

CRIME

Against the “gay house”

A shooting at the home of several gay men on Chicago's south side December 31 alarmed the local community—and exposed some troubling prejudice



For about 100 revelers at a packed house party in the early-morning hours of December 31 on Chicago's south side, 2006 literally ended with a bang. But it wasn't the shooting and wounding of six gay men at the predominantly black soiree that startled the city and the nation. It was the reaction of some of the neighbors, who described the residence as “the gay house” and seemed to suggest the crime was inevitable.

Many of the young men who attended the pre-New Year's event are involved in the “ball culture” scene as popularized by the movie *Paris Is Burning*, and their loud parties have often attracted the attention of police, who were “called on numerous occasions for party noise and fights at the home,” according to a source at the Chicago Police Department who did not want to be named because the investigation is ongoing. “It was a matter of time before something like this happened,” one young man told Chicago-area CLTV News. Another was more blunt: “If

they're going to act like that, they should take that gay [expletive] somewhere else.”

That reaction fueled initial speculation that the shootings were motivated by anti-gay bias, but police believe the incident was more likely the result of a “personal feud or rivalry,” says the police source. “Someone didn't like someone else. To settle the score, one young man left the party and returned with one or more friends and guns.”

Meanwhile, to counter the evident homophobia, the Chicago Commission on Human Relations is sponsoring neighborhood awareness and sensitivity meetings to reach out to black residents in the area, both straight and LGBT. The first meeting on January 6 was well-attended, although it was not without some tension. Chicago's eighth ward alderwoman, Michelle Harris, “took much heat” from gay residents, who accused the police of dragging their feet, notes gay activist Otis Richardson, “but afterward she sat down and spoke with many and was very clear about wanting to be educated on LGBT issues.” —Rod McCullom

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