

Cell phone video from Sandra Bland's 2015 traffic stop made public

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Cellphone video footage from Sandra Bland's 2015 traffic stop was made public this week, showing from her point of view the incident that led to her arrest and death in a jail cell. The video renews attention to her death in police custody and raises questions over the way it has been withheld for nearly four years.

Local police released their dash-cam video after Bland's death, but the cellphone video was never released to the public. The Texas Department of Public Safety claimed that the video was available to investigators and lawyers involved in the Bland case and that it was referenced during the investigative report. The video was only released to a reporter for WFAA, a Texas television station, in response to a public records request.

Since the release of the video, Bland's family has called for the case to be reopened and claimed that the footage was purposely withheld during a civil trial. Contrary to claims by Texas officials, Cannon Lambert, a lawyer who represents the Bland family, said in an interview with WFAA that he had not seen the video until it was made public earlier this week. He said that the withholding of the video confirms the Bland family's claims that the prosecutor did not ensure a fair case.

The 39-second video documents the encounter with State Trooper Brian Encinia from the front seat of Bland's car, showing the policeman, far from being fearful for his life as he claimed, points a taser at Bland and threatens "I will light you up!"

For the remainder of the video, Bland calmly asks why she is being apprehended, but still complies with Encinia's demands, while he shouts in anger at her, undercutting the claim in the arrest warrant that she was "combative and uncooperative."

In fact, Encinia claimed that his "safety was in

jeopardy at more than one time" in interviews with Department of Public Safety officials, a claim directly contradicted by the newly released footage, which shows a furious Encinia opening Bland's car door and drawing his weapon to point it at her. "That video shows that [Encinia] is not in fear of his safety and that she is not reaching for anything," Lambert said in an interview with WFAA. "[Her cell phone] is already in her hand and she is recording him."

Bland was arrested in July 2015 by Encinia during a traffic stop over a failure to use a turn signal for a lane change, where she was on her way to start a new job at Prairie View A&M University in Texas. She was apparently arrested because she questioned why the policeman had stopped her. Bland was found dead in her cell three days later and her death was officially ruled a suicide, although the details remain unclear.

The new footage adds to the evidence of the already released dash-cam footage and a bystander's cellphone video, which show Encinia removing Bland from her vehicle and directing her out of range of his dash-cam to begin brutally attacking her, slamming her to the ground.

Bland was a vocal opponent of police violence and may have participated in protests. It is likely that after Encinia checked Bland's license, he learned of her political activity and decided to arrest her. In fact, in the dash-cam footage, Encinia does begin to take a more aggressive tone after checking her license.

No one was convicted of any crime relating to Bland's death. Instead, Encinia was charged with perjury for lying about his reason for removing her from her vehicle. In September 2016, Bland's family reached a \$1.9-million settlement in a wrongful death lawsuit against Waller County. The following year, the perjury charges against Encinia were dropped, although

he lost his job.

Lambert criticized the prosecutors' decision not to pursue charges against Encinia for perjury. In an interview with the *New York Times*, he said, "so if the video showed that he had no basis of being in fear of his safety, and he lied about that, then you would think they would be using that video."

The entire case of Sandra Bland gives a picture of the real, everyday functioning of police repression in the United States. The arrest, subsequent death, and cover-up by police and government officials allows the police to continue without hesitation in their work of defending capitalist wealth and property and terrorizing the working class.



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