age with three young children, she showed him what hard work, frugal living, and a God-centered life looked like. It is those same values that Dr. DeBaptiste lives by today. His faith is grounded in membership at the church of the Holy Trinity and St. Paul's Baptist Church, both in West Chester. His extraordinary career has taken him around the world, and yet there is nowhere he would rather be than at home in West Chester. This is the place where he and the late Inez E. DeBaptiste (1990) raised three daughters, Mayor Lillian L. DeBaptiste, Inez A. DeBaptiste Esq., and Dr. Celeste E. DeBaptiste MD., along with four grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

On May 19th of 2024, Dr. DeBaptiste celebrated his 100th Birthday. His wisdom, infectious optimism, quick wit, and active mind, continue to influence all those who share in his life's journey.



Lillian L. DeBaptiste

Lillian L. DeBaptiste was officially sworn in to serve as the first Black female mayor of the Borough of West Chester in Pennsylvania on January 3, 2022. She's following in the footsteps of her father, Dr. Clifford E. DeBaptiste, who served two terms as the first African American mayor in West Chester starting in 1994.

Mayor Lillian DeBaptiste moved to West Chester at an early age, with her parents Clifford and the late Inez E. DeBaptiste. Graduating from Henderson High School, she matriculated to West Chester State College—now known as West Chester University—with a degree in Psychology. Lillian is a believer in the power of education, which was instilled by her mother and father who were both first generation college students.

In 1973, Mayor DeBaptiste joined the family business as a licensed Funeral Director and remains the President and Director of DeBaptiste Funeral Home and of Milestone Events.

Through the years, Mayor Lillian DeBaptiste has been involved with multiple community organizations. She has previously served on the board of The Chester County Community Foundation, Planned Parenthood and The Charles A. Melton Arts and Education Center. She recently became a Board Member of Uptown! Knauer Performing Arts Center. Mayor DeBaptiste is also a founding member of the Valley Forge Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta.

Lillian's greatest treasure is spending time with her family. She shares five children and 4 grandchildren—her life's true source of joy—with her husband, Thomas E. Lambert Sr.

Mayor DeBaptiste's family, friends, and community inspire her to continue to work for cultural diversity, environmental initiatives, and racial and social justice.



Rev. Dr. Kyle Boyer

Dr. Kyle J. Boyer, a native of Chester County, Pennsylvania, commenced his spiritual journey at Mount Carmel Church of God in Christ (COGIC), where he currently serves as Senior Pastor. Since delivering his inaugural sermon in 2006, Dr. Boyer has embraced his role as a minister, emerging as a faith leader in Chester County and beyond. His ministerial activities extended to local and regional youth leadership roles for several years. From 2020 to 2023, he served as Pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Coatesville, PA, before returning to lead his home congregation. Additionally, he has served in various capacities beyond the local pastorate, including as the Government and Civic Affairs representative for the Office of the Bishop of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction (COGIC), and as the Assistant Dean of Educational Programming for the COGIC Auxiliaries in Ministry Convention.

In the field of public education, Dr. Boyer has held positions in both classroom instruction and administrative roles within secondary education. His commitment to educational equity led to his successful election to the Tredyffrin/Easttown Board of School Directors, where he became only the second African American member. During his tenure, he was a staunch advocate for equity initiatives. He also served as president of the West Chester, PA branch of the NAACP, where he promoted civic engagement and supported local governments in advancing equitable practices.

Dr. Boyer is the author of “The Prince, the Priests & the Prophets: The Need for Prophetic Leadership in America,” a book that explores the nexus of faith, leadership, and societal transformation in the United States.

Currently, Dr. Boyer serves as Dean of Students at Norristown Area High School and is the founder and President of East Miner Collaborative CDC, an organization dedicated to educational and vocational training, cultural understanding, and familial well-being within the community.

He earned his undergraduate degree from George Washington University and master’s degrees from both the University of Pennsylvania and United Lutheran Seminary, where he also obtained a Doctorate of Divinity.

Frederick Douglass Institute Board Members

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Department of Special Education*

Dr. Bridget Asempapa

*Associate Professor of Counselor
Education, Department of Counselor
Education*

Dr. Francis Atuahene

Professor, Public Policy and Administration

Dr. Christian Awuyah

*Professor of English and Director of
Frederick Douglass Institute*

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*Associate Professor of English, Chair of the
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*Operations Manager, Office of the Sr.
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University College Dean*

June Thompson

Administrative Assistant

Miriam Andoh

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Vanessa Chery

*Graduate Assistant, Department of
Psychology*

Brianna Graham

*Graduate Assistant, Department of
Psychology*

Jamilla Wilson

Graduate Assistant, Department of English

Previous Speakers

2018

DR. JAMES TROTMAN

2021

REV. DR. WAYNE CROFT SR.

2022

SEN. ANDREW DINNIMAN

2023

DR. BRENDA ALLEN

Upcoming Speakers

2025

**DR. CHRISTOPHER FIORENTINO,
PRESIDENT WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY 2017–2024**