Introduction

Violence and the Neighborhood Color Line

The night after members of a black family moved into their new house in a predominately Italian neighborhood, a mob of roughly a thousand whites, who had been rioting in a nearby park, surrounded the family’s house and began to throw stones, breaking windows. The following evening, two hundred teenagers gathered close to the family’s home shouting, “We want blood.”

Soon after Reginald Doster purchased a home for his family in a white neighborhood in Taylor, Michigan, two white men plotted to burn down the Dosters’ house. They and several other men broke a window in the house, poured gasoline inside, and ignited the gasoline.

How can we make sense of these two incidents? Though they are similar in that they both involve blacks who have moved into all-white neighborhoods, what is perhaps most interesting is that more than fifty years separate these events. The first occurred in the late 1950s, the second in 2002. Though many assume that violence directed at racial and ethnic minorities who have moved to white neighborhoods is a relic of this country’s long-dead history, such behavior is not uncommon. In fact, scenarios like the ones described above, targeting racial and ethnic minorities who integrate white neighborhoods, are so common that scholars have coined the term “move-in violence” to describe such acts of violence and intimidation.

The harassment of the Doster family, which occurred in the twenty-first century and not in the Jim Crow era, is disquieting. As the latest
census data show, racial and ethnic minorities constitute an increasingly large portion of the US population. Moreover, survey research reveals that this increasing racial and ethnic diversity has correlated with increases in tolerance. Perhaps surprisingly, the experience of the Dosters and other minorities like them is not rooted in changes in the number of minorities; nor is it rooted in increases in acceptance for interracial marriage. After describing the history of anti-integrationist violence and its contemporary effects in chapters 1 and 2, I will address in chapter 3 the paradox of the phenomenon of increased tolerance alongside violence directed at minorities who live in white neighborhoods.

A more nuanced look at present-day race relations in the United States reveals the existence of anti-integrationist violence to be far less surprising. First, such crimes occur in entrenched white neighborhoods. Over the past thirty years, the overall level of racial segregation in housing has changed little. Many communities are nearly as segregated today as they were in the 1980s. Data from the 2010 census indicate that the “average” white person lives in a neighborhood that is 75 percent white. The racial composition of the residential neighborhoods where African Americans live is very different. Despite tolerance scores indicating that African Americans prefer to live in racially integrated communities, combined with the fact that predominately white neighborhoods are safer and generally offer greater access to valuable amenities like parks, stores, libraries, and good schools, data from the 2010 census indicate that the typical African American lives in a neighborhood that is only 35 percent white. In other words, despite significant progress in race relations, there are still wide gaps in the housing experiences of African Americans and whites.

With the exception of chapter 4, which focuses on Latino/black neighborhoods, Hate Thy Neighbor focuses primarily on the integration into white neighborhoods of African Americans, the nation’s most segregated racial minority group. Census data show that Asian Americans and Hispanics are simply not as segregated as African Americans. This is not because these groups never face discrimination in housing or incidents of move-in violence. Rather, as I detail in chapter 3, survey research suggests that Asian American and Hispanic moves to white neighborhoods are much more palatable to whites than is African American integration.
There are thus simply many more incidents of violence directed at African Americans moving to white neighborhoods.

African Americans and other people of color who are victims upon moving to white neighborhoods are often motivated to move to improve their life chances. When they experience violence in the form of cross burning, assault, vandalism, and arson, these incidents exact a terrible emotional and financial toll on their targets, who are more inclined to return to black neighborhoods than risk exposing themselves and their families to another white neighborhood. Any incentive for African Americans to remain in majority-black neighborhoods is a terrible outcome for housing segregation, which has particularly troubling consequences for the poorest blacks. Those African Americans limited to segregated neighborhoods tend to live in the worst housing, partake of the fewest public resources, and have the least access to employment. Poor black neighborhoods often have high crime rates as well. The cycle repeats as the children of blacks living in segregated neighborhoods tend to attend the worst schools, which affects their life chances and the neighborhoods to which they will have access as adults. Even if blacks do not live in poor housing, in segregated neighborhoods their houses tend to be valued less than those in integrated neighborhoods. Plenty of reasons exist for blacks to prefer living in integrated white neighborhoods, so the segregation cannot be explained by black preference to live in all-black or predominately black communities.

Beyond the issue of failing to honor individual choice, housing segregation exacerbates the danger and harm of move-in violence. The intense level of black-white segregation leads to spaces that are ripe for move-in violence. All-white neighborhoods provide the settings for acts of intimidation like that directed at the Dosters. One of the most commonly understood explanations for such harassment is that perpetrators desire to preserve the white neighborhood and prevent “white flight,” the phenomenon in which large numbers of middle- and upper-class white people leave neighborhoods in search of new spaces that are predominately white. White flight has occurred in large cities across the country when minorities, particularly African Americans seeking better housing, move to white neighborhoods. Rather than being an inevitable consequence of housing integration, historically, white flight was exacerbated by unscrupulous “blockbusters,” real estate speculators
intent on exploiting—for profit—the “deep-seated fears of white homeowners who dreaded Black encroachment on their turf.”

_Hate Thy Neighbor_ is an attempt to move the conversation about housing integration beyond the discussion of white flight by focusing on the fact that some number of white residents, from the beginning of housing integration through the current day, elected to remain in their neighborhoods. Throughout the book, in neighborhoods in cities as diverse as Detroit, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Portland, and Atlanta, I profile individuals who made the decision to fight neighborhood integration. Confronted with their neighborhoods’ changing racial dynamics, whites in such neighborhoods “blocked the penetration as if defending against a foreign enemy, using any means at their disposal to deter the migration.” White flight and violence are not the only two responses to minority integration. From managed integration to solutions crafted by those who are intent on creating diverse neighborhoods, I discuss several racially inclusive approaches to neighborhood creation that might serve as alternatives to the more typical paths of flight or resistance.

When “Home” Is Where the Violence Is

Even today, minorities moving to, and in some cases living in, neighborhoods around the country have faced harassment, vandalism, and assault perpetrated by white neighbors who wished them to live elsewhere. I use the term “anti-integrationist violence” to describe two phenomena: (1) extralegal acts of terrorism, or crimes directed at minorities immediately upon moving to white neighborhoods; and (2) crimes targeted at African Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities while residing in majority-white neighborhoods that are designed to drive them out. This definition reflects the full range of experiences of those racial and ethnic minorities whose integrating presences are rejected by their white neighbors. As chapter 6 details, such violence is illegal. If acts of anti-integrationist violence come to the attention of law enforcement, they may be investigated and prosecuted as hate crimes. Such incidents also violate state and federal fair housing legislation. However, as chapter 6 also discusses, many of these crimes may fall through the cracks in the police and prosecutorial systems.
As chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate, the problem of anti-integrationist violence is more complex than the term “hate crime” or “bias crime” can capture. Anti-integrationist violence is special, and has a distinctive place among other bias crimes because it occurs in and around individuals’ homes. Whether one is renting or owns one’s residence, one’s home has special significance, both culturally and legally. Culturally, Americans are fond of considering “a man’s home his castle.” In this view, the home is seen as both a place of security and the location of individual freedom from outside pressures.

Since the founding of the United States, American legal doctrine has enshrined this cultural understanding of the home as a place that is specially protected. Most Americans are familiar with the common law right to use deadly force to defend oneself when one is attacked in one’s home. Legal protection for the home goes far deeper than the right to self-defense, however. So concerned with the sanctity of the home were the framers of the US Constitution that the Third Amendment forbids the quartering of soldiers in individuals’ homes without the homeowners’ consent. This is in keeping with the cultural idea that the home is a place of personal freedom; common law has recognized the home as a locale where individuals are freer from restrictions on behavior and may thus avoid government scrutiny. Though exceptions exist, the Fourth Amendment generally prohibits the government from searching homes without a warrant. The Supreme Court has been quite diligent in forbidding any intrusion into the home without appropriate justification. Even private possession of obscene materials inside one’s home is constitutionally protected.

By attacking the homes of minorities who move to white neighborhoods, perpetrators violate entrenched cultural and legal understandings about the home. For targets of anti-integrationist violence, home is not a place of security. For these individuals, unlike most Americans, home may be where the heart is, but home is also where the violence is.

The Political Nature of Anti-Integrationist Violence

Like racially motivated crimes in general, a minority of acts of anti-integrationist violence are committed by ideological extremists—members of the Ku Klux Klan, skinhead organizations, or other hate groups. That
being said, acts of anti-integrationist violence are nonetheless fiercely political. Those men—in my research I have found the vast majority of perpetrators to be male—deciding to burn a cross on their new black neighbor’s lawn have strong ideas about what they want their community to look like, who belongs in that community, and who does not. At the most basic level, acts of anti-integrationist violence are strong statements about what residential communities should look like and who the perpetrator wants to see as part of his private, neighborhood life. Though offenders may claim to be motivated by the abstract notions of protecting property values or other nonracial motivation, as the term “anti-integrationist” suggests, perpetrators of such acts are explicitly discriminating and rejecting notions of a racially inclusive community. Not wanting minorities to live in their neighborhood renders perpetrators and those who support them segregationists, even though they claim not to be racists.

Fair housing statutes try to limit the extent to which individuals can control the complexion of their neighborhood. Extralegal behavior—acts of vandalism or harassment aimed at minorities who are able to enter white neighborhoods—subvert statutory protections. Move-in violence will have its intended effect if the person of color is “crimed out” and ends up leaving the neighborhood. If perpetrators are able to force racial minorities out of white neighborhoods, their actions have devastating and far-reaching implications. In committing acts of anti-integrationist violence, perpetrators reinforce notions of racial hierarchy that place whites at the apex and mandate separation of the races.

The incidents that constitute anti-integrationist violence are not what we traditionally think of as “hate crimes,” crimes motivated by prejudice on the basis of race, religion, or sexual orientation. The animus may not specifically arise from racial hatred—perpetrators would not seek out minorities outside their community to harass. Nevertheless, such incidents clearly fit into the paradigm created for hate crimes, particularly when motivated by underlying racial prejudice. In conforming to this picture, such incidents represent a more nuanced and compelling frontier in this recently created category of crime. This book argues that anti-integrationist violence constitutes a little-explored, separate category of hate crime that has the power to significantly affect minorities’ decisions to move to white neighborhoods.
Because the term “victim” has a number of negative connotations, I do not use it to describe those minorities who are attacked in this context. In the anti-integrationist violence context, individuals are targeted. The perpetrator intentionally selects someone because of their race. One who is attacked is a target, not someone who has been unlucky enough to stumble into some unfortunate circumstance.

Police departments reported 3,135 racially motivated bias incidents to the FBI in 2010. This is a small percentage of the roughly 10.3 million violent and property crimes that were reported to the FBI that same year. Though the overall number of incidents is comparatively small, legal scholars and policy makers should pay much more attention to racially motivated bias crimes that constitute anti-integrationist violence. As I describe at several points in this book, our society has evinced an inability to address anti-integrationist violence, both socially and legally. Despite a number of penalties associated with bias-motivated violence, the legal system does not provide sufficient remedy for the phenomenon of anti-integrationist violence. For instance, the arson of the Dosters’ house was eventually attributed to two white men, Wayland Mullins and Michael Richardson. Mullins’s mother lived across the street from the home the Dosters had purchased. Mullins and Richardson were charged with, among other things, violating the Dosters’ housing rights, because the purpose of the arson was to frighten the family and prevent the Dosters from moving into their home.

There is little social support for targets of anti-integrationist violence. Neighbors rarely reach out to let the targets of this violence know that they are indeed welcome in the neighborhood. As a result, when this type of violence or harassment is targeted at minorities who have made the courageous choice to move to white neighborhoods, those minorities often choose to leave. In the Dosters’ case, the harassment that drove the family to leave included dead cats and dogs being thrown into the family’s yard and on their doorstep. In addition, trash was dumped in their yard and their cars were vandalized. “You name it, they did it,” said Lori Doster when interviewed several years after the family had left the neighborhood.

After a second trial resulted in Mullins’s conviction, though Doster told a reporter she was happy to see justice done, she recognized that the harassment the family endured had a lasting effect. Doster noted
that three years of harassment had destroyed their daughter’s childhood.\textsuperscript{18} As chapter 2 describes, in the contemporary period, incidents like the harassment directed at the Dosters are all too common. Such incidents serve as a clear disincentive to families unwilling to pay the long-lasting emotional toll that such harassment causes. As the following chapters suggest, if we want to fully address the causes of racial segregation in housing, we must pay more attention to anti-integrationist violence.

The book’s organization is as follows. The first two chapters, organized chronologically, present a history of anti-integrationist violence, from its beginnings until 2010. In chapter 1, which covers the period from 1865 to 1968, the year the Fair Housing Act was passed, I describe relatively uncontroversial interracial neighborhoods in both the North and the South before and after the Civil War. The postbellum period was followed, as I describe in the chapter, by an increase in violence soon after the turn of the twentieth century, when large numbers of blacks crossed the color line to obtain housing in white neighborhoods.

Chapter 2 begins where the previous chapter ended, in the early 1970s, evaluating the occurrence of violence associated with housing integration even in the wake of the passage of major legislation designed to address it. In this chapter, I set forth changes both in the form that violence takes and in its characterization under the new “bias crime” label. In the section that addresses the current manifestation of anti-integrationist violence, I describe its wide diffusion throughout the United States and also address the emotionally disabling impact of the harassment on many of the targets and their families.

The next three chapters offer a series of distinct explanations of the causes of anti-integrationist violence. Chapter 3 explores what I have termed the tolerance-violence paradox: how systematic, violent expressions of racism persist in a society marked by increasing tolerance and racial diversity. Chapter 4 uses acts of anti-integrationist violence in Los Angeles, where the majority of targets are African American and the majority of perpetrators are Latino gang members, to differentiate the role that issues of geography and neighborhood dominance play in the construction of localized racial hierarchies. Chapter 5 examines anti-integrationist violence though the lens of socioeconomic status, or class. Profiling neighborhoods in which anti-integrationist violence occurred
that are working-class, middle-class, and affluent, I suggest that in some cases of anti-integrationist violence, the perpetrator’s class, or that of the targets, may have at least as much significance as their race.

The final chapter and the conclusion are prescriptive, suggesting how, given the existence of this sort of violence, it might be possible to improve the experiences of integrating minorities. Chapter 6 does this in a straightforward manner by looking quite broadly at the issue of legal remedies for anti-integrationist violence, from hate crime statutes to the Fair Housing Act. Special attention is paid in this chapter not only to details of the laws in a variety of jurisdictions, but also to how each type of law works “on the ground.” The book concludes with an analysis of the impact of anti-integrationist violence on housing integration and a comprehensive formula for curbing its most harmful effects.