

Thoughts on the Goodson verdict



A small group of demonstrators stands outside the Clarence M. Mitchell Courthouse June 23 as the Goodson verdict is announced. (Wendy Stewart)

I almost forgot about the important verdict that was expected today from Circuit Judge Barry Williams in the trial of Officer Caesar Goodson, the police officer prosecutors said gave Freddie Gray Jr. a “rough ride” in a police van that resulted in fatal injuries.

I had no plans to be at the courthouse. I planned to catch up with the verdict via local news and online media just like everyone else.

But that’s not what happened.

Instead, while dropping my sister and her new baby off at the doctor’s office, I found my way back to the Clarence M. Mitchell Courthouse. I already knew there were a few protestors there and tons of media. Because I study mass communication and want to be a photojournalist, I almost felt a duty to cover the verdict – at least for the sake of my own professional career.

There will be plenty of opinions on the judge’s decision to find Goodson not guilty on all charges. There will also be plenty of discussion about what might happen with the remaining officers who have yet to stand trial.

This post is not about any of those things.

I was taken aback by the small group of protestors. Though small in number (there were more members of the media than protestors), they were united in voice and purpose. This group already formed the opinion of corrupt officers whom they believe to be killer cops and belong in jail. Protestor Julie McGregor told me of how she witnessed bullying and harassment by police officers and wanted to see change. I want to see change as well, but we cannot hang our hopes on evidence which does not exist.

For real change to begin, we must start with our own communities and foster positive relations with law enforcement. When we stop viewing them as the enemy, we can move forward toward a positive, working relationship.

Some of you may remember my posts from last year’s riots (“I cried for my neighbors” and “What do we do now?”) where I described the unrest and helplessness I felt at the time. I also explored five ways in which things could get

better. I wish I could say for sure they have.

The bar on the corner in Baltimore where I live was bought by new owners and they are working on reopening, while most businesses from Penn-North down to Smallwood Street appear to have gone back to normal.

We know nothing can go back to the way it was.

Mondawmin Mall has better security measures, shop owners have adjusted their hours, and criminals are still being criminals. What I don't want to see is a repeat of last year. I don't want to see people homeless and out on the streets because a few people took the opportunity to create violence and mayhem. I don't want my week-old nephew to be disturbed by misplaced anger and frustration turned into violence.

I want to believe, for today, I am safe - safe from riots, disturbances and mischief.