

**A Litany in Survival: Black Lives Matter in
the Age of Trump
An Evening with Frank Leon Roberts**

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A Litany in Survival: Black Lives Matter in the Age of Trump, An Evening with Frank Leon Roberts

Project Abstract

I am seeking a grant from the Race and Social Justice Initiative to partially provide funding to have a speaker, Frank Leon Roberts, come to campus in April 2019. Frank is a NYU professor, Black Lives Matter activist, and creator of the nation's first #BlackLivesMatter Syllabus. Frank's speech, *A Litany in Survival: Black Lives Matter in the Age of Trump*, engages audience members to think about the organization and movement Black Lives Matter in the current politically charged environment. Frank argues that Black Lives Matter is a human rights movement and is also making the U.S. a better place for everyone, not just African Americans. Black Lives Matter and the responses to it are particularly important in Charleston in the aftermath of the AME Church Shooting, the shooting of Walter Scott in North Charleston, as well as the the 2017 racially insensitive CofC Halloween costume of Freddie Gray. By bridging higher education and Black Lives Matter, Frank will give CofC students, faculty, and staff an opportunity to examine how black lives have never mattered in Charleston and how to take on an activist role.

Statement of Need

Black lives have never mattered in the history of the United States. Through slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and now police violence and brutality as well as mass incarceration, black lives have always been targeted. The black men who have been victims of police violence, such as Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Freddie Gray, are not men who have been fatally shot at the hands of white police by accident. Rather, police violence against black people, and particularly black males, are a form of institutionalized racism and systemic oppression. From the Black Panther Party to the Black Lives Matter movement, activists argue that black lives have never mattered and unless black lives matter, all lives will never matter.

Charleston is also an important site of black history and within recent years, a call for more attention to Black Lives Matter has been essential. According to the International

African American Museum, Charleston is home to the country's major slave port, a place where more enslaved Africans arrived and were sold than any other location.¹ This brings Charleston to the forefront of understanding not only African American history, but how the city has shaped and fostered American history.

Furthermore, Charleston has a wide range of racial disparities that disproportionately affect African American. Among the most prevalent and speaks to the effects of institutionalized racism, are police violence and brutality. According to *The State of Racial Disparities in Charleston County, South Carolina, 2000-2015*, "of more than 22,000 stops in 2014 in North Charleston, 16,730 involved African Americans-almost 76% of stops, much higher than the city's black population. Most of these, 10,600 involved black men, like Scott".² In other words, almost 76% of stops in North Charleston in 2014 were African Americans and a little less than half of them were black men. This statistic clearly shows how police violence, brutality and racial profiling are a form of institutionalized racism and systemic oppression against African Americans. Institutionalized racism is purposeful and has been so ingrained in American society that it is now taking on a new form of pulling over and shooting unarmed black men.

Additionally, the issue of police violence and brutality in the wake of the Walter Scott shooting, the AME Church Shooting, and the CofC racially insensitive Halloween costume of Freddie Gray sheds light on how Charleston and CofC is in desperate need of a Black Lives Matter discussion. The purpose of the organization Black Lives Matter was to speak out against racial injustices, particularly that of white policeman shooting unarmed black men and women. Scholars and activists such as Frank unless black lives matter, all lives will never matter. Black lives have mattered in the history of the United States and in Charleston, they have not mattered in the 18th century nor in 2015 (AME Church shooting and Walter Scott shooting) and 2017 (CofC Halloween costume of Freddie Gray).

¹ International African American Museum. Accessed <https://iaamuseum.org>.

² College of Charleston's Race and Social Justice Initiative, *The State of Racial Disparities in Charleston County, South Carolina, 2000-2015*, pg. 72.

In response to the clear issues of police violence in Charleston, the RSJI funds will be used to partially fund the BLM speaker and activist, Frank Leon Roberts, to speak on campus in April 2019.

Program Description

Sponsored by Keppler Speakers, Frank Leon Roberts is an activist and professor at the NYU Gallatin School. He is best known for creating the nation's first #BlackLivesMatter Syllabus. Frank incorporates his experiences of being a political organizer, a champion for social justice activism, and a teacher to motivate college campuses to understand the history and significance of the Black Lives Matter movement as well as encourage students to become activists for social change against police violence.³

Frank's speech *A Litany in Survival: Black Lives Matter in the Age of Trump* encourages students to think about how BLM fits into the political environment, prepares professors to incorporate the #BlackLivesMatter Syllabus into their classrooms, and mobilizes students, faculty, and staff to become advocates for social justice activism. Furthermore, Frank demonstrates how progressives can resist white nationalism and neo-fascism shaping American politics.

The event, *A Litany in Survival: Black Lives Matter in the Age of Trump, An Evening with Frank Leon Roberts* will take place in April 2019. Most likely, the event will take place in late April during Sustainability Week with the Office of Sustainability. The event will take place in the evening and be held in a large auditorium space, such as the Stern Ballroom or the Sottile Theater.

Frank's fee is \$7,000 which is inclusive of his speaking fee, travel, and accomodation. Due to the large fee, I will be seeking co-sponsorship with several organizations and departments. Currently, the list of sponsors are as follows:

³ Keppler Speakers. *Frank Leon Roberts*. Accessed <https://www.keplerspeakers.com/speakers/frank-leon-roberts>.

- Freshmen Year Experience
- Women's and Gender Studies Program
- Office of Student Life
- Political Science Club

I am still in the process of officially securing co-sponsorship with several other organizations and departments, and I will be securing that by January 8, 2019 to officially reserve Frank with Keppler Speakers by January 14, 2019. However, these are the organizations and departments that I have officially secured sponsorship with.

The budget for the event is as follows:

- \$7,000 fee for Frank
 - \$1,500-2,000 from Freshman Year Experience
 - TBD based on Executive Board meetings in the upcoming weeks for all other organization and departments
 - Fee for space reservation (Office of Student Life will be working with me on a cost for this and may waive)
 - Fee to have Public Safety at the event (Office of Student Life will be working with me on this)

Advancement of Social Justice Activism

By having Frank speak on campus in April 2019, CofC students, faculty, and staff will gain a better understanding of the Black Lives Matter movement and what they can do in each of their roles to become activists for it. More specifically, the campus will see how BLM fits into American political discourse, the City of Charleston, and the CofC campus as a whole. In turn, CofC students, faculty, and staff will speak out against racial injustices plaguing the black community in Charleston and on campus, especially police violence and brutality.