

The Center for Appellate Litigation would like to acknowledge the recent death of Jordan Neely and honor his life and humanity.

When Jordan's mother was murdered by her boyfriend and dropped off in a suitcase to rot in the Bronx, he was a teenager. Rather than receive the resources he needed to navigate the trauma and subsequent homelessness, he received what many New Yorkers, including our clients, received – nothing.

Through trauma and an unstable environment as a young man, Jordan spent time in Times Square and on the New York Subway as a Michael Jackson impersonator. He was a dancer who performed for tourists and subway riders.

Jordan was killed by a chokehold on that same subway.

Jordan was homeless and struggled with mental illness like many others in New York. When poverty and his mental health left Jordan hopeless and without a home, there was no support. It comes as no surprise that some of Jordan's last words amid a mental health crisis were, "I don't care if I go to jail. I don't have any food." Jordan needed help, not violence – he was calling for help when he was killed.

Jordan's help never came.

Jordan Neely's death directly results from efforts to dehumanize and demonize New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, living with mental illness, or just existing in the world as Black and poor.

This mindset led law enforcement to quickly disclose Jordan Neely's medical history and criminal record – which appeared to stem from mental health and homelessness – all while protecting the identity of his killer. There is a direct correlation between dehumanizing Black homeless people living with mental illness and the kind of vigilantism that took Jordan Neely's life.

The man who killed Jordan Neely was released without criminal charges and spent the night in the comfort of his home as Jordan's body went to the morgue.

We must continue to fight to reform and undo the inequities of our system. We cannot continue living in a country where a man can be choked on video without provocation, weapon, or threat, and his killer is promptly released without any criminal charges.

The lives of Black New Yorkers are not valued equally by the criminal legal system or the many systems that purport to help our society.

The killing of Jordan Neely brings attention to the punitive carceral system that has injured and continues to injure so many. The callousness with which Jordan Neely was treated and the aftermath of his killing only highlight this duality.

The system is disproportionately failing Black Americans and perpetuating disparities instead of erasing them.

The Manhattan District Attorney's Office acted slowly in bringing any charges regarding Jordan's case, and it requires minimal speculation to consider whether our clients—overwhelmingly people of color—would have received the same consideration.

The system is broken.

Rest in Power, Jordan Neely.

There is more work to do.