

4 years after mysterious death, Sandra Bland's cell phone provides answers

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Texas State Trooper
Brian Encinia
thrusts taser at
Sandra Bland while
screaming "I'm

going to light you
up.”

Sandra Bland was arrested in Prairie View, Texas, in July 2015. She was driving on a rural road traveling to a new job at her alma mater, Prairie View A&M, a historical Black university after a holiday visit with her family in Naperville, Ill.

State Trooper Brian Encinia pulled Bland over because he claimed she had failed to put on her turn signal while changing lanes to let his vehicle pass. The blurry police car dash-cam recorded a terrifying confrontation where Bland ended up face down on the ground with Encinia’s knee in her back. Ms. Bland was booked and placed in the one-story Waller County Jail, where three days later she was found hanged in her cell.

The scenes from the dash-cam video, which became viral, along with the questionable jailhouse report of her “self-inflicted” death, created a storm of international outrage. In the subsequent investigation and hearing the only evidence was the dash-cam and a video shot by a bystander.

Sandra Bland recorded assault on her cell phone

Four years later, on May 6, 2019, the [Dallas television station WFAA broadcast for the first time a 39-second video that Sandra Bland made with her cellphone from inside her car](#). Bland had recorded the behavior of the state trooper who pulled her over.

The video begins as Texas State Trooper Brian Encinia orders Bland to put out her cigarette.

[BRIAN ENCINIA: Get out of the car now.](#)

SANDRA BLAND: Why am I being apprehended? You’re trying to give me a ticket for

failure to signal?

ENCINIA: I said get out of the car.

BLAND: Why am I being apprehended? You just opened my car door.

[The cell phone video shows Trooper Encinia pulling his Taser from his holster and thrusting it in Bland's face.]

ENCINIA: I am going to drag you outta here.

BLAND: So you're going ... You're threatening to drag me out of my own car?

ENCINIA: Get out of the car!

BLAND: And then you gonna stun me?

ENCINIA: I will light you up! Get out!

BLAND: Wow. Wow.

ENCINIA: ... Now.

BLAND: Wow.

ENCINIA: Get out of the car.

[The new account given by Bland's cell phone video reveals the face of this towering and armed rage in uniform, screaming with the vitriol of centuries of racist and sexist hatred. Now, everyone can see what Bland saw. She didn't cower or lose self-control. In fact, she demanded to know on what grounds she was being arrested. Not having a reason, Encinia refused to tell her.]

BLAND: Yeah, let's take this to court. Let's do it ... for failure to signal ... Yep. For a

failure to signal ...

ENCINIA: Get off the phone.

BLAND: I'm not on the phone. I have a right to record.

ENCINIA: Put your phone down.

BLAND: This is my property. This is my property.

ENCINIA: Put your phone down.

BLAND: Sir.

ENCINIA: Put your phone down. Right now!

The cell phone video provides Bland's first-person account, giving substance to the data missing from the trooper's dash-cam recording that was released soon after Bland's death.

The only criminal charge filed after Bland's death was one of perjury against Encinia. He was accused of falsifying his police report about what happened during the traffic stop. The new footage can be contrasted, yet again, with the description of the arrest he detailed in his official report.

After Bland's death, Brian Encinia had defended himself by saying, "My safety was in jeopardy at more than one time."

Because the dash-cam in his car proved this to be untrue, he was charged with perjury. In 2017, that charge was dropped and he signed an agreement saying that he would never work in Texas law enforcement again.

These agreements don't hold much weight. Waller County Sheriff Glenn Smith,

whose department oversees the jail (and oversaw the subsequent investigation into Bland's death), had [previously been fired](#) from his job as the chief of police in Hempstead, the city in which the jail is located, over [allegations of police misconduct](#), including [racism](#).

In the U.S., where Black people face criminalization, racial profiling and violence at the hands of the law, [police officers rarely face](#) criminal charges or jail time for murder. Racism in the U.S. is so endemic that all a police officer has to do to justify killing a Black person is to claim she or he acted in self defense. "The legal standard for police to justifiably use deadly force varies from state to state, but is basically whether [a "reasonable" officer](#) would do the same in that same situation, [rather than whether the victim actually posed a real threat](#)." (CNN May11, David Love)

The defense of racist slaughter comes up again and again. "Tulsa Officer Betty Jo Shelby, who is white, was acquitted of manslaughter after she fatally shot Terence Crutcher, an unarmed black man. During the trial, she told the court she fired her weapon because she [feared for her life](#). Now, Shelby is teaching [an NRA firearms course](#).

Similarly, the officers who killed Philando Castile and Michael Brown claimed they feared for their lives — and avoided punishment. Officer Jeronimo Yanez was found [not guilty](#) of second-degree manslaughter and intentional discharge of a firearm that endangers safety in Castile's death. In Brown's case, a grand jury [declined to indict](#) Officer Darren Wilson.

There is an endless list of cases.

Sandra Bland had fought back against police brutality. A couple of months before her death, she made a video where she talked about the Black Lives Matter movement saying, "In the news that we've seen as of late, you could stand there, surrender to the cops, and still be killed."

How the cell phone video surfaced

Bland's family is calling for authorities to reopen the investigation into her death. Her mother, Geneva Reed-Veal, doesn't believe that Bland would have ever taken her own life. "Once I put this baby in the ground, I'm ready. This means war." Reed-Veal spoke at Bland's memorial service pledging to fight for justice.

According to Houston Public Media, it was when the WFAA reporter Brian Collister realized the family had not seen the cell phone recording that he decided to make it public. ([NPR May 7](#)) Bland's family believes the video was intentionally not made public. They see the disclosure made by cellphone video as an opportunity to reopen the case.

Sandra Bland's unsolved death has been a rallying cry of the movement against police brutality. In response, the news media scrutinized every detail of her private life in an effort to create a defense for the trooper who attacked her. A familiar racist deluge attempted make a fact out of the lie that she was instrumental in her own destruction.

The racism and sexism exposed in her case begins early in the lives of African-American women. A National Women's Law Center report documents that Black girls, for example, are [5.5 times more likely to be suspended](#) from school than their white counterparts.

Parents protested in January at a school in Binghamton, N.Y., where four 12-year-old girls, two Black and two Latina, said they were told to strip down to their undergarments because they were acting "giddy." One of the girls was served with an in-school suspension because she refused to strip. Another was given a drug test. The school district claims it wasn't a strip search, but rather "a medical assessment."

The racist and sexist stereotypes assumed by school authorities such as these are an attempt to criminalize African-American students. This bias in turn leads to rampant sexual abuse and not infrequently it leads to the murder of people of color. Public institutions such as schools and law enforcers aren't worried about suffering serious consequences because the history of racist abuse leads them to believe Black girls are without protection.

This grave misconception must be changed. In her final struggle, Sandra Bland has rearmed us. All who have heard her brave and righteous voice can make the change: Fight racism and sexism in the name of Sandra Bland.

