

# Hundreds attend funeral of Sandra Bland

**Evan Blake**  
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On Saturday, hundreds of family members, friends and supporters attended the funeral of Sandra Bland, a 28-year-old African American woman found hanged in a Waller County, Texas jail cell on July 13, three days after being arrested during a traffic stop. The funeral was held at her lifelong church, DuPage African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Lisle, Ill., outside Chicago.

The official investigation into Bland's death, being carried out by local authorities in collaboration with the FBI, has sought to whitewash police involvement in her death.

Last Thursday, Waller County Prosecutor Warren Diepraam declared that an official autopsy found unequivocally that Bland's death was a suicide. His presentation has been reported uncritically as fact by almost every mainstream news outlet in America, in an effort to sweep the entire case under the rug.

At Bland's funeral, her family upheld her character, while maintaining that she would never harm herself. The last speaker was Bland's mother, Geneva Reed-Veal, who emphatically declared, "That baby did not take herself out of here."

Placing no confidence in the official investigation, Reed-Veal insisted, "I'm going to find out what happened to my baby. My baby has spoken. She's still speaking and no, she didn't kill herself." Her remarks brought those in attendance to their feet.

Reed-Veal spoke of a recent road trip she had taken with her daughter, during which Bland told her that she had found her life's calling, which she intended to pursue in Texas. "Her purpose was to stop all injustice against blacks in the South," Reed-Veal told mourners at the funeral.

Immediately prior to Bland's death, she had been accepted for a position at her alma mater, Prairie View A&M University, an historically black school in Prairie View, Texas. She was just getting settled in her new

home, and was set to begin work in August before her encounter with the police.

While driving through Prairie View, Bland was pulled over, supposedly for failing to signal before changing lanes. Dash cam footage of the traffic stop, released last week by the Texas Department of Public Safety, shows Bland being verbally harassed, threatened and physically assaulted by state trooper Brian Encinia, who pointed his Taser at her and screamed "I will light you up!" before arresting her.

Speaking to reporters outside the church on Saturday, Rev. Theresa Dear, who had known Bland since she first began attending DuPage as a child, highlighted the fact that she was arrested because she asserted her democratic rights in the face of police intimidation, saying, "She challenged and asked the question why, 'Why should I put out the cigarette?' She asked 12 times, 'Why am I being arrested?'"

Bland's subsequent death while in jail is shrouded in mystery, with numerous indices pointing to a cover-up. Investigators have released dubious information piecemeal, creating a highly contradictory official story.

Last Wednesday, following a closed door meeting between state politicians and members of the team investigating Bland's death, authorities released two conflicting suicide-risk assessment forms allegedly completed during Bland's processing into jail.

The first form claims that Bland stated that she tried to commit suicide in 2014 by taking pills, due to a "lost baby," and that she had felt depressed and considered committing suicide in the past year. The second form, however, indicates that Bland answered "no" to the same questions regarding depression and thoughts of suicide.

At Bland's funeral, friends and family reiterated that she was a smart, assertive woman, and well known as having "healthy self-esteem," according to Dear.

Dear articulated the view shared by millions, saying, “When you are about to start a new job, when you know your family is about to bring the money for your release, when you are an activist and a fighter, you don’t take your own life.”

Last weekend, members of DuPage A.M.E. held a march to honor Bland’s memory, while calling for a more thorough investigation into her death. Solidarity protests have also taken place in cities across the US, including in New York City (where at least a dozen were arrested), Los Angeles, Newark, Philadelphia and Austin. There have also been consistent demonstrations outside the Waller County Jail where Bland was held.

At Bland’s funeral, Senator Richard J. Durbin and Representative Bill Foster, both Democrats of Illinois, declared that they had each sent letters to Attorney General Loretta Lynch, urging her to investigate Bland’s death.

In fact, the Obama administration has done everything in its power to shield killer cops from prosecution. The White House has not brought federal civil rights charges against officers in any of the high-profile police murders in recent months, including the killing of Freddie Grey, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and Tamir Rice. The administration has taken the side of the police every time a police violence case has come before the Supreme Court.

On March 4, the Justice Department upheld the initial investigation and exonerated killer cop Darren Wilson in last year’s killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. In coming to this conclusion, they discounted the nearly two dozen witnesses who claimed that Brown had his hands up when he was killed, while giving credibility to those who corroborated Wilson’s testimony.

Since the start of the year, at least 657 people have been killed by police in the US, according to a list compiled by the *Guardian* newspaper.



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