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## ***Critics say the media make innocent blacks look dangerous. Here's their latest example.***

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On Sunday night, 18-year-old Nia Wilson and her sister became the victims of what authorities say was an “unprovoked, unwarranted, vicious attack.” The sisters were transferring trains at an Oakland, Calif., Bay Area Rapid Transit station when they were suddenly attacked by a man with a knife. Wilson died on the platform, and her sister was injured.

Shortly after the stabbing, Wilson’s picture was all over news sites, TV stations and social media. Many of these photos were obtained from her personal Facebook page, where she shared pictures including selfies and group shots with friends.

But one photo, aired by TV station KTVU, has sparked backlash and reignited concerns about the biased portrayal of minorities, particularly African Americans, by news outlets.

During a noon broadcast Monday, KTVU shared a picture of Wilson in which she is seen holding what appears to be a gun. The outcry was instant, with many pointing out that there were several other photos the station could have used.

Twitter users also shared photos that suggested the gun was not an actual weapon but a cellphone case designed to look like one.

The criticism was intensified by the fact that police repeatedly confirmed that Wilson and her sister did not appear to do anything to provoke the attack. John Lee Cowell, a paroled felon whom police described as “violent,” was arrested Monday and has been charged with murder and attempted murder.

“What a shocker,” one person tweeted. “@KTVU ran their live tv story using a photo of #NiaWilson holding a gun, in order to characterize her as violent. Out of respect for Miss Wilson, I won’t repost the photo, but this is the perfect example of how black victims are further victimized after death.”

On Monday evening, longtime KTVU anchor Frank Somerville posted a lengthy apology to his Facebook page. In 2013, the station also came under fire for botching the names of Asiana Airlines pilots.

“We NEVER should have used that picture,” Somerville wrote. “It was a huge mistake on our part.”

He acknowledged that the station had a number of pictures of Wilson from which to choose.

“Please know that everyone here at KTVU is mortified by what happened,” the post read. “From me, and all of us at KTVU, I can’t say enough how sorry we are.”

During a broadcast later that night, Somerville apologized again.

After explaining that the station “took action” so that the photo would never air again, Somerville said he was going “off script.”

“We have a lot of really good people here at Channel 2,” he said. “People who care deeply about what they do. There’s no doubt that we made a mistake. It never should have happened, but we made the mistake, and we are owning up to that mistake.”

He continued: “I also want to say that Nia was just a beautiful young woman. I can only hope right now that her family and their parents are watching so that they can see me and all of us here at Channel 2 saying that we are so sorry about what happened to your daughter, and we are sorry about the mistake we made today.”

Mixed reactions greeted those comments.

Al Tompkins, a senior faculty member at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, called it “the most straightforward, no excuses apology I have seen from any media figure.”

On Twitter, many users wrote that they respected Somerville and that the apology seemed “sincerely” delivered.

However, for others, the apology was not enough.

On Tuesday, the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), the Bay Area Black Journalists Association and the Maynard Institute issued a statement condemning the photo.

“Use of this photo violated one of journalism’s core ethics: ‘do no harm,’ as it implied Ms. Wilson was dangerous,” the statement said. “The use of the photo can be seen as

an attempt to dismiss her humanity and silence those who view her death as a racially-motivated attack.”

While police have yet to find evidence that the stabbing was a hate crime, many were quick to claim race was a motive. Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf said in a statement Monday that the crime’s context needs to be recognized.

“The fact that his victims were both young African American women stirs deep pain and palpable fear in all of us who acknowledge the reality that our country still suffers from a tragic and deeply racist history,” Schaaf said.

Many of the critics who blasted KTVU called the station “racist.”

“Such depictions reinforce unconscious bias, particularly against people of color, who are over-represented in stories about crime and violence,” the NABJ’s statement said.

The complaint that photos of African American crime victims often portray them as dangerous has surfaced in the past.

In 2014, Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager, was killed in a police shooting. Following his death, the New York Times published an in-depth profile in which it described Brown as “no angel.” Brown’s portrayal sparked a viral social media movement using the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. People shared contrasting images of themselves and asked which picture news outlets would choose if they were killed.

Studies about race and media often arrive at the same conclusion: Black people are more likely to be shown in a negative light, compared with white people.

A 2017 study found that major media outlets often present distorted images of African Americans, depicting them as poor, absentee fathers, reliant on welfare and criminal. Researchers examined hundreds of local and national news stories and opinion pieces that were published or aired between January 2015 and December 2016 from various media outlets including CNN, The Washington Post and Breitbart. The study was released by Color of Change, a racial justice organization, and Family Story, an advocacy group.

The perpetuation of these stereotypes can influence how black people are perceived and treated, Rashad Robinson, executive director of Color of Change, wrote in the study.

“There are dire consequences for black people when these outlandish archetypes rule the day,” Robinson wrote.

Another study published last year in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology revealed that people tend to perceive black men as larger and more threatening than white men, even when they are about the same size. Data was gathered from more than 950 people who were all from the United States, researchers said.

“Unarmed black men are disproportionately more likely to be shot and killed by police, and often these killings are accompanied by explanations that cite the physical size of the person shot,” the study’s lead author, John Paul Wilson of Montclair State University said in a statement. “Our research suggests that these descriptions may reflect stereotypes of black males that do not seem to comport with reality.”

In her family, Nia Wilson was known by her nickname, “PG,” short for pretty girl. She had plans to become a lawyer or maybe pursue another criminal-justice-related career, her sister Lahtifa Wilson told ABC 7. Nia also loved makeup and fashion and one day hoped to have her own cosmetics line, Wilson said.

“She was so beautiful, so inspirational, had dreams,” Nia’s father, Amsar El Muhammad, told reporters Wednesday. “I’m supposed to be planning her graduation, not her funeral.”