

A hate crime in the city

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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When you live in the city, you end up having a lot of conversations about crime. People want to know about your neighborhood, and the conversation inevitably dances carefully around people's beliefs about the relationship between violent crime and race. The ugly assumption no one ever quite comes out and states plainly (because they totally [aren't racist](#)): *We know the perpetrators of violent crime will be people of color. The question is, who will the victims be?*

In reality, interracial violence makes up a small share of violent crime—and when it does happen, perpetrators and victims alike are pretty diverse. Nor is the latter fact simply the average of black people killing white people in northern cities while white people kill black people in progress-adverse corners of the Deep South. A [2012 Scripps Howard analysis](#) found that “Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and South Carolina all have white-on-black murder rates well below the national average, even though these states have large black populations.” Meanwhile, the FBI reports that among single-bias hate crimes, there are [three times as many victims of anti-black bias](#) as there are victims of anti-white bias.

Some white people seem to think that people who look like us are only ever in the victim role, except maybe in distant, backwards places-that-aren't-here. But it just isn't true.

I've lived in the city for years. I've been mugged, threatened, burglarized, and intimidated, sometimes by people who look different from me. But I've never been physically hurt, and I've never been the target of a racial epithet or gotten any indication that my whiteness was making me a target.

I did used to live on Chicago's far north side, a diverse area where some white residents express a lot of anxiety about their black neighbors. But I was never [assaulted on a major thoroughfare there in broad daylight](#). This happened to Michael Tingling this week. He was walking down Clark Street with his teenage daughter when Joseph Firek allegedly bumped into her and stopped to lewdly stare. According

to Tingling's wife, Tingling got between his daughter and Firek and told Firek to walk away. Firek's alleged response involved anti-black epithets and multiple punches. Tingling, who had a heart condition, died at the hospital.

It's a heartbreaking incident. Yes, it's just one incident. But that's no excuse for pretending it's a rare exception to some imaginary rule about who does violence to whom.