



## How Does This Happen in 2023?

**Aaron Wade**  
**Minister for Granting and Scholarships**

In a shocking display of blatant racism, the Tennessee Congress recently voted to remove two Black elected officials, Justin Pearson and Justin Jones, from their positions in the Tennessee [House of Representatives](#) for using a bullhorn to protest gun violence on the floor. Their protest came following one of the latest mass shootings that left six dead at a Christian elementary school in Nashville, Tennessee.

This decision came after they, along with their white colleague Gloria Johnson, spoke out against discriminatory practices in the state. While Johnson was not met with the same level of discipline, Pearson and Jones were targeted and ousted in a move reminiscent of historical racist behaviors (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.). Fortunately, public outrage led to their reinstatement, but the microaggressions they continue to experience demonstrate that the fight for social justice is far from over.

It is deeply concerning that in 2023, Black elected officials can be removed from their positions simply for speaking out against injustice. The Tennessee Congress's decision echoes past racist practices that have sought to silence and marginalize Black voices, particularly in the context of the long history of racial discrimination and civil rights abuses in the American South (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.).

The disparate treatment of Pearson, Jones, and Johnson further highlights the systemic racism that permeates our political institutions. Johnson, who is white, faced less severe consequences for her advocacy, while her Black colleagues were immediately targeted for removal. This double standard underscores the continued racial bias that exists within our political systems and institutions.

Following their reinstatement, Pearson stated in a Vanity Fair interview on April 19, 2023 that he and Jones have both been subjected to a barrage of micro-aggressive behaviors from their colleagues, including having their

microphones turned off while speaking. These actions serve as a clear message that despite their reinstatement, their voices are not truly valued or respected by their peers.

This incident serves as a stark reminder that we must continue to fight for racial justice and hold those in power accountable. The removal and subsequent maltreatment of Pearson and Jones should serve as a wake-up call to the insidious nature of racism within our political institutions. As social justice advocates, we must challenge these systems and demand equitable representation and treatment for all, regardless of race.

As we move forward, we must remain vigilant and unrelenting in our pursuit of racial justice. We must continue to call out instances of racial bias and discrimination, whether overt or subtle, and demand accountability from those in positions of power. Silence in the face of injustice only serves to perpetuate the status quo.

It is up to each of us to speak up and out against racism and discrimination. Our collective voices have the power to create change, as evidenced by the reinstatement of Pearson and Jones. If we do not continue to challenge these injustices, we risk allowing similar tactics to silence the voice of justice advocates in the future.

We cannot allow this incident to fade into the background. Instead, let it serve as a rallying cry for continued action and advocacy for racial justice. Together, we have the power to reshape our political institutions and create a more equitable future for all.

Sources:

Southern Poverty Law Center. (n.d.). Civil Rights Movement. Retrieved from <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2023/04/17/tennessee-three-attempt-silence-lawmakers-strikes-heart-democracy>

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rev. Dr. Aaron Wade is the Minister for Congregational Leadership Development and Granting & Scholarships for the United Church of Christ.

LEARN [ucc.org/justice](http://ucc.org/justice)

DONATE [ucc.org/donate](http://ucc.org/donate)

ARCHIVE [bit.ly/witness4justice](http://bit.ly/witness4justice)



*The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.*