



Department Chair's Statement on Kneeling by the ETSU Men's Basketball Team February 26, 2021

As chair of the Department of Communication and Performance at ETSU and leader of its [vision, mission, values, and goals](#), and as a communication professor, I am compelled to respond to the recent dialogue among members of our campus community, surrounding communities, and Tennessee legislators about the ETSU Men's Basketball team's decision to respectfully kneel during the national anthem.

I don't know whether an athlete's uniform is a way to "carry the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of this region," as ETSU President Brian Noland [suggested](#), but, if it is, then we must consider whose hopes, dreams, and aspirations get to be carried and represented. People of color, who fight battles daily that are waged against them and who continue to persevere despite the systemic racism plaguing our country certainly are members of this region. White allies who work to dismantle racism and pursue antiracism are members of this region. Children who deserve to grow up in a country that stands on a foundation of human equity are members of this region. If the players represent the region, then they represent these people.

I regret that there are some who choose to see the reverence inherent in the act of kneeling as an attack of any kind, particularly on American values, including that of appreciating the contributions of women and men in the military. U.S. athletes of color have been kneeling for years in this way and have been absolutely clear about both their intentions and their high regard for those whose military sacrifice served the people of our country. We would do well to hear what these athletes have been repeatedly saying and to see the broader picture of what their act of kneeling has embodied, including the crucial American values of freedom of expression, equality of all people, and accountability for wrongdoing.

The ETSU Men's Basketball team participated in a small and peaceful demonstration that highlighted these values and that was designed to call attention to the continued racial inequities in the United States and its still-glaring problem of brutality against Black women and men by some officers of the law. As the players and the crowd honored their country while the national anthem played, the players humbly knelt to ask that, as we honor, we also remember. Remember that some among us still struggle to have their human spirit and dignity recognized. Remember that life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness are at risk in the context of racial inequalities and disparities. Remember that we still have work to do before we can faithfully say that all citizens in "the land of the free" are truly free.

I will remember, and I #kneelwiththeBucs.

Dr. Amber Kinser