

World Insights: NYC deadly subway chokehold exposes long-buried social scars



People take part in a protest over chokehold death of a black man in New York, the United States, May 6, 2023. (Photo by Michael Nagle/Xinhua)

A 24-year-old white veteran of the Marine Corps named Daniel Penny choked black man Jordan Neely to death on a New York City subway train. Penny wasn't charged, resulting in protests to demand justice for the victim.

by Xinhua writer Xia Lin

NEW YORK, May 7 (Xinhua) -- On May 1, a 24-year-old white veteran of the Marine Corps named Daniel Penny choked black man Jordan Neely to death on a New York City subway train. Penny wasn't charged, resulting in protests to demand justice for the victim. Political voices have surfaced, calling for more protections for those socially sidelined. Neely's brutal death has become a wedge dividing the city, even the country, along long-simmering fault lines between people of different races and political views.

Meanwhile, the debate over tackling the most vulnerable is also taking place across the nation where people in dire need are often in plain sight on park benches and subway trains.

INADEQUATE PROTECTIONS

Before Neely was killed, he was known for his swift, entertaining Michael Jackson dance moves -- yet he struggled with the trauma his mother's murder had left him with at an early age.



People take part in a protest over chokehold death of a black man in New York, the United States, May 6, 2023. (Photo by Michael Nagle/Xinhua)

"He told me about how much his mother's passing impacted him. He disclosed that she was murdered, and her body was put in a suitcase," Moses Harper, an artist who knew Neely, was quoted by CNN as saying.

Calling for Penny's arrest, media and citizens referred to Neely's death as "an unnecessary tragedy that underscores the city's inadequate policies toward its most vulnerable and marginalized residents."

Some New Yorkers have also said that Penny's actions reflect the frustration and fear many riders have about the transit system, even as

the rate for major felony crimes on the subway has fallen, according to the report.

Lennon Edwards, a lawyer for Neely's family, said in an interview on Friday that Neely's death was unacceptable. "He was robbed of his life in a brutal way by someone who decided that they were judge, jury, and executioner on the spot," he said. "We can't have vigilantes, and we can't have people taking the law into their own hands."

ALREADY SOCIALLY DEAD

For some New Yorkers, Neely was dead even before Penny allegedly choked the life out of him on the floor of a subway train, the New York Magazine reported on Saturday. "Modern America, including New York, designates some categories of people as socially dead -- part of an underclass that is subject to exclusion, indifference, or even outright hatred and violence."



Police officers clash with protesters during a protest over chokehold death of a black man in New York, the United States, May 6, 2023.

(Photo by Michael Nagle/Xinhua)

"To be Black, destitute, homeless, and mentally ill in our city is to be one of those outsiders, existing in a kind of internal

exile from society's circle of care and concern," it noted.

"I don't have food, I don't have a drink, I'm fed up," Neely screamed in the final minutes of his life, according to Juan Alberto Vazquez, a freelance journalist on the train who recorded the incident. "I don't mind going to jail and getting life in prison. I'm ready to die."

"The doomed man's words were sadly accurate about the choices he believed New York offered: prison or death," said the magazine, adding that the city's web of social organizations is ludicrously underfunded and badly lacking in quantity and coordination. "When the political dust settles, we should demand a full accounting from all of these officials," it added. ■
