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From Graduation to Cancellation:
Kanye West's Tumultuous Legacy

As his career unfolds, many are left asking: Can Kanye ever regain the respect and admiration he once commanded?

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Vol. 6 Issue 5 May 2025

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Parma's First Black Council Member Sees Changing City



By Ron Kisner

As evidence of a changing Parma, the city known for its racially torn history including a 27-year-old Cleveland NAACP housing and employment discrimination suit finally



SCAN TO LISTEN

settled in 2002, has appointed its first black council member, Monica Wilson.

Clearly aware of her city's sordid racial history, Wilson, who represents Ward 1, said that, overall, she has fared well in her position, and is witnessing the emergence of a new Parma. The City Council appointed her in 2023 above four other candidates. She runs for reelection this year.

"I know of historical challenges faced by African American residents in Parma," offered Council member Wilson. "However, it's encouraging to recognize that these incidents are no longer as prevalent. "

Council member Wilson noted that one of the noticeable changes in Parma is its increased diversity, indicating a shift towards a more inclusive environment.

"Black families facing negativity from the neighbors are not nearly as prevalent," she assured. "These changes are positive indicators of a more inclusive Parma."

One tangible example of the shift was the collaboration among the 10-member City Council to stage a Black History Month celebration in February.

While she says she has not encountered frequent or systemic racially tinged incidents, Wilson re-



called once, while campaigning, "I did come across a concerning situation where a resident walked on his porch with a firearm in a holster while raising questions about my qualifications for council. While this was disturbing, it was an isolated incident."

COUNCIL Continued on page 2

Dangerous Chemicals in Synthetic Braiding Hair: Consumer Reports Find

Consumer Reports finds 'dangerous chemicals' in synthetic braiding hair products. Carcinogens were detected in all of them.



SCAN TO LISTEN

By Staff Writer

A new report suggests that some synthetic hair products may be unsafe. Consumer Reports tested 10 popular hair brands and found that all of them contained hazardous chemicals, some of which can even cause cancer.

One of the chemicals found is benzene, which is highly toxic to your health. Lead is another chemical found in the majority of the hair, which can harm the brain, especially in children.

Why This Matters

"This isn't just about hair. It's about keeping people healthy," said James Dickerson, a scientist who worked on the report.

Many Black women and girls use this kind of hair for styles like braids and twists. It helps protect their real hair. But if synthetic hair has harmful chemicals, it can make people sick over time. These chemicals can cause cancer, breathing problems, pregnancy issues, and changes in hormones.

What Are the Next Steps?

Consumer Reports is asking the government to make new rules. They want labels that show what's in the hair, warnings if the hair might be unsafe, and limits on how much of each chemical can be used.



They also started a petition—a way for people to sign their names and ask for change.

What Professionals Are Saying

Tamarra James-Todd, Mark, and Catherine Winkler, Associate Professor of Environmental Reproductive Epidemiology and lab director of the Environmental Reproductive Justice Lab, were quoted in the Consumer Reports article. She said that chemicals in synthetic braiding hair "look like endocrine disruptors—they look like things that can mess with our body's normal hormonal system."

HAIR Continued on page 2



Credit Unsplash

Having a Reentry Plan Can Help Released Individuals After Incarceration

By Tonya Sams

After time served in prison, an individual who has been incarcerated hopes to get a fresh start, but many challenges can cause this new chapter to be a difficult one. Hurdles such as limited access to employment opportunities, housing, and other necessities can make it extremely hard for someone to get reestablished in society. Some things can be done before release to help someone prepare for life outside of prison.

“The individual should create a reentry plan,” said Maria Smith, Supervising Attorney at The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland. “They should be working on this plan with somebody while they’re incarcerated.”

A reentry plan helps individuals make the transition from incarceration to reentering society. This includes determining where they will live, how they will find a job, training, and other resources. A reentry advisory committee, comprised of those who have experienced being incarcerated and have reentered society, could help with a reentry plan. Prison officials and families should also help to create this plan.

“For the family of the per-



Credit DC Department of Corrections

son incarcerated, they should think about how to best prepare for this person coming out of prison,” said Smith. “If this is a person they want to

be a member of their household, they need to find out if there are any obstacles to them joining the household and try to navigate them be-

forehand.”

People living in federally subsidized housing sometimes assume that a person recently released cannot live with them. There are, however, only two absolute bans from federal housing: a conviction for producing methamphetamine on federally subsidized property, or if they are required to register as a lifetime sex offender.

Other than those two exceptions, housing authorities and other landlords should abide by HUD Guidance issued in 2016 that every person applying for a rental should have an opportunity for an individualized assessment.

If the individual desires to get a place of their own, they should research where they would like to live, what the rent amount would be, and if there are any programs for recently released individuals that offer rent assistance. They should also find out if they have an eviction record.

“When people are in jail without bail, they sometimes end up getting evicted because they haven’t had a chance to return to their home and move out and return the keys,” Smith said.

“They need to determine if they had a landlord before

they were incarcerated who will give them a positive reference. Is there someone who can step up and verify that they were a good tenant? They should think about what programs they have completed, what certificates they have earned while incarcerated, that could demonstrate that they are ready to do what’s required of a tenant, Smith added.”

Individuals should also get a new state identification card immediately upon release, enroll in Medicare if they are or will be 65 years old after release, and research their conviction record. Most importantly, individuals should find reentry groups to connect with.

Resources for those reentering are available at North Star Neighborhood Reentry Resource Center: northstar-reentry.org/services.php.

For Cuyahoga County Reentry Awareness Month events, go to lasclev.org/reentryweek2025/

If you need assistance with a civil legal issue, call Legal Aid at 888-817-3777 or complete an online intake at lasclev.org/apply.

Tonya Sams is a Development & Communications Manager at The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

COUNCIL From front page

Born in Detroit, MI, Council member Wilson found herself briefly living on public assistance, as a child, after her father, one of the first Black executives of Sears, and mother, divorced. But showing considerable drive and resilience, the Detroit native, who graduated from Wayne State University, earned a master’s degree in chemical engineering, moved to West Virginia to work for Union Carbide, and then to Cleveland to take a management position in global polymer technology.

The skills she developed in her career prepared her, she believes, to

wrestle with the everyday issues of constituents. Wilson retired last year from the paints and coatings industry.

“My professional career in the chemical engineering industry equipped me with the skills necessary to tackle complex challenges, and work effectively with diverse teams,” said Wilson, who was honored by the American Institute of Chemical Engineers for being a pioneer female process engineer. “As a Global Polymer Technology Manager, I successfully managed multimillion-dollar projects and collaborated with colleagues from around the world.”

Now that the trailblazing council

member is in, she says her goal is to continue living her motto that “there is nothing more important than a human being.”

Believing that by working together, “and fostering inclusivity, we can create a Parma that is truly a place where everyone feels valued and supported,” says Wilson.

Next year, Council member Wilson’s term is up, and she plans to run again. As for any prospective political ambitions on the horizon, she says, “I’m open to future opportunities that may arise. My goal is to make a positive impact on our community, and public service is a valuable way to achieve that.”

HAIR From front page

James-Todd noted that Black women have been found to have much higher blood and urine concentrations of these chemicals.

Tasha Neal, a hairstylist in Cleveland, said she’s not surprised. “This hair often smells like chemicals,” she said. People tell me it makes their heads itch or gives them headaches.”

Some hair stylists soak the fake hair in apple cider vinegar (ACV) be-

fore using it. This can help remove the coating that causes itching, but doesn’t remove all the bad chemicals.

Why People Use Apple Cider Vinegar on Synthetic Hair

Synthetic hair often comes with a factory-applied alkaline coating that helps preserve it during shipping and storage, but this coating can cause scalp irritation, itching, and allergic reactions. Soaking in apple cider vinegar (ACV) helps neutralize this.

Many users report less itching and

fewer scalp issues after ACV rinses. ACV has mild antibacterial and antifungal properties that help prevent minor scalp infections or discomfort.

What You Can Do

Until the rules change, Consumer Reports recommends that shoppers read product labels, if there are any. Let the hair air out before using it, don’t keep it in too long, and choose safer hair brands if possible.

You can learn more or sign the petition by visiting: ConsumerReports.org.



CLEVELAND OBSERVER

The Cleveland Observer is a community-based non-profit monthly newspaper dedicated to providing information and resources that will uplift and enhance the community. Copyright 2025

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Article Submission Policy

The Cleveland Observer will consider article submissions electronically via email or through theclevelandobserver.com. Registration required. Submitter must provide name, e-mail address, and phone number with submission.

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First Reading Emergency Ordinances Referred March/April



By Observers AI

The Cleveland Observer is dedicated to informing residents about legislative activities under review. By reporting on ordinances and resolutions during their initial stages, the Observer enables community members to engage with their Council members, providing feedback or expressing support before final decisions are made.

As read **March 18, 2025**

Ord. No. 323-2025 Amendment to Apprenticeship and Grant Authorization
Sponsor: Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Amends Section 143.06 of the Codified Ordinances to include authority for the City to apply for and accept apprenticeship grants, fellowships, and internships.
Funding Amount: Up to **\$50,000** in matching funds; additional legislative approval required if the amount is exceeded.

Ord. No. 325-2025 Oracle Customer Billing System Support
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes a two-year contract (with two one-year renewal options) with Oracle America, Inc. for hosting and support services for the Customer Care and Billing system used by the Divisions of Water and Cleveland Public Power.
Funding Amount: Not specified; paid from Fund Nos. 52 SF 001 and 58 SF 001.

Ord. No. 326-2025 Airfield Lighting System Maintenance
Sponsors: McCormack and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes non-competitive contracts with ADB Safegate Americas LLC for maintenance and replacement parts for airfield lighting systems at the City’s airports, for up to two years with two one-year renewal options.
Funding Amount: Not specified; per unit **costs as needed**.

Ord. No. 327-2025 NEORSD Pump Station Permit
Sponsors: Bishop and Hairston (by departmental request)
Summary: Gives Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District a revocable permit to construct and operate a pump station encroaching into the right-of-way on Central Avenue.
Funding Amount: Not applicable.

Ord. No. 328-2025 Historical Marker at Cleveland Public Library
Sponsors: McCormack, Bishop, and Hairston (by departmental request)
Summary: Permits the installation and maintenance of an Ohio historical marker on a 10-foot post at Superior Avenue, outside the Cleveland Public Library.
Funding Amount: Not applicable.

Ord. No. 329-2025 Nautica Entertainment Egress & Canopy
Sponsors: McCormack, Bishop and



Hairston (by departmental request)
Summary: Permits Nautica Entertainment to install an egress stairway and entry canopy into the public right-of-way of Elm Street.
Funding Amount: Not applicable.

Ord. No. 330-2025 Police Data Collection Partnership with CWRU
Sponsors: Polensek and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes contracts with Case Western Reserve University for continued professional services supporting police data collection and analysis per the DOJ Settlement Agreement.
Funding Amount: Up to **\$250,000** per year.

Ord. No. 331-2025 Residential Plumbing Protection Program
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes professional services contracts to manage and expand residential plumbing protection plans for the Divisions of Water and Water Pollution Control; extends HomeServe USA contract for up to one year.
Funding Amount: Funded through customer premiums and surcharges.

Ord. No. 332-2025 Infrastructure Supply Contracts
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes requirement contracts for the purchase and installation of water mains, hydrants, valves, and restoration services for multiple divisions.
Funding Amount: Based on unit pricing; total amount not specified.

Ord. No. 338-2025 Lead-Safe Certification Audit
Sponsors: Hairston and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes a three-year contract with Crowe LLP for auditing and monitoring the City’s lead-safe certification processes.
Funding Amount: **\$289,500**

First Reading Emergency Ordinances Referred

As read **March 24, 2025**

Ord. No. 378-2025 Citywide Youth Football Program Contract
Sponsors: Bishop and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes contract with the Cleveland Muni Football League to conduct a citywide youth football program.
Funding Amount: **\$160,000**

Ord. No. 379-2025 Equipment and Maintenance for Port Control Vehicles
Sponsors: McCormack and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes one-year requirement contracts with three one-year renewal options for machines, equipment, supplies, labor, and services for Port Control’s vehicle fleet.
Funding Amount: Not specified; based on previous term procurement levels

Ord. No. 383-2025 Amendment to Youth Opportunities Unlimited Contract
Sponsors: Santana and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Adds \$500,000 to Contract No. PS 2024-86 for 150 additional youth applicants and four job coaches for the 2025 summer employment program.
Funding Amount: **\$500,000** additional; revised contract total: **\$2,498,674**

Ord. No. 384-2025 Proprietary Parts & Services for Gorman-Rupp Pumps
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes a non-competitive two-year contract with Craun-Liebong Co. for maintenance and parts for Gorman-Rupp pump equipment in Water Pollution Control.
Funding Amount: Not specified; funding includes eligibility for NEORSD Community Cost-Share grants

Ord. No. 385-2025 Vehicle & Equipment Procurement for Port Control
Sponsors: McCormack and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes purchase or lease of vehicles, equipment, accessories, training, and inspections for Port Control over one year with a renewal option.
Funding Amount: Paid from Fund Nos. 60 SF 001 and 60 SF 141

Ord. No. 386-2025 Amendment to Public Auditorium Agreement with Cleveland Charge
Sponsors: Bishop and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Modifies terms of Ord. 647-2024 for improvements, lease, and parking agreements with the Cleveland Cavaliers/Cleveland Charge, including street closures and Willard Garage parking for game personnel.
Funding Amount: Not specified; estimated **\$3 million** in improvements from Cavaliers

Ord. No. 387-2025 Overhaul of Air Pollution Control Code
Sponsors: Conwell and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Amends, repeals, supplements, and enacts numerous sections and chapters of the Cleveland Codified Ordinances related to air pollution, including regulations on fugitive emissions, indoor air quality, and public health protections.
Funding Amount: Not specified

First Reading Emergency Ordinances Referred

As read **March 31, 2025**

Ord. No. 422-2025 Audit Management Software Contract Extension
Sponsor: Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Extends Contract No. CT 1506 PS 2023-287 with Diligent Canada Inc. for audit management software and related services for three years.
Funding Amount: To be paid from approved Department of Finance funds

Ord. No. 423-2025 Honorary Street Naming – Jonah Moore, Sr. Way
Sponsor: Gray
Summary: Adds Jonah Moore, Sr. Way as a secondary and honorary name to Dickens Avenue between East 93rd Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive.
Funding Amount: Not applicable

Ord. No. 424-2025 Food Service Contract Renewal – Carl B. Stokes Building
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Renews contract with Take a BREAK Quick Catering to operate food and beverage services at the Carl B. Stokes Public Utilities Building.
Funding Amount: Not specified

Ord. No. 425-2025 Lead Investigations – ODH Contract
Sponsors: Conwell and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes a contract with the Ohio Department of Health and others for environmental lead investigations for children through 2027.
Funding Amount: Paid from Fund No. 10 SF 304; state compensation received under the contract

Ord. No. 426-2025 Public Utilities Building Improvements
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes contracts and consultant hiring for improvements to utility buildings and sites; allows acceptance of NEORSD grants.
Funding Amount: Fund Nos. 50 SF 002, 52 SF 001, 54 SF 001, 58 SF 001, and grant funds

Ord. No. 432-2025 High Voltage Equipment Cleaning Contract
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes contracts for cleaning high-voltage electrical components for Cleveland Public Power, for up to two years.
Funding Amount: Based on prior term expenditure levels, not to exceed prior year totals

LEGISLATION From PAGE 3

Ord. No. 433-2025 Rigging Services Contract for CPP
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes requirement contracts for rigging services for Cleveland Public Power for up to two years.
Funding Amount: Based on unit pricing from prior term, not to exceed appropriated levels

Ord. No. 434-2025 African Town Plaza TIF Agreement
Sponsors: Starr, Hairston, and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Approves Tax Increment Financing agreement with JSAACC LLC to support the redevelopment of the former YMCA building at 7515 Cedar Ave. into African Town Plaza.
Funding Amount: Estimated **\$9 million** total investment; 30-year TIF supports project debt service

Ord. No. 435-2025 Cleveland Commission on Black Women and Girls Funding
Sponsor: Howse-Jones
Summary: Amends Section 127.49 to authorize spending for food, beverages, mementos, and professional services for Commission events.
Funding Amount: Professional services not to exceed **\$10,000**

First Reading Emergency Ordinances Referred

As read **April 7, 2025**

Ord. No. 463-2025 Proprietary Water System Equipment and Services
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes a two-year non-competitive contract with BissNuss Inc. to supply proprietary equipment and services for drinking water systems in the Division of Water.
Funding Amount: Based on unit orders; charged to appropriate Water Division accounts

Ord. No. 464-2025 Environmental Services Contract Renewal
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes the first renewal of Contract No. CT 2002 PS 2024-23 with Partners Environmental Consulting, Inc. for services to the Public Utilities divisions.
Funding Amount: Not to exceed **\$372,000**

Ord. No. 465-2025 One World Day 2025 Co-Sponsorship
Sponsors: Conwell, Hairston, Bishop, and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes an agreement with the Cleveland Cultural Gardens Federation to co-sponsor the August 2025 One World Day event.
Funding Amount: Not to exceed **\$10,000**

Ord. No. 468-2025 Lease for Health Care Clinic Facility
Sponsors: Conwell and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes a 10-year lease with Blanket Mills Prime Tenant, LLC for 6,034 square feet at 3466 St. Rocco’s Court for a public health clinic.
Funding Amount: Rent ranges from \$14.50 to \$17.00 per sq. ft. over the term, plus pro-rata costs

First Reading Emergency Ordinances Referred

As read **April 14, 2025**

Ord. No. 490-2025 Underwater

diving and inspection services
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin
Summary: Authorizes requirement contracts for underwater diving, inspection, cleaning, debris removal, and occasional repair of submerged and water-filled facilities for the Division of Water.
Funding Amount: Not specified

Ord. No. 491-2025 Landscaping services for utilities properties
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes requirement contracts for landscape materials, equipment, supplies, and services for maintaining and restoring landscaping at utilities facilities and rights-of-way.
Funding Amount: Not specified

Ord. No. 492-2025 Pumps, motors, transformers for Water Division
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes contracts for purchase and repair of water pumps, motors, controls, transformers, circuit breakers, switchgear, and appurtenances for the Division of Water.
Funding Amount: Not specified; based on previous needs and appropriations.

Ord. No. 496-2025 Metroparks trail development agreement
Sponsors: Bishop, Hairston, and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes a Project Development Agreement with Cleveland Metroparks for the construction and maintenance of four trail projects and permits related acquisitions and agreements.
Funding Amount: **\$315,000**

Ord. No. 497-2025 SCADA/PCCS maintenance contracts and vendor waivers
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin
Summary: Authorizes contracts for maintenance of SCADA and PCCS systems and allows for non-competitive contracts with vendors providing proprietary components.
Funding Amount: Not specified

Ord. No. 498-2025 Land sale to ODOT near I-90 interchange
Sponsors: McCormack, Bishop, Hairston, and Griffin (by departmental request)
Summary: Authorizes the sale of two City-owned parcels near the I-90 interchange to ODOT for infrastructure improvement.
Funding Amount: **\$85,300** in revenue

Ord. No. 499-2025 TIF agreement for Shoreway Tower project
Sponsors: Spencer, Hairston, and Griffin
Summary: Authorizes a 30-year non-school TIF agreement with Shoreway Tower LLC for redevelopment of 1200 West 76th Street, including new residential and commercial spaces.
Funding Amount: PILOTs generated to offset **\$92,137,385** in project costs

Ord. No. 502-2025 Housing support for unsheltered residents
Sponsors: Conwell and Griffin
Summary: Approves contracts for continuation of the “A Home for Every Neighbor” initiative, providing housing and case management for unsheltered residents.
Funding Amount: **\$1,920,000**

Ord. No. 503-2025 EV charging station operations and fee collection

Sponsors: Bishop, Kazy, and Griffin
Summary: Authorizes management and maintenance of City-owned EV charging stations, including public fee collection and professional service contracts.
Funding Amount: Not specified

Ord. No. 504-2025 Moratorium on smoke shop permits/licenses
Sponsors: Conwell, Griffin, Santana, Kazy, McCormack, Slife, and Maurer
Summary: Establishes a moratorium on issuing permits or licenses for new smoke shops until the new tobacco retail licensing ordinance takes effect.
Funding Amount: Not applicable

First Reading Emergency Ordinances Referred

As read **April 21, 2025**

Ord. No. 490-2025 Underwater diving and inspection services for Water Division
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin
Summary: Authorizes requirement contracts for diving, inspection, cleaning, debris removal, and occasional repair of submerged and water-filled facilities for the Division of Water.
Funding Amount: Not specified

Ord. No. 491-2025 Landscaping services for utilities-related sites
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin
Summary: Authorizes requirement contracts for landscape materials, supplies, and services at City-owned or leased utilities facilities and rights-of-way.
Funding Amount: Not specified

Ord. No. 492-2025 Maintenance and replacement of pumps, motors, and transformers
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin
Summary: Authorizes requirement contracts for water pumps, electric motors, transformers, and related services for the Division of Water.
Funding Amount: Not specified

Ord. No. 496-2025 Trail construction agreement with Metroparks
Sponsors: Bishop, Hairston, and Griffin
Summary: Authorizes a Project Development Agreement with Cleveland Metroparks for the construction and maintenance of four trail projects.
Funding Amount: **\$315,000**

Ord. No. 497-2025 SCADA/PCCS systems maintenance contracts
Sponsors: Kazy and Griffin
Summary: Authorizes contracts to maintain and repair control systems and proprietary SCADA/PCCS equipment for the Water and Cleveland Public Power divisions.
Funding Amount: Not specified; includes use of NEORSF funds

Ord. No. 498-2025 Sale of City parcels to ODOT for I-90 improvements
Sponsors: McCormack, Bishop, Hairston, and Griffin
Summary: Authorizes sale of two City-owned parcels near the I-90 Central Interchange to ODOT for public infrastructure construction.
Funding Amount: **\$85,300**

Ord. No. 499-2025 TIF agreement for Shoreway Tower redevelopment
Sponsors: Spencer, Hairston, and Griffin
Summary: Authorizes a 30-year non-school TIF agreement with Shoreway Tower LLC to support redevelopment of 1200 West 76th Street.
Funding Amount: PILOTs to offset **\$92,137,385** in project costs

Ord. No. 502-2025 Encampment-to-housing initiative continuation
Sponsors: Conwell and Griffin
Summary: Authorizes contracts with Downtown Cleveland Alliance, The Centers, and others for the “A Home for Every Neighbor” initiative.
Funding Amount: **\$1,920,000**

Ord. No. 503-2025 Operation and maintenance of EV charging stations
Sponsors: Bishop, Kazy, and Griffin
Summary: Authorizes fees and contracts for management, operation, and maintenance of City-owned EV charging stations.
Funding Amount: Not specified.

Ord. No. 504-2025 Moratorium on smoke shop permits
Sponsors: Conwell, Griffin, Santana, Kazy, McCormack, Slife, and Maurer
Summary: Establishes a moratorium on all permits and licenses for new smoke shops until Chapter 235A licensing goes into effect.
Funding Amount: Not applicable





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From Graduation to Cancellation: Kanye West's Tumultuous Legacy



By Konner Hines

Kanye West, once celebrated as a groundbreaking artist and fashion mogul, now faces significant scrutiny as his controversial statements and actions overshadow his contributions to music and culture. Once hailed as a genius, West has increasingly become a polarizing figure due to his offensive remarks and behaviors in recent years. As his career continues to unfold, many are left asking: Can Kanye ever regain the respect and admiration he once commanded?

Early Career: Musical Innovation and Cultural Impact

Emerging in the early 2000s, Kanye West quickly established himself as a force to be reckoned with in the music industry. His debut album, *The College Dropout* (2004), showcased his unique blend of soulful samples and introspective lyrics, earning him critical acclaim and commercial success. Subsequent albums like *Late Registration* (2005) and *Graduation* (2007) solidified his status as a musical innovator, each project pushing the boundaries of genre and production.

Beyond music, West ventured into fashion with his Yeezy brand, collaborating with Adidas to release the Yeezy Boost sneakers in 2015. The line's success was unprecedented, with products selling out rapidly and influencing sneaker culture worldwide. In 2020, Kanye's Yeezy brand was valued at \$3 billion, highlighting his impact on the music and fashion industries.

Mid-Career: Artistic Evolution and Public Scrutiny

In 2019, West released *Jesus Is King*, a gospel-inspired album reflecting his recommitment to Christianity. The album won the Grammy for Best Contemporary Christian Music Album, showcasing his ability to blend personal faith with musical expression.

However, this period also marked a shift in West's public persona. His 2020 presidential run, though unconventional, highlighted his willingness to challenge political norms. Despite limited campaigning, he garnered 0.04% of the national vote, sparking discussions about celebrity influence in politics.



Personal Turmoil: Marital Strains and Divorce

West's personal life, particularly his marriage to reality star Kim Kardashian, has significantly influenced public perception. The couple married in 2014, but the relationship faced challenges, including West's mental health struggles. In a 2019 interview, West described the experience of having a manic episode associated with bipolar disorder, stating, "You feel the government is putting chips in your head. You feel you're being recorded."

In October 2022, West expressed lingering feelings toward Kardashian during an interview, stating, "I will love her for life, and oddly enough I will protect her."

In a March 2025 interview, Kanye West expressed regret over his relationship with Kim Kardashian, stating, "I didn't want to have children with this person after the first two months of being with them." The remark follows years of public scrutiny surrounding their high-profile marriage and comes despite the couple sharing four children together: North West (11), Saint West (9), Chicago West (7), and Psalm West (5).

Recent Controversies: A Series of Missteps

Since late 2022, Kanye West has faced widespread backlash over a series of increasingly controversial actions. His public support for President Donald Trump, including wearing a MAGA hat and endorsing Trump's 2024 re-election bid, sparked criticism from fans and fellow artists. The outrage escalated

after West posted a series of antisemitic statements, including a recent post on X (formerly Twitter) declaring, "I love Hitler" and "I'm a Nazi," drawing condemnation from across the political and cultural spectrum.

These remarks led to the swift termination of his partnerships with major brands including Adidas, Balenciaga, and Gap. Adidas alone reported a projected \$1.2 billion loss in sales and \$500 million in profit after ending its deal with Yeezy.

Further fueling controversy, West reignited long-standing feuds with fellow celebrities. He directed misogynistic remarks toward Taylor Swift, falsely accusing her of interfering with his chances to perform at the Super Bowl. Additionally, he made offensive and unsubstantiated comments about Beyoncé's children, suggesting they have undiagnosed autism, remarks that were widely condemned as both inappropriate and harmful.

Kanye West's two-year marriage to Bianca Censori appears to be nearing its end, with West claiming that Censori left him due to the backlash surrounding his controversial public remarks. The split comes on the heels of their short appearance at the 2025 Grammy Awards, where the couple drew widespread criticism. Censori's red carpet outfit, a sheer, skin-tight ensemble designed to resemble public nudity, sparked significant controversy and fueled ongoing debates about West's influence and decision-making.

Community Impact: The Ripple Effects of West's Actions

West's downfall is a cautionary tale with deep cultural implications. For Black communities, his rejection of foundational civil rights symbols and support for figures associated with white nationalism have been viewed as betrayals. During one of his 2020 presidential campaign events, he remarked, "[Harriet Tubman] never actually freed the slaves, she just had them work for other white people." His behavior also reignites conversations about the responsibility of celebrities who hold massive influence over younger generations.

Response: Industry and Public Reactions

In response, companies cut ties and public figures distanced themselves. Notably, Adidas ended its Yeezy part-

nership, stating they "do not tolerate antisemitism and any other sort of hate speech". Public figures like Reese Witherspoon and Eric Andre have openly criticized West's remarks, while social media users have launched campaigns to boycott his music and products.

Outcome: Shifting Public Perception

The consequences of West's actions have been measurable. His net worth dropped from an estimated \$3.3 billion to \$400 million following the end of his Adidas deal. While some loyal fans continue to support his music, mainstream media and the industry at large have largely distanced themselves. Streaming numbers declined across major platforms in early 2023, signaling a broader shift in public reception.

Evidence: Concrete Revelations

Beyond the collapse of business partnerships, West's public image has suffered irreparable harm. Brand sponsorships, magazine covers, and media appearances have all disappeared. The absence of institutional support for his future projects serves as clear evidence of the social and financial fallout.

Insights: Unpacking the Downfall

Though West has long spoken publicly about his bipolar diagnosis, many argue that mental health struggles cannot excuse harmful rhetoric and behaviors. The core issue lies in the lack of accountability—his repeated deflections, coupled with unfiltered public rants, have alienated even former supporters.

Summary

Kanye West's journey from artistic brilliance to public infamy reflects the complex intersection of genius, mental health, celebrity culture, and accountability. While his contributions to music and fashion are undeniable, his offensive rhetoric and dangerous associations have drastically altered his public standing. As society debates the separation of art from artist, one thing is clear: his legacy now includes both triumph and turmoil.

Konner Hines is a Marketing and International Business student at Baldwin Wallace University, a member of the Honors College. Passionate about storytelling and global issues, Knowles explores pop culture, media, and social justice through thought-provoking writing.

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Opinion: The Sankofa Series: Winston Willis



By Ajah Hales

These views are expressed solely by the writer and not necessarily by The Cleveland Observer. This three-part series explores the rise, destruction, and ongoing fight for justice surrounding Winston Willis's lost empire.

The Systematic Destruction of Winston Willis' Legacy Part 3:

By the early 1970s, businessman Winston Willis had built an empire. His University Circle Properties Development (UCPD) owned over 30 properties at Euclid Avenue and East 105th Street, a thriving Black business district filled with restaurants, gas stations, theaters, and retail shops.

More than 700 Black Clevelanders found employment in his businesses. For the first time, a Black entrepreneur controlled a prime economic hub in Cleveland, proving that Black ownership and self-sufficiency were not just possible but thriving.

But the City of Cleveland had other plans. University Circle Inc. (UCI), a powerful, city-backed nonprofit, wanted the land for educational and medical development, which we now know as the "Eds and Meds" district surrounding Case Western Reserve University, University Hospitals, and the Cleveland Clinic.

The City used eminent domain to push Black residents out of University Circle, making way for institutional expansion. But Willis wasn't just a resident: he was a businessman and a owner.And that made him a threat.

The City's Playbook: How They Took Down Winston Willis

Willis had money, businesses, and political connections, so the City couldn't remove him overnight. Instead, they launched a calculated campaign to dismantle his empire systematically.

A smear tactic was the first. An attack on his reputation was led by The Plain Dealer. Local media ran hit pieces, branding Willis as a slumlord, porn king, and criminal, even though the majority of his businesses were family-friendly establishments.

Journalists staged setups, reporting on power outages at his properties power that the utility companies had intentionally cut off.

They focused exclusively on Willis's few adult theaters, ignoring his vast portfolio of restaurants, retail spaces, and community businesses.

"The Plain Dealer said he was a Porn King," his sister Aundra recalls. "But let's be clear—he didn't make those movies, he didn't create them. He distributed them. And a lot of the people going to those theaters were white politicians and officials."

This steady drumbeat of negative press wasn't just about tarnishing Willis' name, it was a calculated effort to turn the public against him, paving the way for what came next.

The Legal Warfare

With headlines labeling him a criminal, the City had the cover to go after him through the courts. Officials piled on building code violations, slapped him with fines, and forced his businesses to close



Winston Willis (left) with jazz great Dizzy Gillespie. Credit: Case Western Reserve University

under the pretense of "public safety."

They refused to renew his business licenses, making it impossible for him to operate. Lawsuits came one after another, many built on false claims, slowly draining his resources and boxing him into a fight he was never meant to win.

Willis refused to back down. He paid his fines, fought the lawsuits, and ran his businesses. However, the more he resisted, the harder the City pushed.

The Dirty Politics: The Land Grab

City officials needed a way to finish what they started, and they found their answer in urban renewal. Under the banner of "progress," they used eminent domain, the same tool that had already displaced thousands of Black residents, to come after Willis. They branded his businesses a "nuisance" and manipulated legal loopholes to take his properties without due process, as reporter by Mansfield Frazier columnist for Cool Cleveland

The Final Blow: The Arrest

In the final move to eliminate Winston Willis from Cleveland's business scene, the City found a way to silence him completely.

They manufactured a criminal case. Willis was arrested on trumped-up charges—accused of assaulting a police officer. He was convicted without evidence, based solely on officers' testimony. Sentenced to prison, Willis lost any chance to fight back legally. By the time he got out, his empire was gone. This was also reported by Cool Cleveland columnist Mansfeild Frazier

The Aftermath: Erased from History

Once Willis was out of the picture, the City moved quickly to erase his legacy. Officials bulldozed his businesses, absorbed his properties into University Circle Inc., and never acknowledged the theft of his empire.

To this day, no single plaque, street sign, or historical marker exists to recognize what Willis accomplished. In Cleveland at Euclid Avenue and East 105th Street, there was a site once known as the Inner City Disneyland.

A Living Legend Refuses to Be Forgotten

Despite losing everything, Willis never stopped fighting. Willis spent

Cleveland has ever known.

Why Winston Willis Matters Today

The story of Winston Willis is not just history—it's a warning. What happened to Willis is part of a larger pattern in America: black success targeted and dismantled by government-backed forces.

The government and capitalist systems have stripped away wealth and a cohesive Black communities through redlining, white flight, the crack cocaine epidemic, and false legal justifications. The results continue today, stolen generational opportunities and leaving communities in economic despair. Once a thriving Black neighborhood, University Circle has become a hub for billion-dollar institutions. The businesses that replaced Willis' empire cater to a different demographic, while the people who once lived and worked there remain uncompensated. But we remember. The Fight for Justice Continues

Final Thought:

How do we honor Winston Willis? By telling his story, demanding recognition, and ensuring that no future Black entrepreneur has to suffer the same fate. Cleveland may have tried to erase The Greatest Story Never Told—but now, we tell it.

But Not the End of the Fight.

This concludes The Sankofa Series on Winston Willis, his family continues to fight for justice today. Let's make sure history doesn't forget him again.

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Black Americans’ 300-year Struggle With Economic Mobility



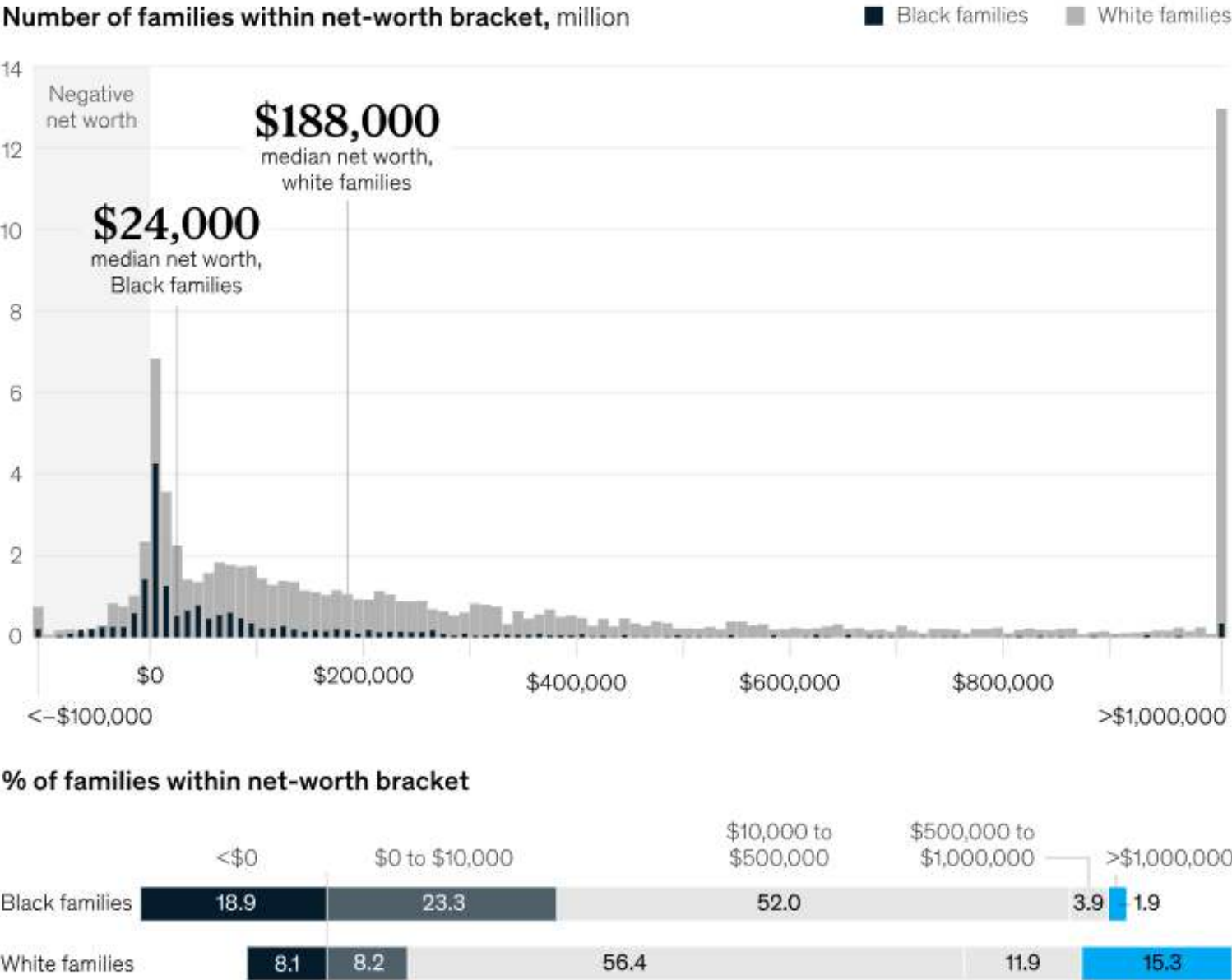
By Ajah Hales
Always separate, never equal: Black Americans’ 300-year struggle for upward economic mobility
In 2011, Pew Charitable Research Trust released a study on economic mobility in the United States. This study remains one of the most comprehensive data collections on American wealth building. According to the data, access to education, functional family structure, and maintaining savings are the key drivers of upward economic mobility.

Fourteen years later, economists and other sociocultural researchers found that none of these key drivers benefit Black Americans in the same way that they benefit white Americans. Despite high levels of educational attainment, the Black white American wealth gap is greater now than it was in 1980. So, what are the drivers and disruptors of Black economic mobility in the United States? How have systemic issues like redlining, predatory lending, and lack of access to capital impacted wealth-building Opportunities for Black Americans, and what, if anything, can be done about it?

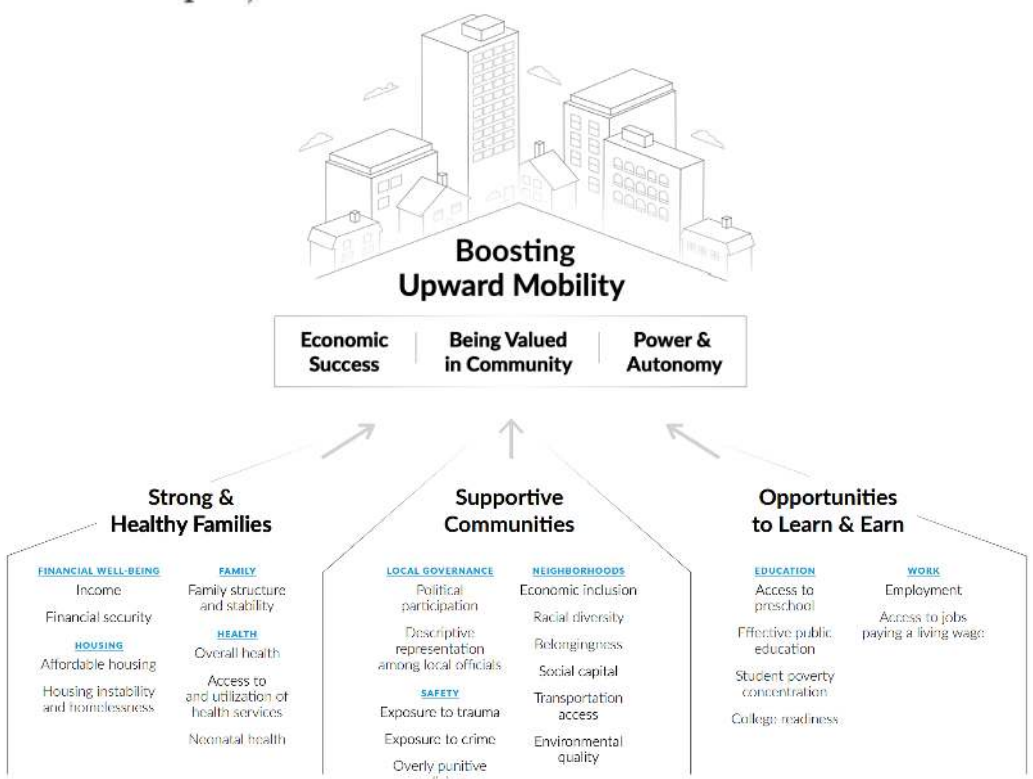
Black Codes—building the racial wealth gap

To truly understand the roots of the racial wealth gap, go back nearly 400 years. Although the American South was credited with the creation of Black codes starting in 1865, after the Civil War, codified ordinances barring Black Americans’ access to opportunity pre-date the founding of America. Some of the earliest recorded Black codes were established by Dutch colonizers in New Amsterdam, which is now called New York. In 1644, the Dutch West India Company ruled that free Blacks living in the colonies had to pay an annual fee for their freedom. Missing a payment meant returning to chains. Additionally, free Blacks were compelled to work for the company “at any time it is requested.” English colonizers had even stricter rules for enslaved and free Black people. Their codes determined who Black people could live around, work with, and socialize with. One Pennsylvania ordinance from the 1700s prohibited Black people from assembling in groups of four or more. After the Revolutionary War, even free states like Ohio had Black codes that stripped Black Americans of their rights. Before Ohio became a state in 1803, Black men had the right to vote in the Ohio Territory. After the incorporation of the state, Black people could no longer vote or testify in court. They had to register as free persons at the local courthouse to be able to work in Ohio. Any business owners caught employing unregistered Blacks were fined \$50, the equivalent of \$1,200 in today’s dollars. Black Ohioans paid taxes, but weren’t allowed to send their children to public schools. Black settlers who wanted to stay in Ohio had to have two white Ohioans post a \$500 bond at the local

Black families are concentrated in low-net-worth brackets and underrepresented in the highest net-worth bracket.



McKinsey & Company



courthouse, guaranteeing their good behavior, around \$13,000 in today’s dollars. Whether they lived in the North or the South, Black Americans were systematically barred from access to education and the ability to maintain savings, effectively keeping generational wealth for whites only.

Land ownership
Another key driver of generational wealth is land ownership. At the end of the Civil War in 1865, Black Americans were no longer enslaved, but they were never paid for hundreds of years of free labor. In 1865, 20 Black leaders met with Union General William T. Sherman and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton to discuss giving free Black Americans 400,000 acres of coastal land in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Each family would receive a plot of 40 acres (the mule came later). This type of land grant was common in the 1800s. Remember the game *Oregon Trail*? It was based on the Homestead Act of 1862, which gave white Americans 160-acre plots to “settle the West.”

Land grants were also given to over 100 colleges and universities, including Ohio State University, allowing Americans to benefit from public colleges. Despite Sherman’s Field Order 15 authorizing land grants for newly freed Black Americans, the Federal Government never made good on its promise. Black Americans were forced to sign labor contracts with their former enslavers or face slavery by another name—convict leasing. Black Americans without proof of employment could be arrested for vagrancy and sold to individuals and companies to “pay their debt to society.” Even though the odds were stacked against them, some Black Americans accumulated enough wealth to “move on up.” These citizens banded together to create Black towns, only to see these cities destroyed by their white neighbors, drowned under reservoirs or man-made lakes, or stolen through eminent domain. These early acts of racial violence and discrimination laid the foundation for more modern exploitative systems like redlining, contract lending, and subprime lending that continue to devastate the Black community to this day. Next month, a closer look will be taken at how legal and de facto racial discrimination from the Civil Rights Era going forward has shaped the Black American economy that exists today, and what can be done to ensure an economic future that looks different than the past.

Building Community Wealth in Uncertain Times: 3 Moves for Cleveland’s Black Community



Photo by Nachristos on Unsplash



By Ray’Chel Wilson, CFEI

Let’s be real: economic uncertainty isn’t just a buzzword you hear on the news—it’s something you feel in your bones, especially if you’re part of Cleveland’s Black community. The legacy of redlining, the sting of predatory lending, and the constant hustle to make ends meet are all too familiar.

But if there’s one thing our history and faith have taught us, it’s that we know how to make a way out of no way. When the economy gets shaky, we don’t just survive—we find new ways to thrive, together.

Here are three practical, faith-rooted steps to help you and your neighbors build and protect wealth, even when the future feels up in the air.

1. Balance Your Fiscal Capital: Diversify and De-Risk

When the market’s on a rollercoaster and the headlines are all doom and gloom, it’s tempting to just stash your cash under the mattress.

But as Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock, put it in his 2025 annual letter, “Diversification has often been referred to as the ‘only free lunch.’ This concept was the driving force behind Nobel laureates like Harry Markowitz and Bill Sharpe, who formulated Modern Portfolio Theory” (Yahoo! Finance).

Translation: don’t put all your eggs in one basket. Spread your money across different types of investments—mutual funds, global funds, and good old-fashioned savings accounts—to help cushion the blow when things get rough.

If you’re just getting started, here’s

what you can do:

- Build up an emergency fund with three to six months’ worth of expenses, so you don’t have to rely on high-interest loans when life throws you a curveball.
- Consider investing in bonds or bond funds, which are generally lower risk than stocks.
- Look for mutual funds or Exchange-Traded Funds (ETFs) that invest in a mix of U.S. and international companies.

As one local investment coach told me, “The earlier you start, the longer you have to let your money work for you.” And if you’re worried about risk, remember: “It’s not about timing the market, it’s about time in the market.”

Of course, every financial situation is unique. That’s why it’s crucial to have trusted professionals, like a financial advisor or a certified public accountant (CPA), on your financial team. CPAs optimize your tax outcomes, while financial advisors invest on behalf of your financial goals.

Fellow financial professionals, like Certified Financial Education Instructors and Financial Therapists, can provide holistic perspectives on building wealth and sustaining it, even in economic uncertainty. Before making any big moves, consider consulting with these professionals to make sure your strategy fits your needs and goals.

2. Dodge the Usual Money Traps: Build Knowledge

Let’s talk about the elephant in the room: systemic barriers. Redlining and predatory lending didn’t just happen in the past—they’re still shaping who gets access to credit and homeownership today. But you can take steps to protect yourself and set up a strong financial foundation.

Here’s how:

Increase your financial knowledge. The three-part “Black Wealth Freedom” workbook series by Raise the Bar Investments is an easy-to-understand and easy-to-apply financial

literacy journey for the family.

Check your credit report every year (it’s free!) and dispute anything that looks off.

Steer clear of payday lenders and check-cashing places that charge sky-high fees. Instead, look for local credit unions or community banks that want to see you win.

Take advantage of free financial literacy workshops from local non-profits, churches, or your library.

If you’re looking for a place to get real, practical money advice from people who know Cleveland, tune in to “The All Things Money Radio” every Thursday from 11 a.m. to noon on 95.9-FM WOVI. Hosts Ras Asan, entrepreneur-in-residence at the City of Cleveland, and Sharron Murphy-Williams, director of the Phe’be Foundation, bring in a lineup of guests to talk about all money topics, and how money is connected to all things. It’s a space where you can hear from local experts, ask questions, and get the financial knowledge tailored to our community.

As the team at Phe’be Foundation’s All Things Money team says, “We’re here to break down the money topics that matter most, right here in Cleveland.” So if you want to build credit, avoid common traps, and get your questions answered, make it a weekly habit to tune in and join the conversation.

Remember, wealth-building is a journey, not a sprint. And if you stumble along the way? There’s always another Thursday to get back on track.

3. Build and Reinforce Social Capital: Invest in Relationships

Here’s the secret sauce: your network is just as important as your net worth. In tough times, it’s the people around you—family, friends, church folks, neighbors—who help you get by and get ahead.

Dr. Donna Coletrane Battle, who teaches Prophetic Ministry: Shaping Communities of Justice at Duke Divinity, puts it this way: “Relational one-on-ones are the foundation of resilient

communities.” In other words, real change starts with real relationships.

So what does that look like in practice?

- Join or start a small group focused on financial empowerment, entrepreneurship, or homeownership. “When we share what we know, we all get stronger,” says a local business owner.
- Make it a point to support Black-owned businesses—every dollar you spend locally helps keep wealth circulating in the community. “Buying Black isn’t just a hashtag. It’s an investment in our future,” says a Cleveland entrepreneur.
- Get involved in co-ops, land trusts, or local investment funds. These collective efforts help build shared wealth and give everyone a stake in the community’s success.

Faith-based leadership calls us to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly” (Micah 6:8). That means looking out for each other, mentoring the next generation, and pushing for policies that make it easier for everyone to build wealth, not just a lucky few.

Why This Matters for Cleveland

Cleveland’s Black community has faced generations of economic exclusion, but that’s not the end of the story. By balancing your fiscal capital, dodging financial traps, and investing in relationships, you can help write a new chapter—one rooted in faith, resilience, and collective action.

A Metropolitan Baptist Church pastor once shared, “Wealth isn’t just about money. It’s about legacy, opportunity, and the freedom to dream bigger for our kids.” So, what step will you take today to build wealth for yourself and your community?

Writer’s Bio

Ray’Chel Wilson is the author of the internationally selling “Black Wealth Freedom” workbook series and CEO of ForOurLastNames, a technology turning financial trauma into financial action for first-generation wealth builders. She is currently a graduate student at Duke Divinity School.

Don't Use These DEI Words in Your Funding Proposal



By Ray'Chel Wilson, CFEI

The world of grant writing is not one-size-fits-all, but recent diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) shifts have created a newly complex landscape for businesses, social enterprises, and nonprofits alike. What once resonated with funders may now raise eyebrows, requiring a more strategic and informed approach.

As national development professional Razelle E. Townsend observed, "Many foundations are shifting their focus from identity-based funding to cause-driven strategies," a trend that necessitates a critical reevaluation of how we frame our proposals.

What to Avoid

The challenge for grant writers today is clear: How do you communicate the real needs of your community without using language that may unintentionally jeopardize your funding chances? The key is balance. Below are some words that have increasingly been flagged in funding reviews:

- Social Inequality & Discrimination words like inequality, institutional, intersectional, marginalized, minority, oppression, discriminated, hate speech, systemic, victim, polarization, barrier, and excluded may raise concerns in applications.
- Identity & Demographics terms such as BIPOC, Black and Latinx, ethnicity, female, gender, LGBT, Indigenous community, and women might lead to additional scrutiny.
- Bias & Prejudice language, including biases, implicit bias, male-dominated, and privilege, can sometimes trigger objections.
- Diversity, Inclusion & Equity words like advocacy, antiracist, cultural relevance, diversity, equality, inclusive, multicultural, racial diversity, and sense of belonging may attract critical attention.
- Experiences & Conditions terms, such as disability, historically, socioeconomic, sexual preference, trauma, and underrepresented, could flag an application for further review.

A recent report in The Washington Post noted how certain keywords related to DEI have come under increased scrutiny, particularly within federal funding streams like the National Science Foundation.

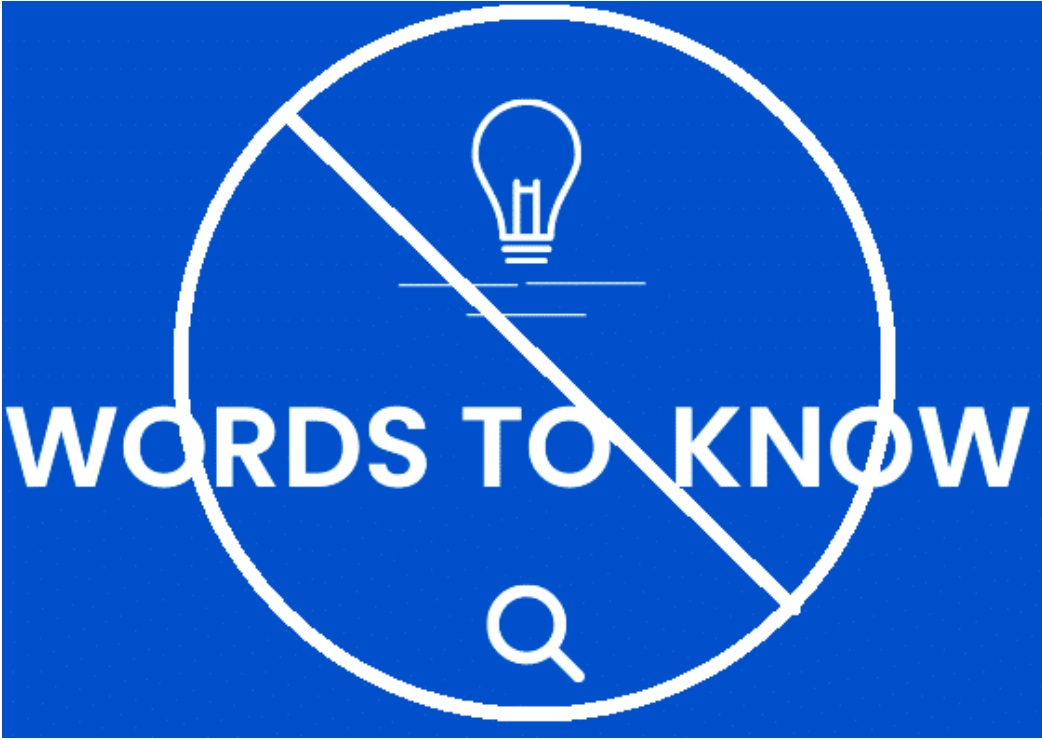
This shift appears linked, in part, to the Biden administration's executive orders concerning diversity initiatives, such as the one addressing women's issues by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). These orders, while aimed at preventing discrimination, have inadvertently created a climate where overly emphasizing certain terms can trigger a side-eye.

A Path Forward

So, how do you craft a winning grant proposal that addresses critical needs without falling into these potential traps? Here are some key strategies to update the messaging



Photo by Mick Haupt on Unsplash



of your solution:

Shift #1: Focus on the Problem, Not Just the Population

Funders are increasingly looking for proposals that emphasize broad challenges rather than identity-specific language. Instead of centering a project on a particular demographic, frame it around the industry-based issue being addressed and how your solution provides a measurable impact.

- ✗ "Improving educational outcomes for Black and Latinx students."
- ✓ "Closing the achievement gap in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields by expanding access to hands-on learning programs."

Shift #2: Quantifiable Impact Matters.

Funders want to see measurable results. Highlight specific outcomes like increased graduation rates, job placements, or health improvements.

- ✗ "Creating an inclusive workplace where underrepresented employees feel valued."

- ✓ "Implementing mentorship programs that increase employee retention and leadership promotions by 25%."

Shift #3: Data-Driven Justifications

Use solid research and statistics to back up your claims. Instead of relying on emotional appeals, present hard data that underscores the need and effectiveness of your project.

- ✗ "Many marginalized communities lack access to quality healthcare."
- ✓ "In [X region], 40% of residents live more than 20 miles from the nearest healthcare provider, increasing preventable hospitalizations by 30%."

Shift #4: Community Engagement Over Identity-Based Framing

Show how your project is co-created with the community rather than framed as a solution for a particular group. Demonstrate active participation and leadership from those directly impacted.

- ✗ "Empowering BIPOC entrepreneurs to overcome systemic barriers to funding."
- ✓ "Providing first-time business owners with financial literacy training

and direct access to capital."

Shift #5: Sustainability and Long-Term Viability

Funders prefer projects that have longevity beyond the grant period. Explain how your initiative will continue through additional funding streams, strategic partnerships, or self-sustaining models.

- ✗ "Addressing gender disparities in STEM through a summer coding boot camp for girls."
- ✓ "Launching a STEM workforce pipeline by integrating coding education into K-12 curricula, ensuring ongoing skills development."

Shift #6: Thoughtful, Strategic Language Use

While inclusive language is still important, it must be used strategically. Instead of broadly stating your organization is "committed to diversity," describe *how* your programs ensure accessibility and equitable participation.

- ✗ "Our organization is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion."
- ✓ "We implement hiring practices that expand candidate outreach and create leadership pathways for all employees."

Final Thoughts

The world of grant writing is evolving. What worked a few years ago may not be as effective today, but that doesn't mean you have to water down your mission. By shifting how you frame your impact—focusing on solutions, outcomes, and sustainability—you can continue to secure funding while staying true to your values.

Writer's Bio

Ray'Chel Wilson is the author of the internationally selling "Black Wealth Freedom" workbook series and CEO of ForOurLastNames, a technology turning financial trauma into financial action for first-generation wealth builders. She is currently a graduate student at Duke Divinity School.

Reclaiming Your Health: 5 Ways to Lead a Healthy Lifestyle Despite the Systemic Challenges



By Shamani Salahuddin
While America is a global leader in scientific advancement and medical innovation, it ranks last in low-performing health outcomes, despite spending the most on health care, according to a study conducted by the Peter G. Peterson Foundation.

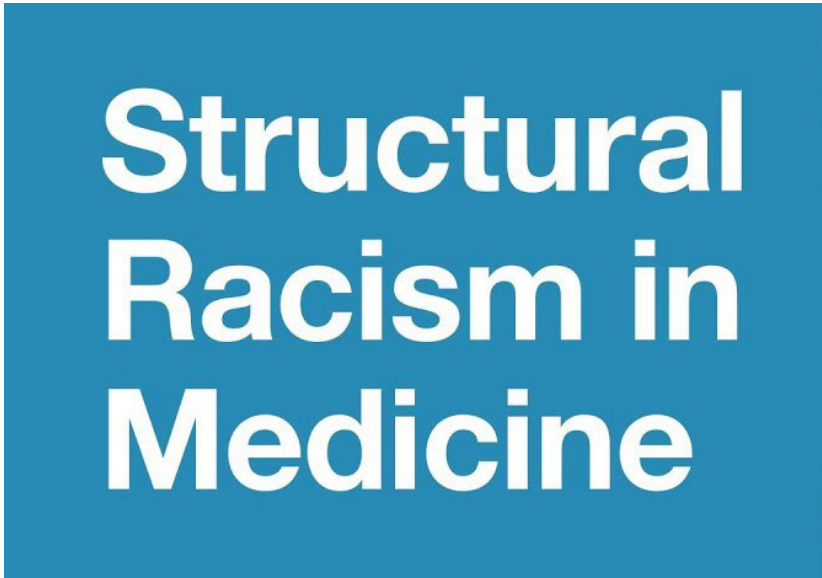
Many professionals name health inequity as the cause for the disparities in the American health care system. Health inequity describes the differences in access to health resources between different social groups based on social conditions such as where people are born, live, work, age, and race, according to the World Health Organization.

For example, more than half of working adults cannot afford health care, discouraging many Americans from seeking treatment, creating a financial health disparity. Plus, with attempts to cut Medicare funding, that number could continue to increase.

“The fact of the matter is that if there is a call to defund Medicaid, there are hundreds of thousands of people [who] will lose their insurance,” said the Director of Communications for Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio, Diamond Crumby.

In a nation without equal access to health care services, patients can reclaim their health by focusing on preventative care, adopting healthy habits, and remaining aware of the latest health news.

Practicing preventive health care
Preventive health care includes services and care provided to maintain health and possibly diagnose conditions before they become a problem. This can look like screenings for heart disease, cancer, and diabetes, as well



as adopting health habits like eliminating smoking and balanced eating, or simply attending yearly check-ups.

Leaning on community resources
Uninsured individuals may need to research where to access preventive health care services, as nonprofit organizations tend to be less advertised and, therefore, unknown. However, most communities have groups that work to provide health care to those of a lower socioeconomic class.

In Ohio, the Charitable Health Network receives funding from the Ohio Department of Health to serve uninsured patients. Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio also has financial assistance options for services.

In 2024, Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio provided care for over 50,000 patients, according to Crumby. “Planned Parenthood also provided over 10,000 preventative care visits, and a large part of that is cancer screenings...one thing we are very concerned with is that Black women in particular are nearly 2-to-3 times more likely to die from cervical cancer because of lack of access to get the proper screenings for cervical cancer,” Crumby said.

Independent health organizations in Cleveland offer free or charitable wellness and preventative health care services, including primary care, dental care, physicals, cancer screenings, sexual health, and women’s health services. Cleveland organizations:

- Ohio Department of Health: Free Clinics
- Planned Parenthood
- The Centers Integrated Health and Wellness

Prioritizing healthy nutrition
Most know that eating whole and nutrient-dense foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dairy, and protein is the best way to promote good nutrition, and it can also be a natural way to get essential vitamins.

Start the day with whole grains like oatmeal or raw vegetables for a snack to incorporate more fiber into the diet, promoting digestive health. Increase calcium and vitamin D intake to promote bone health through dairy and seafood like salmon and sardines, and support the kidneys, heart, and muscles by adding more potassium through produce like beets and bananas, or beverages like pomegranate and orange juice.

However, healthy eating may be easier said than done for communities living in food deserts – areas with limited access to nutritious, affordable food options – but it’s not impossible. Strategically shopping at grocery stores by stocking canned and frozen produce tends to be cheaper and lasts longer without wasting food, Tony Al-lemon, PA-C, shared with Healthline.

Moving more and sitting less
According to the American Heart

Association, physical exercise may help cut racial health disparities in chronic diseases, like heart disease. Groups at higher risk of cardiovascular disease include adults who are older, female, Black, and who experience depression, have disabilities, have a lower economic status, or live in rural areas.

Less than 1 in 4 adults in the U.S. meets the federal guidelines for physical activity. The CDC recommends 150 minutes of weekly moderate-intensity exercise. Things like brisk walking, jogging, weight lifting, and swimming help strengthen the heart by improving circulation and lowering blood pressure and cholesterol.

Regular exercise can also improve mental health, reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Staying updated on health news
Keeping up with health news is the key to preparing for potential outbreaks like the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the rise of measles cases in the United States today.

While watching broadcast news is a conventional way to access news updates, the mainstream news cycle can have biases and political motivations. However, it is more reliable to subscribe to reputable, objective sources like the World Health Organization, leading medical journals like the New England Journal of Medicine, or follow experts and organizations on social media.

Survivors of Suicide Loss Come Together



By Darcella L. Lambert
On April 12, NeighborUp funding enabled Removing The Stigma to host the Survivors of Suicide Loss Luncheon: A Day to Remember, at the Stella Walsh Recreation Center, located on Broadway Avenue in Cleveland. The event provided a supportive space for those grieving the loss of a loved one to suicide. The luncheon welcomed 51 guests, which included two youth, five males, and 44 females, highlighting the diverse individuals impacted by suicide loss within the community.

As the keynote speaker, Removing The Stigma Founder Denise Holcomb shared her deeply personal story, reflecting on the loss of her youngest brother, Calvin, to suicide, and the

profound impact of keeping that loss a secret for 16 years, when her only son, Derrick, died by suicide. The death of her son, Derrick, led her to speak out about her brother Calvin’s death and break the stigma of suicide loss.

In the years that followed, she and her niece, Darcella L. Lambert, founded Removing The Stigma, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating, empowering, and offering hope to individuals while working to remove

the stigma associated with mental illness and suicide.

Removing The Stigma 12200 Fairhill Road Cleveland, OH 44120 (216) 325-7755
Website: <https://www.rtstigma.org/>
email: info@rtstigma.org



Cleveland: A City of Rebels, Resisters, and Revolutionaries



By Ajah Hales

The Systematic Destruction of Winston Willis’ Legacy Part 3:

Since Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb announced in January that his “administration will not engage in the deportation of individuals who have not committed violent crimes,” he has been treading carefully to avoid directly antagonizing President Donald Trump while still sending the message that he will do what’s best for Cleveland, regardless of who is in office.

While some Clevelanders may have found this surprising, Bibb’s decision was consistent with Cleveland’s long-standing history of civil disobedience and social activism.

A History of Hope

As the gateway to the North, Ohio played an important role in the Underground Railroad, a network of abolitionists who helped people escape chattel enslavement. Historians estimate that half of all the people who escaped slavery came through Ohio.

During that time, Cleveland was called Station Hope because it was just a stop away from God Be Praised—the code name for Ontario, Canada. Cleveland was also a well-known conductor hub and home to many of the 1,500 Ohio Underground Railroad conductors.

Cleveland’s early notable elites, like the Ford and Cozad-Bates Families, self-made Black millionaire John Brown the Barber, and civic leader John Malvin, a freeborn tradesman who fought against Ohio’s Black Codes, were known conductors and station operators.

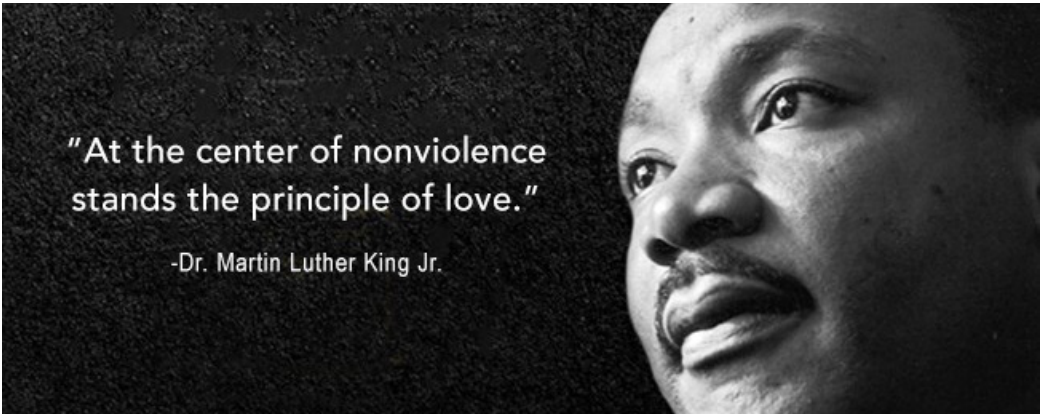
Thanks in part to the work of the Woodland Cemetery Foundation, many of these history makers’ grave sites have been preserved as part of the National Park Service Historic Register of Underground Railroad sites.

While not all Clevelanders were abolitionists, by 1860, the city had developed a reputation as an abolitionist hotbed that refused to comply with the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

According to historian Michelle Day,



Malcolm X at Cory. Credit: Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio



Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Credit: YouTube

Cleveland was a thorn in the side of the Confederacy. For example, William Goshorn, enslaver of Sara Lucy Bagby Johnson, the last woman to be reclaimed under the fugitive slave act, refused to negotiate with abolitionist leaders who wanted to purchase Bagby from him for twice the price Goshorn’s father initially paid for her.

Instead, he pressed the Cleveland U.S. Marshals to execute this reclamation as a way to “test” the Western Reserve’s willingness to comply with the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. According to Day, Goshorn called Cleveland “the worst abolitionist hole in the U.S.,” a badge many early Clevelanders wore with honor.

After the Civil War, many Black Americans saw Cleveland as a land of opportunity. Because of its abolitionist history, most of Cleveland had already been integrated by 1900. Cleveland was home to several prominent Black academics, political leaders, and business owners.

Between 1819 and 1903, Cleveland

boasted six Black newspapers, including The Cleveland Journal, The Cleveland Globe, The Cleveland Gazette, and The Alienated American, according to The Ohio Black Press in the 19th Century.

These papers covered everything from local politics to national issues like lynching, and The Great Migration, which some papers called the negro migrant crisis. Between 1910 and 1930, Cleveland’s Black population grew by 60%, with over 900,000 Black Clevelanders recorded in the 1930s census.

Cleveland, Chocolate City

During the Harlem Renaissance, Cleveland served as a second northern outpost for the Black artistic, cultural, and political revolution.



Harry E. Davis in 1934. Credit: Cleveland Public Library Digital Library.



Jane Edna Hunter, 1941. Credit: CSU-Michael Schwartz Library

Attorney Harry E. Davis, the first Black man elected to serve on Cleveland’s Civil Service Commission, brought a racial discrimination suit against a white store owner for refusing to serve him in 1909 and won.

Feminist icon and social worker Jane Edna Hunter started The Working Girls Association, later known as the Phyllis Wheatley Association, in 1911, to provide safe living quarters for unmarried Black women migrating into the city.

But these were not the only newsworthy Black Americans to grace our city with their presence. Artist Augusta Savage, playwright Lorraine Hansberry, and poet Langston Hughes spent time in Chocolate City. Hansberry and Hughes spent time at Karamu House, the oldest Black Theatre in the United States, with the debut Broadway show, A Raisin in the Sun, premiering at Karamu in 1960, just one year after its initial run on Broadway.

Popular empowerment organizations like the NAACP (1912), the Urban League (1917), the National Negro Congress (1936), the Congress of Racial Equality (1963), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (1967), all had robust Cleveland chapters. These organizations brought in high-profile speakers like W.E.B. DuBois and James Weldon Johnson, who spoke at the NAACP’s 20th Annual Session Meeting in 1929.

With such a politically and socially active Black population, it’s no wonder that Cleveland played a major role in the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. During that time, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. visited the city more than a dozen times. In 1964, Malcolm X delivered his famous Ballot or the Bullet speech at Cory Methodist Church in Cleveland’s Glenville neighborhood.

With the election of Carl Stokes in 1968, Cleveland also became the first major city in the United States to have a Black mayor. His brother, Louis Stokes, became a 15-term United States Congressperson and a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus who advocated for veterans’ rights.

Clevelanders have a proven track record of being justice-minded social activists willing to stand 10 toes

Removing the Stigma: Collaboration Program for Youth



By Denise Holcomb

Removing the Stigma seeks youth-focused organizations, individuals, businesses, and volunteers to support our Youth Life CLE Readiness program.

In the summer of 2024, we launched the Youth Life CLE Awareness and Prevention program to promote the removal of stigma around suicide and create a safe environment for youth to connect with peers, parents, and



supporters. The program also identifies resources for ongoing help and support.

This initiative focuses on highly vulnerable African American youth and families. Our YLC youth-focused community awareness project highlights

how suicide is viewed in terms of race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, age, and media influences. The program equips youth with resilience, hope, independence, connection, wellness, and healthy thinking through the arts, training, conversations, volunteering, and resources.

The Youth Life CLE Adult Readiness program (YLCAR) addresses barriers that might lead to suicidal thoughts among youth, such as poverty, low self-esteem, teen pregnancies, toxic relationships, financial literacy, incompetent guardianship, employment readiness, housing preparation, higher education, self-employment, stress management, and medical and healthcare access.

Removing the Stigma’s YLC program collaborates with peers, experts, and other organizations within Cuyahoga County and neighboring

counties. This approach offers youth and their families additional resources and learning opportunities while addressing their needs and decreasing barriers that can lead to suicide.

The YLCAR program will use the same approach, bringing in experts and resources to end the dependence of parents-in-need of government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage. It incorporates addressing barriers and learned behavior that lead to out-of-wedlock pregnancies, while establishing goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of pregnancies and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

For more information or if you’re interested in collaborating, contact our Executive Director, Denise Holcomb, at denise@rtstigma.org or call our office at 216-325-7755.

We Need Therapy: Tackling Barriers that Keep the Black Community from Therapy



By Jennifer Bailey, LICSW-CP

From August 1619 to December 1865, the enslavement of Black people played a crucial role in the American economy, providing a lucrative foundation of wealth and status for the United States of America (Jim Crow Museum). For 246 years, Black people endured physical, sexual, and psychological trauma during slavery. Despite that Black people established a culture and identity that evokes hope and perseverance. Black people worked for freedom in the Underground Railroad and marched on Washington to fight segregation. The Black community knows how to come together when it matters, so why are we avoiding mental health?

Results from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that 19.7% of Black adults experienced a mental health condition. 6.6% of Black and African American adults have experienced a major depressive episode (SAMHSA). Also in 2022, suicide was the third leading cause of death for Black or African Americans ages 10 to 24, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health (OMH). There is a need for mental health support within the Black community. However, Black people aren’t seeking help. According to McLean Hospital, about 25% of Black people go to therapy compared to 40% of white people.

Barriers Keeping Blacks from Going To Therapy

For this article, I received insight on what is keeping the Black community from therapy from two mental health professionals who are also people of color, Caroline Sanders and Claude L. King.

“These [barriers] include stigma in seeking treatment, historical trauma and mistrust of the health care system, financial constraints, and health care providers who lack cultural competency,” said Caroline M. Sanders, a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC). She provides therapy to individuals from various backgrounds who come to her for support.

Stigma

Merriam-Webster defines stigma as “a set of negative and unfair beliefs that a society or a group of people have about something.” In this case, the group is Black people, and the “something” is going to therapy.

“Many still believe that seeking therapy means you’re ‘crazy,’ or that you’re admitting there’s something fundamentally wrong with you,” said Claude L. King, a licensed clinical professional counselor (LCPC). “This belief system can make people feel ashamed for even considering therapy, reinforcing the idea that mental toughness means suffering in silence. Combating these internalized stigmas is essential for increasing access and utilization of mental health services in our community.”



Credit: freepik



Credit: freepik

King provides individual therapy and assists athletes in improving their performance. In short, Black people are concerned that if they get therapy, they’re crazy. Perhaps individuals who would want to receive therapy hesitate because they could feel as though they aren’t “Black enough.”

Underrepresentation

The majority of therapists, at 73%, are white, leaving 27% of therapists of color. Of that 27%, only 4% are Black or African American according to Counseling Psychology.org.

“One of the most significant [barriers] is the underrepresentation of Black clinicians. We all want to speak with someone we feel safe and comfortable opening up to,” King added. “The value of sitting with someone who inherently understands the nuances of your experiences, without needing extensive explanation, is invaluable. That level of cultural resonance and trust can make the difference between someone committing to therapy or walking away from it altogether.”

Affordability

In 2023, 12.5% of Black individuals were uninsured according to the health policy organization KFF. King explained how being uninsured makes the affordability of therapy more difficult. “For Black individuals without health insurance, paying out-of-pocket can be expensive. Therapy sessions

can range from \$75 to \$200 per session, and weekly, this is simply not feasible for many, especially if they are earning minimum wage, supporting a family, or dealing with other financial stressors like housing, food, or childcare.”

Breaking Down Barriers

Discussing mental health will help normalize it, which will decrease the stigma around the issue.

“There is real power in hearing a friend, colleague, or family member share their struggles with stress, trauma, or relationship issues and the steps they are taking to address them,” said King. “These conversations can destigmatize help-seeking behavior and reinforce the message that it’s okay to not be okay, and it’s courageous to seek help.”

“Educating members of the Black community about the benefits of therapy is the first step in encouraging individuals to seek treatment,” Sanders added.

Community outreach from trusted community leaders could shift individuals’ negative connotations around seeking mental health support. “These venues can serve as a safe environment that acknowledges and addresses stigma and the historical trauma experienced by Black Americans,” said Sanders.

To address these issues, King proposes expanding Medicaid, increasing funding for community mental health

clinics, and requiring insurance companies to cover mental health services at parity with physical health care.

The Black community is synonymous with hope, change, and togetherness. It’s time that we use these qualities to break down the barriers that are keeping people in the Black community and other people of color from accessing mental health support.

- Takeaways**
- The Black community is not going to therapy.
 - Stigma: The idea that therapy is for “crazy” people and we should handle things on our own.
 - Underrepresentation: 4% of therapists are Black. Speaking to someone who one feels understands the experience is imperative to the relationship between client and therapist.
 - Affordability: A lack of insurance makes therapy hard to afford.
 - To break down the barriers, we must have conversations about mental health to break down stigma.
 - Implementing policies that support community mental health agencies and to provide affordable therapy services will increase accessibility.
- Jennifer Bailey is a wife, mother of three, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and a Registered Drama Therapist (RDT).

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