



The Sift[®] News Goggles

Race in headlines

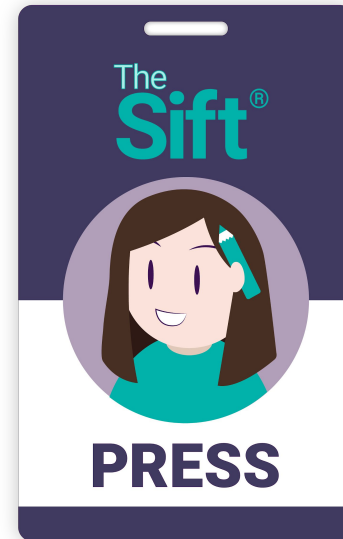
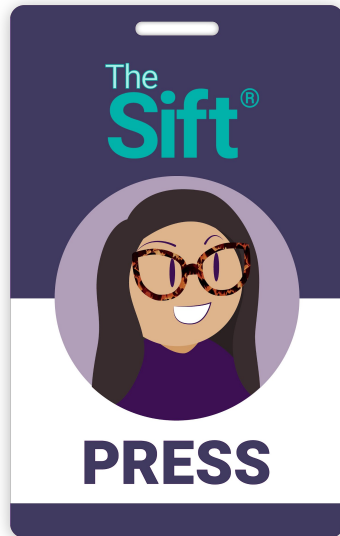
Nov. 2, 2020

Warning:

This activity includes information about a fatal shooting that some people may find disturbing.

First things first

- Be sure to view these slides in presentation mode.
- Suzannah and Hannah, former reporters who work at NLP, are going to help you examine this topic through journalists' eyes.



On Oct. 26, Philadelphia police fatally shot Walter Wallace Jr., a 27-year-old Black man who was holding a knife.



This week, we want to focus on two Facebook comments posted on a news report from WPVI-TV, a local ABC news affiliate in Philadelphia.



6abc Action News

October 26 at 7:45 PM

Police say the man was shot multiple times after he didn't adhere to calls to drop the weapon. In a statement regarding the shooting, Mayor Jim Kenney identified the man.



6ABC.COM

'Put the knife down': Man shot, killed by police in West Philadelphia identified

371

907 Comments 98 Shares



For once they didn't put race in the title. Hooray.

Like · Reply · 2d



Oh, is the man's race not relevant in this case?

Like · Reply · 18h



This is a common question after a news event like this. What do you think? When is race relevant in a headline? How do journalists make these decisions? Let's find out!



News report 1:
WPVI-TV, Philadelphia's
ABC affiliate



6abc Action News

October 26 at 7:45 PM · 🌐

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6ABC.COM

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👍👎👏 371

907 Comments 98 Shares

What do you notice about this headline (in bold beneath the photo) and story description (above the photo)? Would race be specifically relevant in the headline and/or description? Why or why not?



Click to the next slide for our thoughts.

Note: Images are hyperlinked to the full reports. Some have been updated with additional reporting.





6abc Action News

October 2, 2020 7:45 PM

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This news organization does not mention race at all in its initial Facebook post, either in relation to the involved officers or Wallace.



Standards-based newsrooms do not make these decisions lightly and often have policies on when race is a relevant detail. Keep in mind that in breaking news situations, it's possible that some of these details weren't immediately available.



News report 2: Philadelphia Inquirer



Philadelphia Inquirer

October 26 at 6:45 PM

Police officers fatally shot a 27-year-old Black man armed with a knife during a confrontation Monday afternoon in West Philadelphia, an incident that quickly raised tensions in the neighborhood and sparked a standoff that lasted deep into the night.



INQUIRER.COM

Fatal police shooting of Walter Wallace Jr. prompts heated overnight protests in West Philly

5.2K

923 Comments 341 Shares

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INQUIRER.COM

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923 Comments 341 Shares



Interesting. The Philadelphia Inquirer does mention race in the story description above the photo, but not in the headline underneath the photo. I wonder what led to this decision to handle it this way? Maybe local readers already knew Wallace was Black after reading the story description? It's hard to say.

Notice that “Black” is capitalized in the story description. The Associated Press Stylebook, an influential guideline for the news industry, updated its style on this in June. Major news organizations, such as the [Los Angeles Times](#) , [USA Today](#) and NBC News, had [changed](#) their practices to start using capitalization shortly after George Floyd’s death in May.



News report 3: Associated Press

AP Associated Press

Philadelphia police shooting of Black man sparks unrest

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Police shot and killed a 27-year-old Black man on a Philadelphia street after yelling at him to drop his knife, sparking ...

2 days ago



What do you notice about this headline and story description (as seen in an online search)? Would race be specifically relevant here? Why or why not?



Click to the next slide for our thoughts.

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AP Associated Press

Philadelphia police shooting of Black man sparks unrest

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Police shot and killed a 27-year-old Black man on a Philadelphia street after yelling at him to drop his knife, sparking ...

2 days ago



Unlike the Philadelphia Inquirer, AP does mention race in both the headline and story description.



Again, you can see AP's style in action to capitalize "Black."

AP Associated Press

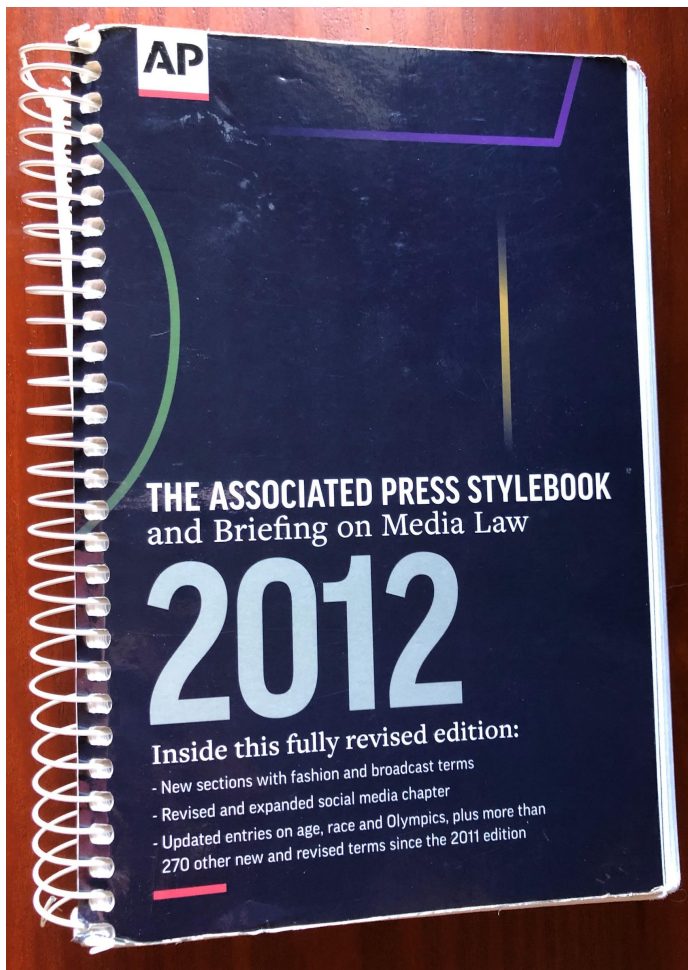
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Have you heard of the “Associated Press” (AP for short)? It’s an independent global news wire service that provides news reports for more than 15,000 media outlets. WPVI-TV and the Philadelphia Inquirer both have local audiences, which are perhaps more familiar with the details of this shooting. In contrast, AP’s broad readership may have shaped its decision to include race in the headline.



Note: Many news organizations follow the editing rules and language suggestions outlined in The Associated Press Stylebook, which also includes entries about race-related coverage and offers this [guidance](#): "Consider carefully when deciding whether to identify people by race. Often, it is an irrelevant factor and drawing unnecessary attention to someone's race or ethnicity can be interpreted as bigotry. There are, however, occasions when race is pertinent." In June, AP [updated its style](#) to capitalize Black "when referring to people in a racial, ethnic or cultural context."

News Goggles: Next steps

Discuss: Which of the three headlines do students think is the best? Why? If the class had to write a headline for this news event, what would it be? Would it include any references to race, either in reference to Wallace or the officers?

Idea: Have students read [this piece](#) from AP, which explains the organization's decision to capitalize Black, among other races and ethnicities, but not "white." Do students agree or disagree with AP's approach? Why? Consider sharing students' feedback with AP [here](#).

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This exercise originated in the Nov. 2, 2020, issue of The Sift® newsletter from the News Literacy Project. You can read archives of the newsletter and subscribe [here](#).



Thank you!



A future founded on facts



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