

Media Bury Police Officer's Race in Charlotte Shooting

[Violence erupted](#) in the streets of Charlotte Tuesday and Wednesday following the police shooting of Keith L. Scott, a 43-year-old black man.

The facts of the shooting remain murky. Police say Scott was shot after he exited his vehicle brandishing a gun. A lawyer for Scott's family, however, [said that the shooting victim](#) "did not aggressively approach" police and "Mr. Scott's hands were by his side, and he was slowly walking backwards."

Because of the conflicting accounts, it's too early to determine whether or not the police shooting was justified. But it's worth noting that some media outlets are burying a key fact that could mitigate some of the outrage that seethed in the wake of Scott's death: the officer who shot him (depicted above) is also black.

Readers of the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* might have missed this fact. [Via Howard Kurtz](#):

The riot in Charlotte, and the fatal shooting of Keith Scott that sparked the violence, was the lead story in yesterday's New York Times. But a crucial fact was buried.

Not until the 30th paragraph were readers told that "Brentley Vinson, the officer who the police say shot Mr. Scott, is black, as is the police chief."

The Washington Post took a similar approach with its lead story, waiting until the 31st paragraph to report that

“authorities said the officer who shot Scott is black.”

Journalists are taught, as Kurtz points, not to gratuitously inject race into news pieces. But few would argue that the officer’s race is not a pertinent fact in this case. It’s also worth noting that the publications did not bury the race of shooters in past high-profile shootings of black males when the shooters were white.

[Here](#) is how the *Times* opened its initial story on the shooting death of Trayvon Martin in March 2012:

*MIAMI – Nearly three weeks after an unarmed teenager was killed in a small city north of Orlando, stirring an outcry, a few indisputable facts remain: the teenager, who was black, was carrying nothing but a bag of Skittles, some money and a can of iced tea when he was shot. The neighborhood crime watch volunteer who got out of his car and shot **him is white and Hispanic.***



The shooter’s race in this news article was inserted in the very first graph. And [here](#) is how they reported the shooting death of Michael Brown, where the officer’s race is mentioned in the third graph:



The *Washington Post* handled these shootings differently. The paper did not reference Zimmerman’s race until a March 21 story titled [“Who is George Zimmerman,”](#) and then it was

mentioned only as an afterthought (in an update).

The *Post*, however, changed course in the Michael Brown shooting. When Ferguson police identified the shooter as Darren Wilson, the paper initially [made no mention](#) of Wilson's race or skin color. This began to change, however, in the paper's subsequent coverage. When Wilson's shooting is identified, it is mentioned [early in the story](#).



Failing to note Vinson's race until the *30th paragraph* whiffs of journalistic malpractice, particularly in light of the current violence in Charlotte and the way these publications have covered recent high-profile shootings of black males.

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