

Through the riots, see the pain, and learn from the lessons of Ferguson

Joint statement from Alderwoman Milele A. Coggs, Alderman Ashanti Hamilton and Alderman Russell W. Stamper, II

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Our hearts go out to the Brown family and to the people of Ferguson. Last night's announcement of the grand jury's choice not to charge Darren Wilson, a Ferguson police officer, with the death of Mike Brown was a major blow to our hope for justice, and to the similar hopes of millions of Americans. Although the verdict may not have been what many wanted, there is much to be learned from the lesson of Ferguson, and as we watch the unrest, we should also see the hurt and pain.

We know there is hurt and pain because we have learned of the witnesses' accounts who say Mike Brown was mere feet away from Officer Wilson, facing the officer with his hands raised in the air and imploring, "Don't shoot, I'm unarmed." In Milwaukee we have seen the pain and the hurt in the faces of the family of Dontre Hamilton, the 31-year-old Milwaukee native and resident shot and killed by former Milwaukee Officer Christopher Manney earlier this year in Red Arrow Park. To date there is no decision from the District Attorney in the Dontre Hamilton case, and it's been nearly seven months since Dontre's death.

Watching what is happening in Ferguson, we hope that we are collectively taking notes here in Milwaukee. It has been especially striking to see how much preparation has gone into readying for the verdict in Ferguson and how little has gone into helping the community to heal.

Transparency of process and systemic change are essential in Milwaukee. Throughout any process or investigation all affected parties have to feel heard and that their concerns are being addressed. Long-term, systemic changes are needed, including new laws and better police training, in the hopes of preventing additional incidents like Milwaukee's Dontre Hamilton case.

We believe we need to spend more time thinking about how we can heal in Milwaukee and how we can effectuate meaningful, systematic, systemic change in the wake of the Hamilton case. Ferguson received a grand jury verdict in less than four months; our community has been waiting for a decision for nearly seven months. We hope the District Attorney comes out with the findings in the Hamilton case soon so that Dontre's family can begin healing.