

STATEMENT ON CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING STACEY PATTON AFRICANA STUDIES LECTURE

In the opening of her soon-to-be published work, [“Spare the Kids: How Whupping Children Won’t Save Black America”](#) Dr. Stacey Patton cites the important words of W.E.B. DuBois, who pointed out that “In the treatment of the child the world foreshadows its own future and faith.” Dr. Patton’s talk on campus “How Killing Black Children is an American Tradition,” which occurred on February 28, 2017, was a reflection of Du Bois’s analysis and initiated some very engaging and thoughtful conversations on campus among students, faculty, and the community. Specifically, Dr. Patton’s talk dealt with America’s unsavory and violent history of the mistreatment of black children that emerged from chattel slavery and how that history has informed contemporary black patterns of physical punishment of their children. Her talk connected these dots to show audience members how the past informs and structures the present.

In [a recent Knoxville News Sentinel article](#) discussing why her unit removed funding from the event because of the title, Dr. Catherine Luther, director of the College of Journalism and Electronic Media, suggested that it is important to discuss the subject matter but without the idea of tying it to American history. We are troubled by this because to do so ignores the central thesis of the subject and the rigorous research that has been done by Dr. Patton to support it and also “whitewashes” essential information necessary to move toward change.

What we also find very troubling is that there is more controversy surrounding the title of Dr. Patton's talk than there is about the actual crisis of the death and normative degradation of Black children in America as well as the historical roots of the crisis. Racial disparities, discrimination, and violence against black children are facts of American life that have a historical basis about which we must continue to educate students and the public and strive to remove but which will not be erased by eliminating any aspects about actions by perpetrators—white, black, or otherwise--who contribute to sustaining those wrongs. Moreover, any of us who resist bringing all those facts to light necessarily become complicit in sustaining the status quo. Serious and dedicated scholars such as Stacey Patton, who have spent years of study on the topic, heighten critical awareness among other researchers, students, and families and kindle intellectual integrity that must be the basis for implementing change and for providing sustainable and effective advocacy for children’s rights.

Finally, we invite anyone who was unable to attend to [watch the lecture](#) and determine for themselves if the School of Journalism and Electronic Media, the College of Communication and Information and Child and Family Studies should have withdrawn their monetary support for this important event.

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