



## ***Say Her Name: The Life and Death of Sandra Bland***

### **Film Study Guide**

**Director:** Kate Davis & David Heilbroner

**2018 | Documentary | 103 Minutes | English**

<https://www.hbo.com/documentaries/say-her-name-the-life-and-death-of-sandra-bland>

**Synopsis:** In 2015, Sandra Bland, a politically active black woman from Chicago, was arrested for a traffic violation in a small Texas town. Three days later, Sandra was found hanging from a noose in a jail cell. Combining Bland’s video blogs with extraordinary access to her family’s testimony and their legal team, *Say Her Name* is both an engrossing murder mystery and a disturbing account of systemic racism and neglect.

**Director’s Statement:** Within days after Sandra Bland was found hanging in her jail cell on July 13, 2015, a sense was setting in among those closest to her that Sandra’s supposed “suicide” might actually be something far worse.

Protesters called out a southern-style lynching, and the media descended on Waller County Texas and Sandra’s family in Chicago. In the midst of this overnight national attention, the family’s lead attorney, Cannon Lambert, fielded our phone call, asking if we could film their battle to learn the truth about Sandra’s death. We jumped on a plane for Chicago and began a two-year journey leading to *Say Her Name: The Life and Death of Sandra Bland*.

Reality is rarely simple, and David’s background as a Manhattan prosecutor also helped us gain access to the Waller County authorities, who felt stigmatized by a growing chorus of anti-white racism and

insisted Sandra's death was a suicide, despite a large number of extremely mysterious and suspicious events -- from police brutality to outright fraud.

The filmmaking took us to some dark places – from a morgue where Sandra's second autopsy was performed, to the Texas jail cell where she spent her final three days. But there were also pockets of joy. Some 30 "Sandra Speaks" video blogs (which Sandra filmed herself) allowed us to get to know Sandra Bland in what felt like a first-hand manner. She speaks as an empowered, enlightened woman of color whose sharp, humorous, charismatic remarks address subjects such as educating kids about black history, the importance of natural hair, police brutality, and how she felt both black and white people need to listen to one another. And so, Sandra herself emerged as the film's central voice, speaking eerily from beyond the grave to help put her own life and death in the context of America today.

### **Post-Screening Discussion Questions**

1. How did the recording of Sandra Bland's arrest change her case and the story of her death? How might have things gone differently if no one had recorded it?
2. How do you feel the internet and public access to information have aided in the Black Lives Matter movement and protests responding to deaths like Sandra Bland's?
3. The Chief Deputy and the Waller County Judge say they wanted the process of Sandra Bland's investigation to be open and transparent. Do you think it was? Why or why not?
4. How do you feel press involvement and coverage affected the case of Sandra Bland?
5. The independent autopsy showed that the amount of THC in Sandra Bland was minimal and had already been metabolized. Why do you think the police stressed marijuana use in their public statements?
6. One newscaster says that "black people have a right to assert their dignity in public," referring to Sandra refusing to put out her cigarette when the Trooper tells her to. How was Sandra's dignity taken from her after this point? By the police? By the media? By others?
7. Near the end of the film Sandra's mother, Geneva Reed-Veal, says she needs to "go from what happened to what happens now." How does she do this?