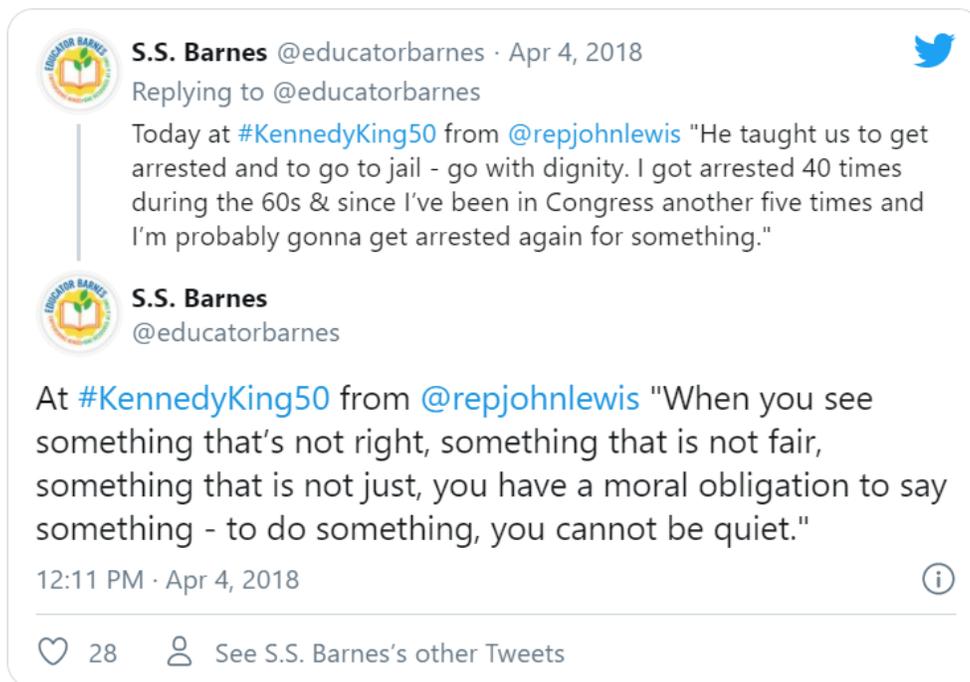




I'm Okay with Getting into Good Trouble

By Educator Barnes – July 18, 2020

The tweet that has been pinned to the top of my Twitter account since 2018 are the words of Rep. John Lewis, the Civil Rights activist and icon that passed away yesterday. In 2018, Lewis came to Indianapolis on the 50th anniversary of Robert Kennedy's speech when the world learned that Dr. King had been assassinated. Lewis said the words he had said many times before. "When you see something that's not right, something that is not fair, something that is not just, you have a moral obligation to say something – to do something, you cannot be quiet."



When I think about why I write and why Indy K12 means so much to me, I know this platform is an opportunity to call out inaction and to move people to action. That is the only way we can improve education. I'm not naive. People benefit from the status quo. Changing education means some people will lose their positions. Some people will lose their power. Some people will be forced to see the ugliness reflected in the mirror.

People respond in multiple ways when they are called out. They ignore it, pick apart what you said, fight to change it, or try to get you into trouble. When I think about the fact that multiple people decided to share with my principal that I wrote, "Race and Equity Talks Have Magnified How Emotionally Unsafe I Feel at My School," I wonder what these people's purpose was. I wonder if they were worried more about what I said than more about doing something about what I said.

This isn't my first round with this type of foolishness. This is my fourth school since I started writing. In every school, I had an open conversation about the fact that I write and what I write about. Three of those four principals decided to not follow me online or read what I write. The other principal was already following my work before she hired me. The only article my current principal has read is this one. I have written hundreds of pieces since I started my commitment to education writing. People who want to start trouble don't care about that. Their purpose is to shut me up. Guess what? You'll never do that.

I have no problem with people not liking what I write. I have no problem discussing what I write with people. I do have a problem if you are only following me to stop the progress I am fighting for. If you are reading this and you are one of those people who had nothing better to do with your life than to attempt to stir up trouble, shame on you. If you are bold enough to come forward, I will be more than happy than to look you in your face and repeat these words.

I have only been employed at my current year for one school year, and I plan to continue through this school year despite the fact that six schools have reached out to me about employment opportunities. I have not even applied to any jobs. Please trust and believe that I will keep providing you with the truth, and I stand 100% behind what I write whether you agree with it or not. Trust and believe there is only so much that I'm willing to put up with. How much should I endure before I should consider other options? I like my school; that's why I'm still there, but why does it feel like some people are pushing me towards the door?

My mental health matters. It is more important than fighting cowards who are bold enough to pass around what I write but too scared to have a conversation with me to learn more. I wasn't the one yesterday, I'm not the one today, and I sure as hell won't be the one tomorrow for people to come for. This isn't the first time I've had to address this type of situation and it probably won't be the last. It is part of the journey when you are fighting for change.

Follow me because you care about Black children having more Black teachers. Follow me because you want tips on how to advocate for your child as a parent. Follow me because you are sick and tired of the sub-par education our children, especially children of color, are facing. Don't follow me because you are trying to creep around on the low to see what I'm writing to start mess. Check yourself and check your purpose in life. Do you really have nothing better to do with your life than to see what I'm doing online? That's pretty sad.

Advocacy and activism are not for the weak. It does wear you down which is why I needed to share how unsafe I felt at work. Why is it easier to write online that I'm emotionally unsafe than to have the conversation at work? That question is not for me to answer. As the preacher says sometimes in predominantly Black churches, "Some of you will catch that on the way home." Why was there a meeting called about what I wrote instead of bringing me to the table when the meeting took place to gain an understanding from me directly? If you want me not to write about a situation, change the situation so there isn't anything for me to write about.

When I was asked at work how I could continue to work at my school if I felt this way, I responded that I'm in therapy and that I will take care of me. Honestly, that is what it is like being Black in America. I have been the only Black teacher in an entire school, the only Black English teacher in a department, the only Black English as a New Language teacher in a district, and the only Black librarian in a district. I don't believe my school was ready for a Black administrator. I spent my entire career speaking up for issues that have been unpopular and yet I maintain my professionalism and get the job done. I have worked with countless mediocre individuals who could not do half as much as I did and they weren't even facing the oppression, microaggressions, gossip, or pushback, I have faced.

I'm going to be good because I have learned a hard lesson in life. I know other Black people have come to this realization, too. You've got to look out for you and keep pressing on. You can't wait for anyone to save you because they'll cut you loose and save themselves first.

If you work with me and you are reading this now, don't continue to follow me if you don't have the stomach for what I write. I write about my experiences, past and present, and the experiences of others. My writing is not about you. It is about being a voice for others. It's about putting another education perspective into the world. If something makes you feel uncomfortable, you need to analyze the why instead of going on the attack. You wouldn't be feeling some type of way if I hadn't pointed out something that was true.

When I think about Rep. John Lewis and the concept of good trouble, I believe this means being a risk-taker and being willing to get into trouble because the goals you are fighting for are bigger and more important than the consequences you might face. I'm down with that cause.

Rest in Peace, and Rest in Power Rep. John Lewis. Thank you for being a role model for us all.