

ed post

stories >

explainers

podcasts

videos

resources >



Donate >

These Students Let Their Textbook Publisher Know Nobody 'Needed' Slavery



Dec 2, 2019 12:00:00 AM

by Shawnta S. Barnes



Fourth-grade teacher, Laura Wooley, was preparing her students for an upcoming social studies test using a McGraw-Hill textbook. During the course of the review, her students found an issue with the content in the book. On page 148 of the United States Research Companion, it states, "As more farmers grew tobacco, they needed more enslaved Africans to do the work." Ms. Wooley and her students took issue with one word in this sentence, "*needed*."

Instead of being angry and moving forward with the review, they decided to take action. They wrote letters explaining why the word was problematic and should be changed.

Below are some excerpts from the [letters](#) shared with the McGraw-Hill company.

When the wealthy people bought enslaved Africans, they didn't really need it. They wanted it. You see, the White people could've done all the work themselves, but they wanted slaves to do it. You should replace needed with wanted. It's more realistic. And when the 3rd graders come to 4th grade and see THAT, they are gonna think it's totally fine to enslave people because they NEED it.

Caroline

Our class doesn't think this is right. We think needed should be changed to wanted for these reasons. (I'm sorry if I say things that are rude, disrespectful or judgemental). 1. No one needs slaves in this world. 2. Plantation owners could have done the work themselves instead of sitting on their lazy butts. 3. If they need slaves, I need a pet panda.

Laurel

I feel that needed is a strong word. Farmers didn't need enslaved Africans, they wanted them to do the work. If you don't change this, little girls and boys will think that slavery is right. Please address this and change this.

Delany

It said they needed slavery, but you should of wrote wanted because if they needed them they would probably paid them but they wanted them and did not care about them. That is why you should change needed to wanted.

Vivi

In addition to sending McGraw-Hill the letter, Ms. Wooley also shared the letter on Twitter, and McGraw-Hill [responded](#):

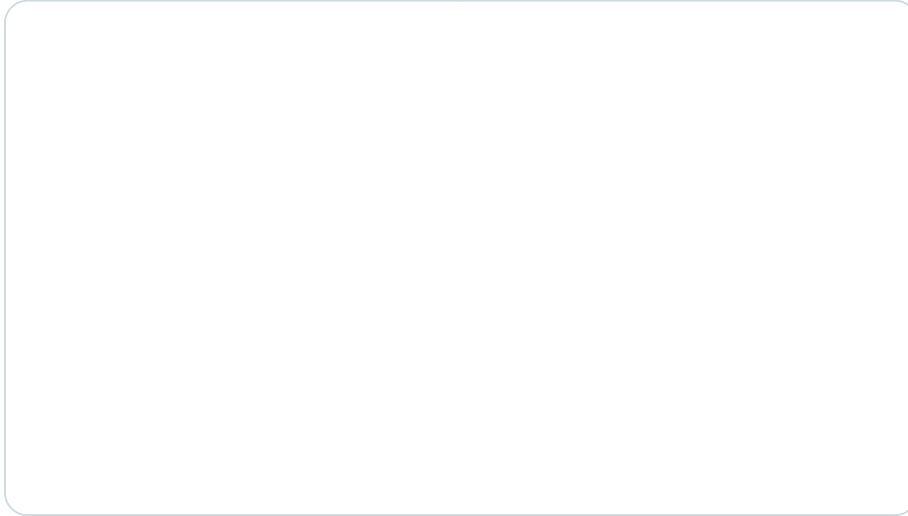
Laura · Nov 22, 2019



@Luluwhoo · [Follow](#)

Replying to @Luluwhoo

[@MHEducation](#)



McGraw Hill

@MHEducation · [Follow](#)

Thanks for sharing these with us. Please in-turn thank your students for writing these letters. Their letters are powerful and have been forwarded to our Academic Design team for our next update.

1:22 PM · Nov 26, 2019



6



Reply



Copy link

[Read 3 replies](#)

Ms. Wooley students learned more than facts for the upcoming social studies test—they also learned how to speak up and use their voices to advocate for change.

This post originally appered on Indy K12 as "[Teacher and Students Request McGraw-Hill Change Its Textbook](#)."

[Photo by Memedozaslan, Canva-licensed.](#)

Shawnta S. Barnes

Shawnta (Shawn-tay) S. Barnes, also known as Educator Barnes, is a married mother of identical twin boys. She navigates education from not only the educator's perspective but also the parent's perspective. She has been an educator for nearly two decades. Shawnta works with K-12 schools, universities, & education adjacent organizations through her education consulting business Blazing Brilliance. She is an adjunct college professor, supervises student teachers, Indy Kids Winning Editor-in-Chief, Brave Brothers Books Co-founder, & CEO, and Brazen Education Podcast host. She holds five education licenses: English/language arts 5-12, English to speakers of other languages P-12, library/media P-12, reading P-12, and school administration P-12, and she has held a job in every licensed area. Previously, she has served as a school administrator, English teacher, English learners teacher, literacy coach, and librarian. She won the 2019 Indiana Black Expo Excellence in Education Journalism Award. In 2023, she completed her doctorate in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education with a minor in Learning Sciences. She is an urban gardener in her spare time and writes about her harvest-to-table journey at [gardenershicole.com](https://www.gardenershicole.com). To learn more about Shawnta, visit [educatorbarnes.com](https://www.educatorbarnes.com).

[view profile](#)

Leave a Comment

First Name*

Last Name

Email*



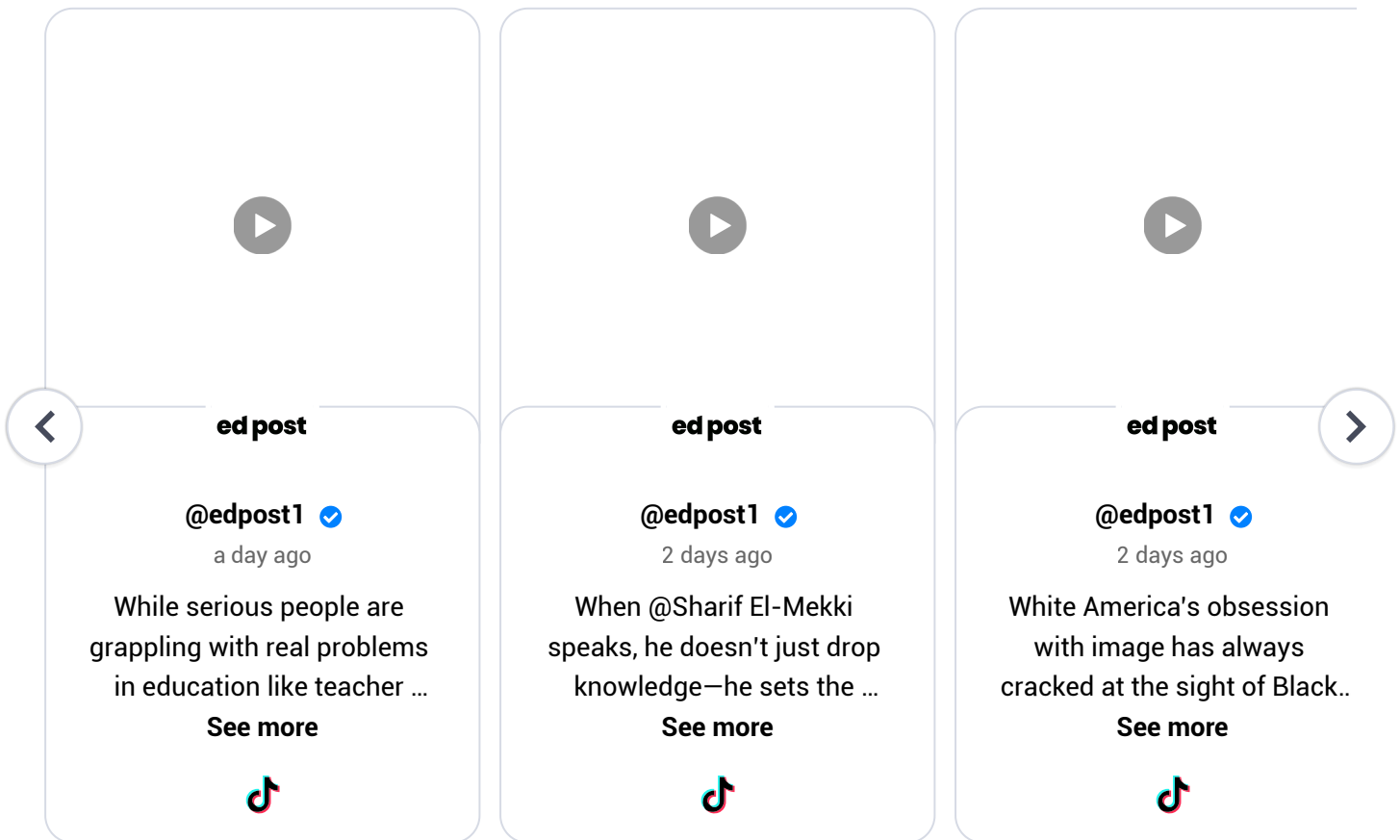
Comment*

protected by reCAPTCHA

[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)

Submit Comment

The Feed



Explainers

[all explainers >](#)

What's an IEP and How to Ensure Your Child's Needs Are Met?

[Ed Post Staff](#)



If you have a child with disabilities, you're not alone: According to the latest data, over 7 million American schoolchildren — 14% of all students ages 3-21 — are classified as eligible for special...

read more



Follow our social media and newsletter to take action.

Submit



ed post

Stories
Explainers
Podcasts

Videos
Take
Action
About

Privacy
Policy
Resources





Ed Post is the flagship website platform of brightbeam, a 501(c3) network of education activists and influencers demanding a better education and a brighter future for every child.

© 2020–2025 brightbeam. All rights reserved.