

## Governing in Crisis Teaching Guide

### PA Representative Jake Wheatley Police Reform and Broader Issues of Systemic Racism

#### Interview Summary

Since the killing of George Floyd by officers of the Minneapolis Police Department, the entire nation has seen protests targeting not only policing practices but broader issues of systemic racism. State and local governments throughout the country have been considering, and in some cases implementing, changes to the policies and practices governing the mission and methods of law enforcement. Pennsylvania State Representative Jake Wheatley is a member of the Working Group on Police Reform in Harrisburg. Rep. Wheatley discusses reform efforts in Pennsylvania, as well as the broader impact of systemic racism in such critical areas as education, healthcare, and economic opportunity.

Please watch or listen to the interview using your favorite video or podcast app: *YouTube, iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcast, Stitcher, Amazon Music.*

The Governing in Crisis series videos, podcasts, and resource materials are available at: [www.iop.pitt.edu/governing-crisis](http://www.iop.pitt.edu/governing-crisis).

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- (0:00) Introduction
- (3:52) Addressing the causes of structural racism
- (13:42) Challenges of policing reform
- (21:25) Overview of PA policing reform legislation and efforts
- (34:15) Fostering change through community action

#### Potential Uses

- Post a governance series video on Canvas and ask students to respond to a discussion question about the video, as well as comment on 1-2 of their classmates' posts.
- Show a clip of the video during class to enrich learning, emphasize a point, and/or contextualize a topic.
- Create a resource folder on Canvas that includes governance series videos, accompanied by "learn and do more" documents, as well as other links to support student growth related to current events.
- Incorporate a governance series video into pre-class readings for a live discussion using or adapting the questions below.

## Suggested Written Reflection Questions

- ❑ As Rep. Wheatley explains, “Policing is part of the systemic problem.” To address institutionalized racism, we must first look at its root causes. First, define systemic racism in your own words. How do race and class fit into your definition? How are race and class root causes of systemic racism? Do you think there are other root causes? Second, what can you do in your own life and career to fight racism? You may need to consult resources beyond the video.
- ❑ Implicit biases are favorable and unfavorable attitudes and stereotypes that unconsciously affect a person’s understanding, actions, and decisions. According to Rep. Wheatley, what impact do implicit biases have on systemic racism? What unconscious biases do you have, or have you experienced? How can biases impact your work?
- ❑ What did you find interesting in the interview? What is something that you disagreed with?

## Suggested Classroom Discussion Questions

- ❑ Since *Brown vs. Board of Education*, social science data has been admissible in the highest court to demonstrate racial inequality. Rep. Wheatley cites data to prove that COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted minority communities. What are some benefits and deterrents to using data to illustrate systemic racism?
- ❑ The murder of George Floyd has stimulated and propelled calls for police reform. Reformers have challenged and been challenged by police unions. Define collective bargaining and explore its pros and cons with respect to policing.
- ❑ The Supreme Court has long struggled with determining how to balance the interests of police officers’ discretion and individuals’ constitutional rights. Rep. Wheatley underscores this when he explains the differences between police officers and other professions. How should we constrain abuses of police discretion? Does the decentralization of police standards challenge police accountability? Why does this model exist? What are some challenges that may arise from regional standards around certification, de-certification, licensing, and training?

## Related Reading

- ❑ Utibe Essien, an assistant professor of medicine at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine researched [racial and ethnic disparities in COVID-19 mortalities](#). You can also check out the PittWire article called [Racial Data and COVID-19: Why it Matters](#).
- ❑ David Harris, Sally Ann Semenko Endowed Chair and Professor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law presented at Pitt’s Center for Race and Social Problems on [Race, Police, and Unarmed Civilian Deaths: What Can Be Done?](#)
- ❑ Read the [Pittsburgh Equity Indicators’ report](#), an annual report put out by the city in partnership with CUNY ISLG to assess the city’s progress regarding equitable opportunities.
- ❑ Look into some [proposed PA legislation](#) to tackle police reform including [House Bill 1841](#).
- ❑ Check out the Urban Institute’s collection of [resources and articles on structural racism in the U.S.](#)
- ❑ The Institute of Politics established reforms for fostering a fairer and less costly Allegheny County criminal justice system, without compromising public safety in its report, [Criminal Justice in the](#)

21st Century: Improving Incarceration Policies and Practices in Allegheny County.

- In the summer of 2020, the PA General Assembly passed legislation to *strengthen oversight and training requirements* for law enforcement officers.

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