

Inside



Assata Shakur, Racial Justice Activist, Dies at Age 78

The U.S. government categorized Shakur as a dangerous terrorist, but to many supporters, she was a symbol of resistance and a source of inspiration.

Page 7



CLEVELAND OBSERVER

Since 2018

“Engage ... Educate ... Empower.”

Vol. 6 Issue 11 November 2025

WWW.CLEOBSERVER.COM

Cleveland STI Cases On the Rise: Reveal Deep Health Inequities



By Ron Calhoun



SCAN TO LISTEN

A new report from Frances Mills, commissioner of health, City of Cleveland Health Department, shows that sexually transmitted infections, or STIs, remains a serious health problem in Cleveland. Nearly 8,000 people were diagnosed with chlamydia, gonorrhea, or syphilis.

Health experts say some numbers have gone down, but one infection, syphilis, keeps going up. They warn that the increase indicates Cleveland needs more testing, treatment, and education about sexual health.

Chlamydia Still the Most Common Infection

Chlamydia was the most common STI in Cleveland in 2022, with 4,396 people infected and 4,885 total cases. That means some residents were infected more than once.

Even though the number of chlamydia cases went down about 13% from 2021, Cleveland still has one of the highest infection rates in the country. There were 1,303 cases for every 100,000 residents, which is almost three times higher than

the national average, according to the department's 2022 chlamydia infographic.

Fewer Gonorrhea Cases, But Still Widespread

The number of people with gonorrhea dropped by 37% in 2022. There were 2,512 total cases among 2,300 residents. That's an improvement, but the infection rate, 670 cases per 100,000 residents, is still very high.

Doctors say many people have both chlamydia and gonorrhea at the same time. In 2022, there were 811 co-infections, showing that these two diseases often occur together.

Syphilis Keeps Rising

While chlamydia and gonorrhea went down, cases of syphilis went up. In 2022, the city recorded 466 total cases, a 4% increase from 2021.

Health officials say this is part of a five-year trend. The number of people with syphilis has grown every year since 2018, especially among young adults and men.

Who Is Most Affected

Black residents in Cleveland are affected by STIs more than any other group. Between 2017 and 2021, they made up more than 70% of all cases. Experts say this is due to bigger issues, like limited access to healthcare, higher poverty rates,



A variety of infections disproportionately affect young people aged 15 to 29. Licensed under the Unsplash+ License

and a lack of testing sites in some neighborhoods.

Women, are more likely to get chlamydia, while men are more likely to get gonorrhea or syphilis. In 2022, three out of four syphilis cases were in men.

The people getting sick are often ages 15 to 29. Health officials say this shows that young people need more information about safe sex and regular testing.

Repeat Infections and Hot Spots

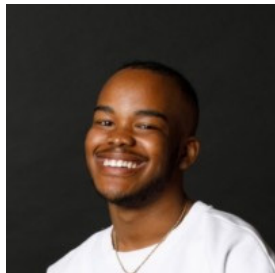
Many Clevelanders are being

infected more than once. In 2022, 428 people had repeat chlamydia infections, 172 had gonorrhea again, and 14 had syphilis more than once.

Maps from the Cleveland Department of Public Health show that the city's East Side neighborhoods have the most cases. Areas such as Mount Pleasant, Glenville, Union-Miles Park, and Hough report the highest numbers every year.

These neighborhoods also
Continued on page 2

Zadok Little's Journey of Faith, Sound and Purpose



By Konner Hines



SCAN TO LISTEN

Zadok Little doesn't just make music; he lives it. His voice carries the weight of lived experience, yet reflects the light of a man who's found his purpose. Born and raised on Cleveland's east side, Little is part of a new wave of artists transforming personal testimony into powerful sound.

"I grew up all across Cleveland," Little said. "It shaped me. A lot of what I've been through, the good and the bad, is what inspired my music."

For Little, Cleveland isn't just a hometown, it's a canvas. From neighborhoods near Harvard



Cleveland faith artist Zadok Little

and Lee to East Cleveland and Cleveland Heights, every block added another note to the soundtrack of his life. It's where he first heard the old-school funk his family loved, where hip-hop beats pulsed through the summers, and where rock riffs cracked open his curiosity.

"I caught a very distinct ear at a young age," Little said. "I wasn't just stuck to one genre. I got exposed to funk, hip hop, rock, jazz... it just felt good to me."

The Moment the Music Found Him

By his freshman year at Cleveland Heights High School, Little was scribbling rhymes between classes and freestyling with friends. He studied the wordplay of Kanye West and Eminem, the energy of Lil Wayne, the grit of Linkin Park, and the spiritual depth of Lecrae.

"I had a rough background," Little said. "Music was my outlet, my way of telling my story. As I got older, I found God. My music changed completely, and I believe it was for the better."

The turning point wasn't about fame or streaming numbers. It was about faith. Little's personal journey led him to redefine not only his sound but his mission.

"I'm for the kingdom first," Little said. "But I'm also just an artist who wants to inspire others and give glory to God."

A Mission in Every Lyric

One of Little's favorite ways to describe his artistry comes from a message he wrote to himself, a sort of personal manifesto:

"I'm bringing authentic, genuine, smooth, and energetic Christian hip hop to your ears. As

Continued on page 2

Zadok Little's Journey Continued from front page

an artist, I give it my best to glorify the gifts God gave me. I've been saved by the blood of Jesus in so many ways.

My goal is not to push my beliefs on anyone, but maybe open your eyes to the best life that God can give," Little said.

His faith is evident, but so is his desire to connect. His music is equal parts testimony and invitation, a reminder that no matter where you come from, hope has a beat.

Strings, Beats, and a Game Called Guitar Hero

Little's journey into music wasn't just through headphones; it started with a game controller. As a kid, he spent hours playing Guitar Hero, tapping along to songs that made him feel alive.

"I was probably nine or ten," Little said. "Playing that game inspired me to pick up a real guitar."

Today, he owns two guitars and weaves their sound into his music, blending live instrumentation with his lyrical storytelling. It's a sound that's personal, textured, and uniquely his.

Lighting the Way Forward

What Zadok Little hopes listeners take from his music isn't just rhythm, it's reassurance.

"I just hope people can take away a message," Little said. "Maybe it sparks something. Maybe it encourages someone to check on a friend, pray, or just be more loving. There's a lot of darkness in the world, and I want to be a light."

Little's growing fan base spans streaming platforms like Apple Music, Spotify, Tidal, Amazon Music, and Pandora. On Instagram (@zadoklives), he shares upcoming shows, merch, and glimpses into the faith-fueled journey behind the

music.

Through every verse, every performance, every guitar chord, Zadok Little stands as proof that the most powerful stories don't have to shout. They can grow inside you and become a deeper message to the world.

Exclusive: Little's new single 'Race'

"The title of the song is called 'Race.' The song is about just continuing to run my race of life at my own pace with trusting God and allowing him to help me in my heavy times of anxiety and worry. He's already done so much for me.

"The style of the song has a smooth soulful exciting sound. The song was inspired from my love of cars growing up. It's not about coming in first place. It's about running the race at the pace God has set for me," said Little.

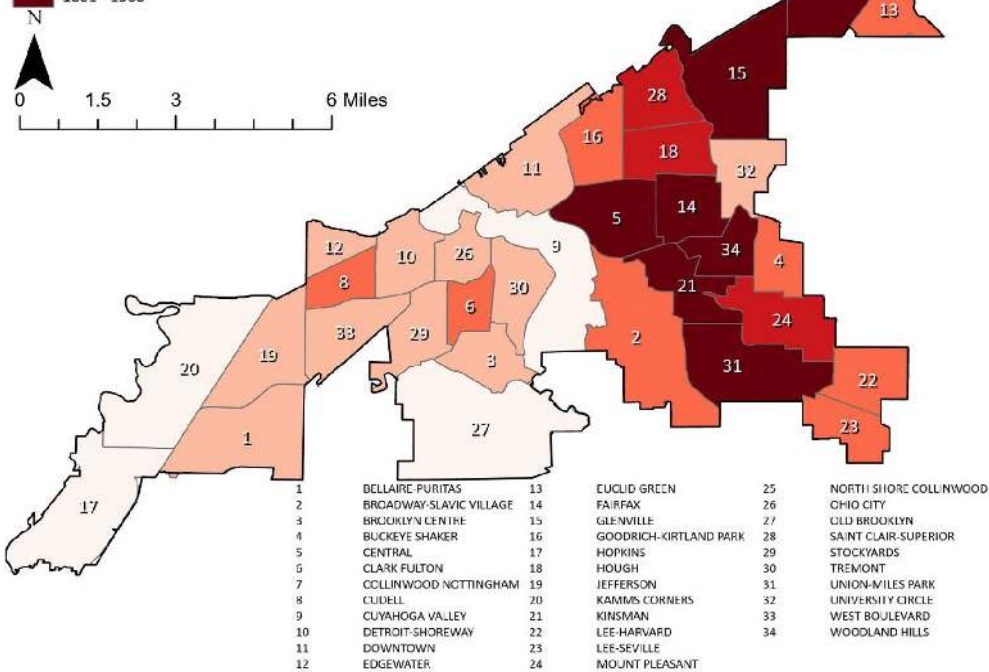
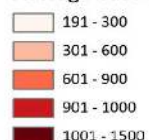
The single and music lyric video are out now on Facebook and YouTube, search for Zadok Little

Konner Hines is a member of the Honors College, and a marketing and international Business student at Baldwin Wallace University.



Cleveland STI Cases On the Rise

Average Case Rate (per 100,000 Residents)



Consistent with the map of chlamydia cases (Figure 29, page 35), gonorrhea had a higher case rate in the eastern neighborhoods of Cleveland.

face higher rates of poverty and fewer healthcare options, which experts say makes it harder for people to get help or testing.

Link Between STIs and HIV

The city report shows that many people who get syphilis are also living with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. About 4 out of 10 people diagnosed with syphilis were also HIV-positive.

More than half said they had been treated for another STI before, and some reported trading drugs for sex. Health workers say this shows how issues like

addiction, homelessness, and lack of healthcare are all connected.

A Growing Concern for Women

Another worrying sign is the increase in syphilis among women, especially pregnant women. From 2017 to 2021, there were 10 cases of congenital syphilis, in which a baby was born infected.

Most of these cases involved Black or Hispanic mothers. Doctors warn that without more testing and prenatal care, those numbers could rise again if healthcare access remains limited.

Continued from front page

What Cleveland Can Do

City officials say Cleveland must focus on education, prevention, and access to testing. They advocate for more clinics and community programs to help people learn about sexual health and get tested regularly.

"Education and access to care are key," said a spokesperson for the Cleveland Department of Public Health. "The more people we can reach, the better chance we have to stop these infections from spreading."

Experts say that while the city made some progress in lowering chlamydia and gonorrhea, the continued rise in syphilis shows there is still a lot of work to do.

Later this year, Cleveland's next STI report will show whether the trend has changed. For now, health officials say one thing is clear: fighting these infections means talking about them openly, and making sure everyone has the chance to get tested and treated.

Data Summary

	Diagnoses in Cleveland 2017-2021	Percent Change in Diagnoses 2017-2021 ^a	Average Yearly Case Rate (per 100,000) 2017-2021	U.S. Average Yearly Case Rate 2017-2021
HIV	634	+6.5%	34 ^b	13 ^b
Syphilis	1,314	+102.3%	70	40
Congenital Syphilis	10	+100.0%	46.7	49
Chlamydia	29,819	-8.2%	1557	516
Gonorrhea	17,617	+20.7%	940	190

a. Calculated using the percent change of the 2021 case count compared to the 2017 case count.
b. Case Rate of individuals older than 13 years. Cleveland residents with HIV below 13 years old (n = 2) excluded from case rate.

SUBSCRIBE SCAN

HERE:



SCAN TO REGISTER

\$60
annual U.S. mail
subscription

CLEVELAND OBSERVER

The Cleveland Observer is a community-based non-profit monthly print newspaper dedicated to Engage, Educate, Empower and Enhance the community by providing information and resources.

Copyright 2025

PUBLISHER
Ron Calhoun

EDITORS
Marva B. White
Lisa O'Brien

PRINT EDITOR
Rosie Palfy

PARTNERS
The Cleveland Foundation

ADVERTISING
sales@cleobserver.com

ADVISORY BOARD
Sheila Ferguson,
Ron Harris, Devon Jones,
Mark Silverberg

PRINT LAYOUT / GRAPHICS
Ron Calhoun

info@cleobserver.com
11459 Mayfield Road #302
Cleveland, Ohio 44106
(216) 236-8081

The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of each writer, and not those of the publisher, editor or any other entity.

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.

NO REPRODUCTION WITHOUT PERMISSION.

Opinion: The Changing Face of Cuyahoga Land Bank and Its Cost to the Community



By Ron Calhoun



Cuyahoga Land Bank began as a residential tool. Today, its priorities seem to serve institutions and commerce over individuals.

From Renewal to Redevelopment

In Cuyahoga County, longtime builder and resident Ron Calhoun has watched the county's Land Bank evolve from a neighborhood renewal program into an engine for developer-driven projects.

Over the past decade, changes in land transfer rules and funding priorities have moved the focus from individual homeowners to large commercial and institutional partners, raising questions about who truly benefits from the city's redevelopment policies.

According to county regulations and public reports from the Cuyahoga Land Bank, the shift since 2018 from affordable, transparent land sales to large-scale deals with well-connected developers. The board, which includes local government officials, has raised urgent concerns about transparency, equitable access, and diminishing opportunities for longtime residents to rebuild and sustain their neighborhoods.

The Shift Toward Institutional Control

But by the late 2010s,

that mission began to change. Amendments made between 2018 and 2022 shifted the Land Bank's focus away from individuals and toward institutional development. Revised policies gave the executive staff broad power to negotiate property sales directly with "strategic partners", a category that includes large developers and community development corporations, or CDCs. (Source: Cuyahoga County Land Bank Code of Regulations, cuyahogalandbank.org)

Entire clusters of parcels can now be bundled and transferred through requests for proposals or "special project" agreements. In practice, only well-connected organizations have the capacity to compete. Public auctions and open sales, once the heart of the program, have largely disappeared.

With the city's support, I built a 2,610-square-foot home. I received a \$5,000 discretionary grant and a 10-year tax abatement, with the understanding I'd repay the grant if I sold the house early.

It wasn't a handout; it was a partnership that encouraged long-term ownership according to the Cuyahoga County Land Bank Code of Regulations.

That partnership reflected the original spirit of what would later become the Cuyahoga Land Bank, a program created to return abandoned property to community hands, not private control.

Established in 2009 under Ohio Revised Code 1724, the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation was designed to "reclaim, rehabilitate, and reutilize vacant, abandoned, or tax-foreclosed real property for the public good."

(Sources: Ohio Revised Code

Sections 1724 and 5722, codes. ohio.gov)

A Homegrown Start: Building from the Ground Up

When I was growing up in Cleveland, the city was full of boarded-up homes and vacant lots. In 1992, my wife and I decided to help rebuild my neighborhood. Through the city's land bank, we bought a parcel at a public auction, a fair, transparent process that allowed residents to reinvest where they lived.

Original Mission: Reclaiming Land, Restoring Neighborhoods

In its early years, the Land Bank focused on people, not profits. Homeowners, small nonprofits, and block clubs could buy lots directly. Side-yard and owner-occupant programs gave Clevelanders a chance to expand their properties or build new homes. Land sales were public, affordable, and transparent.

Who Benefits, and Who's Left Out?

The Land Bank's current board includes the county executive, treasurer, and council president, along with city and suburban officials. This structure ensures political oversight but also ties the Land Bank's priorities to government-led redevelopment plans.

Property transfers now mainly flow to established Community Development Corporations (CDCs) such as Slavic Village Development, Metro West, and Famicos Foundation, or to developers working in designated growth corridors.

(Source: Cuyahoga Land Bank Board of Directors, cuyahogalandbank.org/about/our-team)

These projects have brought visible investment but at the cost of public access. Residents who could once buy a single lot now see entire blocks handed to developers through negotiated deals. Small community groups face more paperwork, fewer opportunities, and less transparency.

Transparency at a Crossroads

The shift also mirrors a broader trend in county policy. Cuyahoga County's plan to sell

delinquent tax liens, once a key pipeline for Land Bank acquisitions, was recently stalled, raising further questions about transparency and accountability in how distressed properties are managed. (Source: Cleveland.com, "Cuyahoga County's plan to sell delinquent tax liens stalled," Oct. 2025)

The Land Bank still describes its work as "returning property to productive use." But the definition of "productive" has changed. Where the system once built equity and stability for local families, it now builds leverage for institutions.

Reclaiming the Promise

Cleveland residents have voiced growing concerns about how large-scale redevelopment projects are reshaping their neighborhoods. Many worry that the loss of smaller, homeowner-driven initiatives has brought new challenges: heavier traffic, limited parking, and rising rents as multi-unit complexes replace single-family homes.

Residents in areas like Hough, Glenville, and University Circle report that once-quiet residential streets now feel commercialized, with increased noise, transient renters, and reduced green space. These frustrations often stem not from opposition to growth but from a sense that decisions are being made without their input.

The lack of early, transparent communication about project size, scope, and impact has left communities feeling excluded from planning processes that directly affect their daily lives.

To rebuild trust and balance progress with preservation, residents and policy advocates are calling for stronger safeguards. They recommend that the Land Bank and its development partners prioritize open communication through mandatory accessible public meetings and clear project updates. Thorough impact assessments, especially traffic and parking studies, should be conducted before approvals, with findings shared publicly.

Maintaining neighborhood character through scale and

Continued on page 4



Glenville neighborhood housing in Cleveland, Ohio Credit: City of Cleveland

News Overload: How National Events Impact Our Emotional Health



By Jennifer Bailey, LCSW & RDT

In the last five years, Americans have weathered wave after wave of national and global crises. From the COVID-19 pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, the Capitol attack on Jan. 6, to the dismantling of DEI policies, each event lingers in our feeds. Social media doesn't let us just witness history, it urges us to relive it, looped and replayed, until the impacts seep in. The result? A nation anxious, hypervigilant, and, more than anything, overwhelmed.

A 2024 Stress in America Poll from the American Psychological Association found that a staggering 77% of Americans see the nation's future as a major stressor. 72% fear the election could erupt in violence, while more than half see the 2024 presidential race as a possible end of democracy. Political drama has always cast a shadow, but now the intrusion feels personal, as if the entire audience has become the cast in this ongoing tragedy.

The Marathon of Crises

Imagine running a marathon, then surging straight into a triathlon, only to dive into another round. Exhaustion is

inevitable. America's emotional landscape has felt exactly like this, a relentless relay of pandemic, protest, disaster, scandal, and policy crisis. From 2020 to 2025, major events have arrived in rapid succession, draining our psychological reserves.

Recent milestones:

- COVID-19 pandemic and massive wildfires (2020)
- Murder of George Floyd and ensuing protests
- U.S. Capitol attack (2021)
- Buffalo and Uvalde shootings, Russia's invasion of Ukraine (2022)
- Increased school shootings, wildfires, global heatwaves, political shakeups, and international conflict have plagued the year 2025.

The finish line always seems to move farther away.

24/7 News and Digital Overload

Gone are the days of the evening news. By 2024, 86% of Americans will get their news digitally. The average adult now checks their phone every few minutes, tallying 144 glances and nearly 4.5 hours of scrolling per day. This isn't just a stream of headlines. It's also a tidal wave of opinions, hot takes, and debates, compounding the noise of every crisis.

What starts as one quick clip soon becomes a labyrinth of viewpoints and arguments. The

news isn't just news. It's news stories, takes about news, and arguments about takes. Each layer adds another emotional weight. The 24/7 news cycle, amplified on social media, fuels anxiety, resentment, and, for some, complete emotional shutdown. The marathon continues, now with searchlights and sirens at every corner.

Choosing Wisely: Protecting Emotional Health

Dane Dalvalantis, licensed clinical professional counselor, offers this perspective: "People have a choice on what media to consume, and it's okay to protect your peace. When a lot is happening in world affairs and politics, I can understand the pressure people might feel to be informed. At the same time, self-preservation can be necessary. We are allowed to choose what is best for our own mindset and to keep ourselves regulated. We should be mindful and observe how our media consumption impacts us. As a therapist, I would like to encourage people to be intentional with what they expose themselves to and in how they take care of themselves."

Finding Balance: How to Manage Emotional Health

- Contributors to emotional overwhelm due to national events are the frequency of events and access to content.

- Viewing one short clip quickly escalates into scrolling through dozens of takes, arguments, and reactions. This results in not just consuming news itself but the infinite layers of commentary around it.
- The consistent and prolonged exposure to the news could increase our experience of negative emotions.

Jennifer Bailey is a wife, mother of three, and therapist. Bailey is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and Registered Drama Therapist (RDT)

Emotional Responses to News Overload

Anxiety & hypervigilance
feeling unsafe, bracing for what's next, uncertainty of the future

Anger and resentment
directed at leaders, systems, and loved ones with opposing views

Grief and exhaustion
mourning lives lost, loss of trust, unity, and opportunities lost

Numbness and avoidance
checking out as a way to cope with what is going on

Cuyahoga Land Bank *Continued from page 3*

design standards is key to protecting Cleveland's distinctive residential feel. Equally important is balancing ownership and rental opportunities so long-term residents can remain invested in their blocks. True community renewal requires not just new construction but consistent engagement, ensuring residents

have a real voice in shaping the future of the places they call home.

When we stood on our empty lot three decades ago, we saw possibility, a chance to rebuild a block, not just a house. That vision is still possible if we return to transparency and fairness.

Opening auctions to

individuals again, restoring owner-occupant programs, and publishing public reports on who receives property transfers would be good places to start.

The Land Bank was born from crisis to serve the community. Its future depends on whether it can still remember who that community is.



Best Artificial Intelligence Tools to Save Time and Money in Everyday Life



By Ray'Chel Wilson

Artificial intelligence (AI) isn't just hype or a Silicon Valley buzz phrase. For many people, the right AI tools are saving time, cutting costs, and preventing expensive mistakes. From catching tax errors worth thousands of dollars to helping small businesses keep up with paperwork, AI platforms like ChatGPT, Claude, and Perplexity are proving their value in everyday life.

What Makes a Good AI Tool?

Before jumping into specific platforms, it helps to know what separates a helpful tool from just another tech fad. Educator Dr. Leo S. Lo, Dean at the University of New Mexico, developed the CLEAR framework for prompt engineering, which guides users to craft better AI requests through five key principles: Concise, Logical, Explicit, Adaptive, and Reflective.

These qualities ensure clarity, flexibility, and reliability, all essential for getting useful results. With this in mind, here are three tools that stand out in real-world use.





















ChatGPT: Everyday Helper

Think of ChatGPT as a digital assistant that's always available to handle life's small but time-consuming tasks. These aren't complicated problems, but they can drain your time and energy.

ChatGPT works well for everyday needs such as:

- Creating a grocery list for a new meal plan.
- Planning a weekend trip on a budget.
- Finding the right replacement part for a household item.

Top AI Tools for Work

Chatbots	 ChatGPT	 Claude	 Bing Chat	Audio Editing	 Descript	 Adobe Podcast
Content Generation	 Jasper	 Writer	 Notion AI	Image Generation	 Midjourney	 Adobe Firefly
Spreadsheets	 Numerous			Slide Decks	 Gamma	 Tome
Meeting Recording	 Vowel	 Fireflies		Chat with PDF	 ChatPDF	
Personal Productivity	 Rewind	 Mem		Synthetic Voices	 ElevenLabs	 Play.ht

Credit: <https://photos.io/>

What sets ChatGPT apart is its conversational style. If the first answer doesn't work, you can respond with changes, "make it cheaper" or "no mushrooms", and it instantly adjusts. It's like brainstorming with a partner who never gets tired.

The key is knowing when to use it. ChatGPT is strongest at personal tasks that require creativity and organization. It's not designed for in-depth financial analysis or corporate reports. But for planning your week or figuring out what to cook for dinner, it's a practical time-saver.

Claude: The Document Detective

When faced with paperwork overload or large amounts of information, Claude acts like a digital research assistant. It can read through documents that would take hours to review and highlight what matters most.

Claude handles long and complex material effectively, including:

- Summarizing research notes.
- Analyzing interview transcripts.
- Restructuring lengthy grant applications.

What makes Claude stand out is its ability to retain detail. Unlike tools that only skim the

surface, it tracks information across very long documents and returns key insights.

Users report success with files as large as 50 pages, where Claude identifies themes and inconsistencies that might otherwise be missed.

This makes Claude especially valuable for students, researchers, and small-business owners who need to process large volumes of information quickly.

It functions like a tireless assistant who never loses focus, freeing people to spend more time on decision-making instead of document review.

Perplexity: The Fact-Checker

Here's the thing about AI: sometimes it makes things up. That's where Perplexity comes in. It's different because it always shows you where the information came from.

Perplexity is most useful when:

- Fact-checking or pulling current statistics.
- Looking up what experts or journals are saying on a topic.
- Avoiding "AI guesswork" by getting verifiable sources.

Unlike ChatGPT or Claude, Perplexity isn't designed for creativity or conversation. Instead, it functions as a search-and-cite sidekick for writers, students, and researchers who need accuracy. Every response includes linked sources, research papers, news articles, or government reports, so you can click through and confirm information yourself.

This is especially valuable for decisions that require precision, or when you need to back up an argument with facts. With Perplexity, you don't have to wonder, "Is this actually true?" You can check the source directly.

Which Tool Should You Use?

All three platforms are

powerful, but each shines in a different role. Matching the right tool to the right task makes all the difference:

- Creative help? Use ChatGPT.
- Processing long documents? Turn to Claude.
- Fact-checking or finding reliable sources? Choose Perplexity.

The key is not chasing every new tech trend. Instead, focus on your goals, stay grounded in your values, and let these tools serve you, not the other way around.

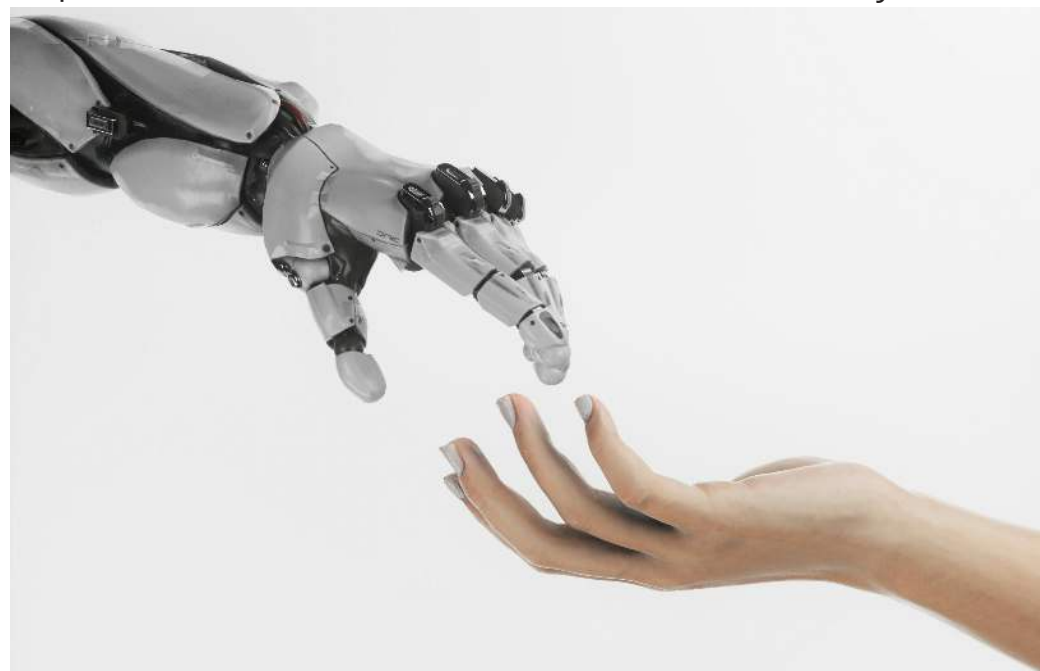
The Bottom Line

These tools won't solve every problem, but they can free up time, reduce information overload, and build confidence that you're working with accurate facts.

The key is being intentional. Identify what you need help with, then pick the right tool for the job. Start with one, build comfort, and expand to others as needed.

ChatGPT, Claude, and Perplexity can save time, lower stress, and even prevent costly errors. For students, families, and small-business owners, the payoff is measured not just in convenience but in real financial and community benefits.

Ray'Chel Wilson, a Toledo native, is the author of the internationally selling *Black Wealth Freedom* workbook series and CEO of ForOurLastNames.



**WRITERS
PODCASTERS
VIDEOGRAPHERS
BLOGGERS
GET PAID\$\$\$**

Email us at:
info@theclevelandobserver.com

Phone:
(216) 236-8081

Artificial Intelligence: The New Brain Drain



By: Marissa Valentine

Cleveland parents and educators are joining a growing national conversation about the effects of artificial intelligence (AI) on student learning, as a new MIT study warns of a phenomenon called “cognitive debt.”

At the beginning of this school year, concerns have risen that overuse of AI tools like ChatGPT may be hindering students’ creativity and critical thinking.

Research by neuroscientist Nataliya Kosmyrna, Ph.D., in her article “Your Brain on ChatGPT: Understanding Cognitive Debt in the Age of AI,” indicates that heavy reliance on AI for complex tasks weakens the brain’s ability to process and generate original ideas.

What Is AI and Why Is It Everywhere?

Over the past 15 years, technology has advanced rapidly, embedding AI in nearly every part of daily life. AI allows computers and machines to simulate human intelligence and perform decision-making tasks once reserved for people.

According to IBM, AI applies to tools such as large language models (LLMs) and applications like ChatGPT and Grammarly. From voice assistants to personalized advertisements, AI is now a constant presence in how Americans live, learn, and work.

AI: Helper or Problem?

AI promises convenience and speed, whether checking out groceries, using traffic cameras, or crafting emails. Many use AI to plan workouts, generate meal ideas, or even research academic topics.

Properly used, it can be a supportive resource, helping students identify credible sources and save time. Yet, this constant ease raises a critical question: if AI handles the complex mental work, are we unintentionally dulling the very thinking skills that make us human?

How AI Makes Our Brains “Lazy”

Asking Alexa to answer a simple question might seem harmless, but the constant use of machine learning tools changes how the brain functions.

A 2024 Scientific Reports study titled “Generative AI Use in Academic Writing Enhances Text Quality but Reduces Brain Activity Associated with Active Thinking”



Photo by Julien Tromeur on Unsplash

found that AI reduces a process called active retrieval, the act of searching, filtering, and analyzing information.

This process keeps the brain sharp and engaged. When ChatGPT delivers an instant, polished response, users bypass critical steps of evaluation and judgment, weakening comprehension and independent thought.

The MIT Study and “Cognitive Debt”

“Cognitive debt” describes the intellectual decline that results from over-reliance on AI manifesting in reduced creativity, reasoning ability, and writing complexity. In 2024 Dr. Kosmyrna and fellow MIT Media Lab researchers monitored students’ brain activity using EEGs.

Those who wrote essays with AI assistance displayed noticeably less cognitive engagement than students who generated their work independently. The study’s findings point to an alarming tradeoff: while AI boosts speed and quality of output, it may simultaneously suppress the brain’s creative and critical faculties.

The Costs of Dependence

The MIT study outlined several side effects of excessive AI use:

- **Diminished ownership of work:** Outsourcing intellectual effort means users feel less connected to their output, which reduces motivation and deeper inquiry.
- **Loss of comprehension:** Copying AI responses fosters surface understanding rather than mastery of complex ideas
- **Reduced originality:** Formulaic AI writing lacks personal insight and emotional nuance, leading to more mechanical, less authentic expression.

These tendencies suggest that the more people rely on AI to write, reason, or solve, the less they engage in the kind of cognitive rehearsal necessary for intellectual growth.

The Local Impact: Cleveland’s Cognitive Stakes

In regions like Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, these concerns take on additional weight. The local economy increasingly depends on innovative, analytical workers who can problem-solve, think critically, and adapt in fast-changing industries.

If students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District rely too heavily on AI, they risk entering adulthood without the intellectual agility needed to thrive in high-wage, high-skill careers.

This “cognitive debt” could widen the education and income gaps already present in the area, limiting long-term economic competitiveness.

What Parents Are Saying

Not everyone believes AI is a universal threat. Some educators and parents argue that AI can enhance learning opportunities, especially for students with learning differences. Lauren Lynch, a Cleveland parent of four, suggests AI could serve as an inclusive educational tool when used with intention.

“AI can support neurodivergent learners if paired with curricula that build problem-solving skills rather than replace them”, she explains. Many teachers share this optimism, noting that AI can help tailor instruction to

meet diverse student needs, when balanced with critical engagement and traditional learning methods.

Striking a Balance for the Future

The solution is not to ban AI, but to foster healthy, mindful use. Educators should teach students how to use AI intelligently, asking questions, verifying sources, and evaluating results. Integrating lessons in digital literacy can help students recognize when AI improves efficiency and when it undermines learning.

Schools can encourage assignments that require independent thought, discussion, and writing to preserve cognitive development while embracing technological tools responsibly.

The Path Forward

Society’s relationship with AI reflects a larger struggle between convenience and cognition. Machines can streamline tasks and expand access to knowledge, but they cannot replace the intricate neural processes that shape human intelligence.

The aim, then, should not be to reject technology but to ensure it remains a complement to human thought, not a substitute for it.

As teachers and families continue adapting to an AI-driven world, awareness of these tradeoffs becomes crucial.

Human brains still need challenge, reflection, and curiosity to grow. The promise of AI should not blind us to its cost: if used carelessly, it may quietly drain the very creativity and critical thought it was meant to enhance.

Marissa is a United States Navy Veteran. She holds a Master’s in Marriage and Family Therapy from Abilene Christian University and a Bachelor’s in Communications from the University of Texas RGV with a focus in Journalism.





STAY INFORMED

Point your phone camera at the QR code to get information about free events, local community, City Council meeting, and free events.

Let your voice be heard.

Assata Shakur, Racial Justice Activist, Dies at Age 78



By Angela Hay

Assata Shakur, a prominent Black liberation activist and longtime political refugee, died on Sept. 25 in Havana, Cuba, at age 78. The U.S. government categorized Shakur as a dangerous terrorist, but to many supporters, she was a symbol of resistance and a source of inspiration.

Early Activism

JoAnne Deborah Byron was born in New York City in 1947. While attending college, she became involved in political activism advocating for racial and social justice.

After graduation, she adopted the name Assata Olugbala Shakur and briefly joined the Black Panther Party, an activist group focused on the protection and care of the Black community.

Later, she joined the more militant Black Liberation Army (BLA). The BLA believed that “law is never impartial, never divorced from the economic relationships that brought it about” and advocated for “total liberation from those forces that maintain our oppressive condition.”

Shakur spent the early 1970s fighting a range of criminal charges against her, including robbery, kidnapping, and murder. In every case, she was either acquitted or the charges were ultimately dismissed.

New Jersey Turnpike Shootout

In 1973, however, a car in which she was riding with fellow Black activists Zayd Malik Shakur and Sundiata Acoli was stopped by New Jersey law enforcement. A shootout occurred that resulted in the deaths of Zayd Malik Shakur and state trooper Werner Foerster. Assata Shakur was shot in the arm, and Acoli was wounded.

Supporters cited evidence suggesting her innocence. Shakur was found guilty of the state trooper’s murder by an all-white jury in 1977 and was sentenced to life in prison.

Targeted by COINTELPRO

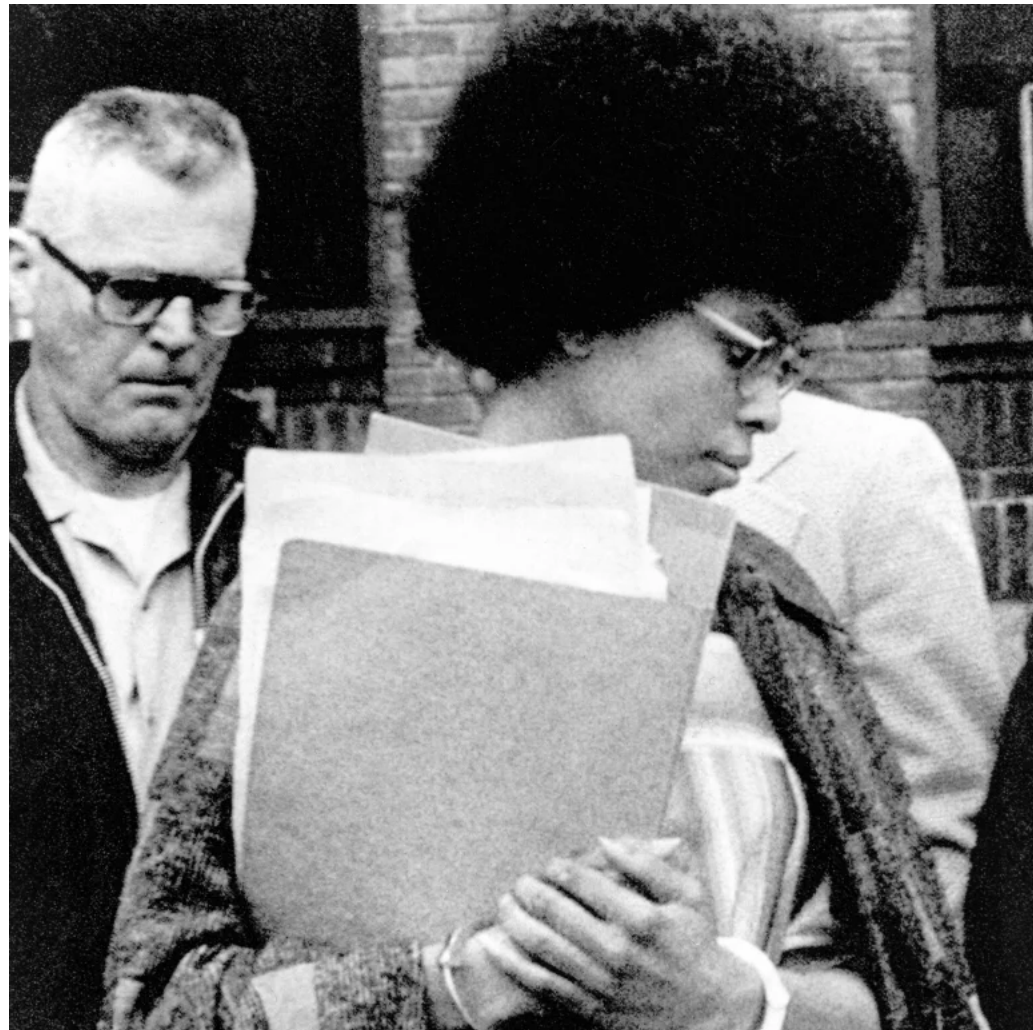
Shakur believed she had been targeted by the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), a covert FBI program created by J. Edgar Hoover to stop communism and squelch other forms of political dissent in America.

“Under the COINTELPRO program, many political activists were harassed, imprisoned, murdered or otherwise

neutralized,” Shakur wrote in a 1998 open letter published on her website.

“The FBI, with the help of local police agencies, systematically fed false accusations and fake news articles to the press, accusing me and other activists of crimes we did not commit.

Although in my case the charges were eventually dropped or I was eventually acquitted, the national and local police agencies created a situation where, based



Joanne Chesimard, who used the name Assata Shakur and was a member of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army, leaves Middlesex County courthouse, in New Brunswick, N.J., April 25, 1977. AP/AP

on their false accusations against me, any police officer could shoot me on sight.

It was not until the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was passed in the mid-’70s that we began to see the scope of the United States government’s persecution of political activists.”

Other Black activists targeted by COINTELPRO include Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammad, and Black Panther Party members Bobby Hutton, Fred Hampton, and Mark Clark.

Political Asylum in Cuba

With the help of fellow activists, Shakur escaped from prison in 1979 and fled the United States. She was the first woman to be included on the FBI’s Most Wanted list, and the FBI offered a \$2 million reward for her capture. She was granted political asylum in Cuba by Fidel Castro in 1984 and lived the rest of her life there.

While in Cuba, she continued her activist work primarily through books, articles, and interviews. A detailed archive of her writings remains available on her website www.assatashakur.org.

“At this point, I think that it is important to make one thing very clear,” Shakur wrote in 1998. “I have advocated and I still advocate revolutionary changes in the structure and in the principles that govern the United States.

I advocate self-determination for my people and for all oppressed people inside the United States. I advocate an end to capitalist exploitation, the abolition of racist policies, the eradication of sexism, and the elimination of political

“The FBI never stopped calling her what she was: a terrorist,” Patel wrote. “Mourning her is spitting on the badge and the blood of every cop who gave their life in service.”

In a Sept. 26 post on X, the Chicago Teachers Union memorialized her differently, calling her “a revolutionary fighter, a fierce writer, a revered elder of Black liberation, and a leader of freedom whose spirit continues to live in our struggle.” This post was criticized by Chicago alderpersons but supported by Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson.

Presidential professor of Anthropology and Urban Educator Dr. Marc Lamont Hill remembered Shakur as “a legend and a mentor and a resource to so many of us.”

“Although she remained hidden in Cuba, especially in the later years, she just stands tall and strong, and I’m grateful that she was able to live free and die free,” Hill said on a recent episode of “The Joe Budden Podcast.”

“So we always say hands off Assata, always free all political prisoners, always love to Assata. So we say rest in peace as she returns to the ancestors.”

Angela Hay is a professional writing & journalism student at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio. She has written and edited for Capital Stories, Capital Magazine, and the university’s student newspaper, the Chimes.

repression. If that is a crime, then I am totally guilty.”

Responses to Her Death

In a Sept. 28 post on X, former FBI director Kash Patel reiterated the government’s belief in her guilt.



Haslam Sports Group \$100 Million Settlement: Who Really Wins?



By Staff Writer

State leaders and the Cleveland Browns say a new, enclosed stadium in Brook Park could be a regional economic catalyst. The current plan carries an estimated price tag of about \$2.4 billion (U.S.), with \$600 million in state support and a separate \$100 million settlement proposed between the city and the team to end litigation tied to the move. Final approval by the Cleveland City Council is still required, as reported by AP News.

What the Current Proposal Includes

The two-year Ohio budget signed in July includes \$600 million in public funding for the Browns project, with the administration describing it as part of a broader economic development strategy. Axios reported that the team would make a significant private investment, with additional local and site infrastructure pieces still to be worked out among the parties.

A separate settlement framework announced in mid-October outlines a \$100 million package connected to ending cross-litigation and clearing the way for the Brook Park project. This includes an upfront payment and scheduled future payments, along with demolition and redevelopment



stadium plan, noting that the agreement was positioned as the best available option after extended disputes. The hearing underscored that the council intends to continue questioning the administration before taking a vote.

What Individual Council Members Are Saying

Cleveland City Council held a special hearing on Oct. 20 to address Bibb's deal with the Browns. The meeting was livestreamed on YouTube, and there was strong dissent from some council members.

Ward 16 Council Member Brian Kazy compared the situation to the 1995 move to Baltimore in recent commentary and appearances.

Ward 8 Council Member Michael Polensek criticized the settlement's value and raised concerns about what the city would net after costs, including demolition. Coverage also captures broader frustration among some members who said they felt excluded from the run-up to the announcement.

get back anything from the Browns when the city owns the asset?" McNeil said, reflecting broader frustration among residents who argue that scarce public dollars should prioritize roads, housing, and basic services before supporting new sports venues.

How Cleveland's Deal Compares

Around the league, recent NFL projects have relied on large public contributions. Independent economic research has repeatedly found that stadium subsidies tend to deliver limited measurable gains for taxpayers. Analysts emphasize substitution effects and opportunity costs and recommend guarding against optimistic projections.

While Cleveland's state share is a smaller percentage than some high-profile cases, the city and region still face material fiscal exposure if revenues underperform

or costs overrun, as reported by AP News.

What Remains Undecided

Key open questions for Clevelanders include: how much total public money (state and local) will be committed to the site and related infrastructure; the timing and structure of any payments; how the lakefront will be redeveloped; and what accountability mechanisms will be in the final agreements.

City Council has scheduled further hearings before a vote on the settlement. State funding is contingent on final deals among the Browns, Brook Park, and state development officials.

The bottom line

Supporters argue the project could create construction employment, add year-round event capacity, and free the city to reimagine the lakefront. Critics point to research on stadium economics, the public share of costs, and the risk of repeating past patterns where private benefits outweigh public returns.

With the council asserting its authority over litigation and approvals, the next several weeks will determine whether the final pact balances those interests in a way that Cleveland's residents consider fair and verifiable.

BROWNS REPORT

steps for the current lakefront site. Construction has been discussed on a 2026 to 2029 timeline, subject to final agreements, according to AP News.

Council Pushback on Deadline

City Council has questioned the process and settlement. In a memo described by WTOL local reporting, Council President Blaine Griffin directed the city's law director not to dismiss lawsuits without council approval, asserting the council's role over the matter. Council has also raised concerns about a Nov. 24 deadline tied to the settlement legislation.

At a public hearing, members of Mayor Justin Bibb's administration presented their case for the settlement and the

Community and Civic Reactions

WKYC coverage and community stakeholders have framed the issue around public benefits, accountability, and the future of the downtown lakefront. Reports note arguments in favor of unlocking lakefront redevelopment if the team departs, alongside cautions that any public outlay should carry enforceable benefits and a transparent process. Key business and neighborhood voices continue to call for clarity on jobs, contracting, and land use.

Terry McNeil, an advocate with Fix Our Streets 216, questioned the logic of the city's financial concessions in light of its ongoing infrastructure challenges. "How does the city of Cleveland

ADAMHS
BOARD OF CUYAHOGA COUNTY
ALCOHOL, DRUG ADDICTION & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

PAUSE BEFORE YOU PLAY

THE BEST GAME PLAN FOR EVERY BET.

⏸ SET LIMITS ⏸ RECOGNIZE THE RISKS ⏸ KNOW WHEN TO STOP

Online betting takes just seconds. But betting too quickly could put you at risk. Learn why you should pause before you bet at PauseBeforeYouPlay.org.

GAMBLING PROBLEM? 1-800-589-9966 PauseBeforeYouPlay.org