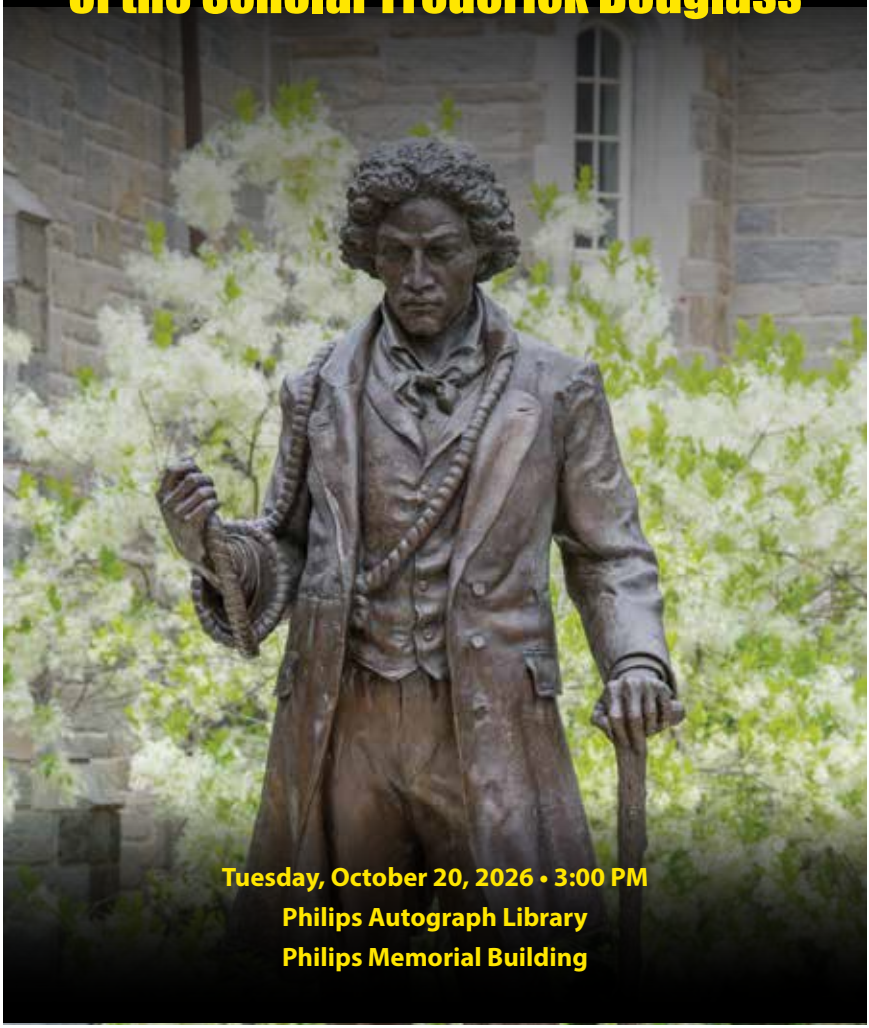
WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY
FREDERICK DOUGLASS INSTITUTE

The Seventh Annual Dr. Clifford E. DeBaptiste
Frederick Douglass Institute Lecture

Featured Speaker: Aiden Tilery
West Chester University Student

Self-Empowerment through Education:

Becoming 21st Century Students of the Scholar Frederick Douglass



Tuesday, October 20, 2026 • 3:00 PM
Philips Autograph Library
Philips Memorial Building

Master of Ceremonies
Dr. Francis Atuahene
Frederick Douglass Institute, Board Member
Professor, Public Policy and Administration)

Program Schedule

Song Selection
Lift Every Voice and Sing
West Chester University Gospel Choir

Invocation
Elder Isaiah Rogers
Pentecostal House of Prayer
Upper Chichester, Pennsylvania

Welcome Remarks
Dr. Francis Atuaheneh

Introduction of President
Jocelyn Manigo, Ed.D.
Frederick Douglass Institute, Board Member Director,
Learning Assistance and Resource Center (LARC)

Welcome Remarks
Dr. R. Laurie Bernotsky
President, West Chester University

Introduction of the Featured Speaker
The Honorable Lillian DeBaptiste
Mayor, West Chester Borough

Featured Speaker
Aiden Tillery
Great Grandson of Dr. Clifford E. DeBaptiste
Senior, Business Management, West Chester University

Closing Remarks
Jocelyn Manigo

Photos in the Frederick Douglass Plaza



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 formerly enslaved 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, Dr. Brenda Allen, and Rev. Dr. Kyle Boyer.

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.

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.

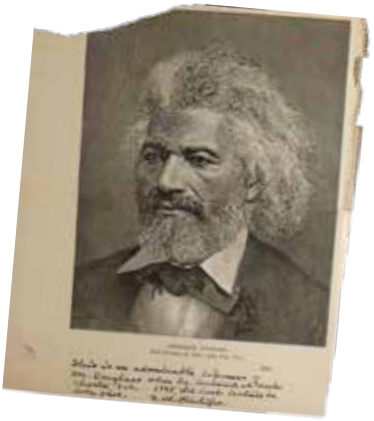
The FDI Debate Team: Each year, WCU in partnership with the FDI Collaborative hosts an FDI Debate Team in competition with other area universities.

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 2026, Dr. DeBaptiste celebrated his 102nd Birthday. His wisdom, infectious optimism, quick wit, and active mind, continue to influence all those who share in his life's journey.



Aiden N. Tilery

Aiden N. Tilery has spent his 20 years of life in the West Chester borough community, with his parents and three brothers, Christopher, Benjamin, and Manzi, supporting each other.

After completing most of his early education at West Chester Area School District, graduating from West Chester East High School in 2024. He continues his education at West Chester University (WCU) to pursue a degree in Business Management. Aiden will be graduating in May 2027 to begin his Funeral and Mortuary Science Studies at Northhampton Community College.

Throughout his college experience, Aiden has worked full time as store manager, splitting his time between developing himself both at University and work. He has a passion for discovering new things and constantly works towards being a better student, leader, and person.

As the son of Elizabeth DeBaptiste, nephew of Mayor Lillian L. DeBaptiste, and great-grandson of Dr. Clifford E. DeBaptiste, he has a strong commitment to his family with plans to join his family business, the DeBaptiste Funeral Home.

Aiden has developed a passion for mental health advocacy and servant leadership, doing his best to value people and their well-being. He has always had a love for literature, writing, and music. He enjoys spending his free time with family and friends.

Aiden will speak on Self-Empowerment through Education: Becoming 21st Century Students of the Scholar Frederick Douglass. Douglass' core value of freedom through education has resonance for today's society, noting the personal journey of his great- grandfather Dr. Clifford DeBaptiste.
In the future, Aiden plans to continue to educate himself and work towards inner growth to give back to the West Chester community.

Frederick Douglass Institute Staff

Dr. Christian Awuyah, Professor of English and Director of Frederick Douglass Institute

June Thompson, Administrative Assistant

Sunday Akomolede, Graduate Assistant, Education Policy, Planning, Administration, Ed.D.

Shayna Eubanks, Graduate Assistant, Psychology, PsyD

John Belfoire, Graduate Assistant, English, MA

Andrew Wedlock, Assistant Director of Equal Opportunity Programs and Strategic Initiatives.

Frederick Douglass Institute Board Members

Dr. Beatrice Adera, Professor and Chair of Special Education, Department of Special Education

Dr. Ginneh Akbar, Associate Professor and Chairperson, Department of Graduate Social Work

Dr. Bridget Asempapa, Associate Professor of Counselor Education, Department of Counselor Education

Dr. Francis Atuahene, Professor, Public Policy and Administration

Dr. Michael Burns, Associate Professor of English, Department of English

Dr. John Craig, Professor, Interdisciplinary Studies and Academic Support Programs and Director, Academic Success Program/ACT 101

Dr. Hadih Deedat, Associate Professor of Undergraduate Social Work, Department of Undergraduate Social Work

Dr. Martha Donkor, Professor of History, Department of History

Dr. Tiffany Jones, Associate Professor and Learning Specialist of ASP

Dr. Jocelyn Manigo, Associate Professor and Director of LARC

Dr. Gerardina Martin, Associate Professor and Assistant Director of Honors College

Dr. Jeremy McCool, Associate Professor of Digital/Global Media , Department of Communication and Media

Dr. Margaret Ottley, Professor of Kinesiology, Department of Kinesiology

Dr. Nicholas Prephan, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication and Media

Dr. Tracey Robinson, Vice President, Division for Access, Compliance andEngagement

Dr. la tonya thames-taylor, Associate Professor of History, Department of History

Sophia Vilceus, Associate Professor, Department of English

Dr. York Williams, Professor, Special Education, College of Education

Andria Young, Executive Associate, Dean of University College

Lift Every Voice and Sing

Lift Every Voice and Sing
Lift every voice and sing,
'Til earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on 'til victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
'Til now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.

ABOUT THE ANNUAL DEBAPTISTE–DOUGLASS LECTURE SERIES

In a fitting tribute to the great abolitionist, orator, and statesman, this annual lecture examines issues of social justice to improve the present by learning from the past. It also commemorates Frederick Douglass's last public lecture on WCU's campus, near the statue erected in 2013 by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

PREVIOUS SPEAKERS



2018
Dr. James Trotman



2021
Rev. Dr. Wayne Croft Sr.



2022
Senator Andrew Dinniman



2023
Dr. Brenda Allen



2024
Rev. Dr. Kyle Boyer



2025
Honorable Mayor Lillian DeBaptiste



2026
Mr. Aiden Tilery

UPCOMING SPEAKERS

2027
Dr. Anita Foeman