After yearlong fight
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During his lunch breaks, Elijah McClain sometimes played the violin for animals at the local shelter. He thought they, too, deserved some music in their lives. He was not like other 23-year-olds. He craved space to be himself, and when officers of the Aurora, Colo., police department approached him on the evening of Aug. 24, 2019, that is what Elijah McClain tried to tell them.

“I am an introvert, ” he explained to the officers who responded to a 911 call about a Black male walking down the street in a ski mask on a night when the temperature was about 66 degrees Fahrenheit. “Please respect my boundaries. ”

Fifteen minutes later, McClain was on the cusp of death, having been choked by one of the original responding officers and then injected with the powerful anesthetic drug ketamine by a medic who arrived on the scene later. “I don’t even kill flies, ” McClain said at one point as the officers continued to restrain him. It was a cry for help, an explanation of who he was. It went unheeded, not only by the three officers who first responded to the 911 call but by the many others who arrived later, and who chatted casually as McClain struggled for his final breaths.

“Aurora, Colo., is corrupt, ” says Mari Newman, a Denver attorney who is representing McClain’s family. “Aurora, Colo., is trying to cover up its wrongdoing. ”

Only now, nearly a year after his death, is the case of Elijah McClain finally receiving the national attention his family has been seeking. That attention comes largely because 2020 has seen a number of Black men and women killed by police officers or vigilantes: Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd. The outrage over those killings has intensified outrage over killings past. And it has made Elijah McClain the latest symbol of what many Americans see as a law enforcement culture informed by racial animosities.

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