

Baltimore: More videos released showing police officers “manufacturing evidence”

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Earlier this month, the Baltimore public defender’s office released footage showing several Baltimore police officers appearing to collude while planting drugs at a traffic stop.

The new video was taken during a traffic stop last November and made public early this month. Shamere Collins, 35, was pulled over after a police officer allegedly witnessed her passenger conduct a drug deal. In the video, several officers are shown to be searching the front driver’s side of Collins’ car, then the camera goes off, then on again, without explanation.

In the next video clip, an officer asks if the driver’s side area has been searched, only then to find a bag of marijuana and heroin in the area that had been searched thoroughly in the previous clip.

Collins’ attorney, Josh Insley, released the footage stating it showed officers engaging “in what appears to be the staged recovery of narcotics.” In an interview with NBC, Collins admitted to recreational marijuana use but was dumbfounded when police pulled heroin from her car. “My mind—I went numb-like—I didn’t know what was going on,” she said. “They [were] telling me I was facing time and all this ... so it’s like I felt numb. I didn’t know what to do.”

The footage came just a week after a previous video, again released by the public defender’s office, showed an officer planting a bag of pills under a pile of garbage in an alley as two other officers looked on. The officer planting the drugs in the first video has been suspended while the other two are on administrative leave. As a result, 41 drug and gun cases that relied on the officers’ testimony were dropped.

In both videos, officers are unaware that their body-cams are set to record a continuous 30-second loop to capture the moments before an officer chooses to begin recording. In the first video, the first 30 seconds show

an officer plant pills in an empty can only to “find” it later in the clip. In the second video, the officers wait for 30 seconds, then, as if on cue, begin speaking and searching.

Baltimore Police Commissioner Kevin Davis issued a memo that stated officers should not attempt to “recreate the recovery of evidence.” In response, the public defender’s office released a statement saying the footage clearly shows “multiple officers working together to manufacture evidence.”

Baltimore, just an hour’s drive from the US capital, has seen a sharp surge of police corruption and brutality in recent years. In 2015, Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old black man, was abducted by police and taken for a “rough ride” in the back of a police van, causing a spinal injury that led to his death. The brutal killing set off protests against police violence throughout Baltimore, leading public officials to call a state of emergency and imposing martial law in the city.

Democratic Party officials, fearful that popular anger would break out of their control, sought to direct protests behind the state’s efforts to prosecute the six police officers involved in Gray’s death. The state failed to obtain a guilty verdict for a single officer.

Last year, the Obama Department of Justice carried out an investigation of the Baltimore Police Department that found “there is reasonable cause to believe that BPD engages in a pattern or practice of conduct that violates the Constitution or federal law.” In March of this year, seven officers were indicted on charges of racketeering. The *Baltimore Sun* reported they “are accused of shaking down citizens, filing false court paperwork and making fraudulent overtime claims.”



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