

Selective release of autopsy findings continues whitewash of Sandra Bland killing

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24 July 2015

On Thursday, Waller County Prosecutor Warren Diepraam declared that an official autopsy found that the July 13 prison death of 28-year-old Sandra Bland death was a suicide.

Following a week in which Bland's unexplained death has been leading the daily news cycle in the US, Diepraam's claim that Bland committed suicide has been repeated uncritically by almost every mainstream news outlet in America. The selective release of the autopsy findings is part of a deliberate move to sweep the entire case under the rug and shift the focus away from the fact that the string of events that led to Bland's death were initiated by her unlawful arrest.

Bland was found hanged in her jail cell a mere three days after being beaten and wrongfully arrested during a routine traffic stop. Her friends and family have continually questioned the official account of her death, and assert that Bland would not have committed suicide, particularly as she had just accepted a new job at her alma mater, Prairie View A&M. They have also called for an independent autopsy.

Theresa Dear, a longtime friend of Bland's, criticized officials for selectively releasing "crumbs and morsels," without revealing the full story. She told a local news station KTLA, "We, as a family and a community who love Sandra Bland, do not accept...this narrative that the Texas authorities are putting in the media that she had suicidal tendencies."

Diepraam made clear that the release of details from the autopsy report was aimed at quelling any suspicion of the possibility that police murdered Bland. "We feel compelled to release [this information] because of specific allegations from some individuals about the circumstances that occurred in the Waller County jail and/or on the streets of Prairie View, Texas," he declared.

Diepraam said that because the mark around Bland's neck was uniform and consistent, and there was no observable damage to her trachea and esophagus, that she did not experience a violent struggle at the time of her death.

He further asserted that there were "no defensive injuries" on Bland's hands, and that lacerations found on her wrists were incurred while being handcuffed by officers.

The most significant finding of the autopsy as reported, however, was that Bland was found to have scabs on her back and on the right side of her shoulder blade, consistent with being forced down on the ground during her arrest. Bland's sister, Sharon Cooper, said that there was "Deep tissue bruising to her back which is consistent with the officer having his knee in her back."

At the very least, the autopsy report confirms Bland's audible statements during her arrest that officer Brian Encinia severely brutalized her and slammed her into the ground.

Despite the attempts to bury the story and exonerate the police, her death remains unexplained, and the official story is full of holes and contradictions.

Emerging from a dubious, closed door meeting on Wednesday between dozens of leading figures in the Texas political establishment and the Texas Rangers/FBI team investigating Bland's death, authorities released two suicide-risk assessment forms allegedly completed during Bland's processing into prison. The forms contradict each other in critical ways.

The first form, reportedly completed at 5:32 p.m., claims that Bland stated that she tried to commit suicide in 2014 by taking pills, due to a "lost baby." On this form, she also allegedly checked a box indicating that she had felt "very depressed" at some point in her life,

and another asking if she had felt like committing suicide in the past year.

On a second form, completed a mere three hours later, Bland reportedly answered “no” to the same questions regarding depression and thoughts of suicide. The lawyer for Bland’s family, Cannon Lambert, declared, “We take issue with the notion that she was suffering from depression. She was not clinically diagnosed that this family understands.”

Two crucial pieces of the investigation, the video footage showing Bland’s arrest and the prison surveillance footage, are shrouded in mystery and strongly suggest a police cover-up. The former contains numerous gaps and glitches, including cars vanishing and looping sequences, while the latter includes a lengthy gap spanning the hour leading up to Bland’s death, which police attribute to the motion sensors shutting down the camera in the absence of foot traffic.

No credence can be given to the official narrative put forth by the local authorities regarding Bland’s death.

Bland was an outspoken political activist, in particular concerning police violence. Over the past year, she became involved with the protests against police killings that took place across the US, and posted about them frequently on her Facebook page.

At a prayer vigil held in Texas Tuesday night, Bland’s mother, Geneva Reed-Veal, recalled a recent conversation with her daughter: “She said ‘Mom, now I know what my purpose is. My purpose is to go back to Texas, my purpose is to stop all social injustice.’”



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