Rethinkin

A look at Lincoln's neighborhoods

incoln doesn't have much in the way of crime. But what it does have runs in a pattern.

Using computerized crime data from the Lincoln Police Department's 1995 report file, a pattern running through the neighborhood area formed. The core areas used for this story were the busiest for Lincoln police.

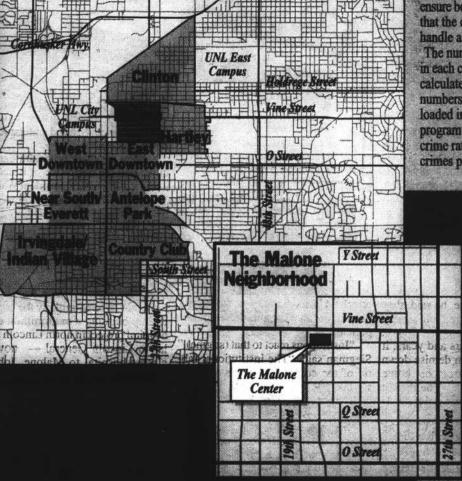But Malone's crime rate came up on the low end of the spectrum.

According to the FBI, Lincoln has one of the lowest crime rates among cities its size. Lincoln Police Chief Tom Casady said without Lincoln's high rate of reporting larcenies, Lincoln would be last in crime rates.

The data were analyzed by loading it into a database system and breaking it down into crime catagories for easier analysis.

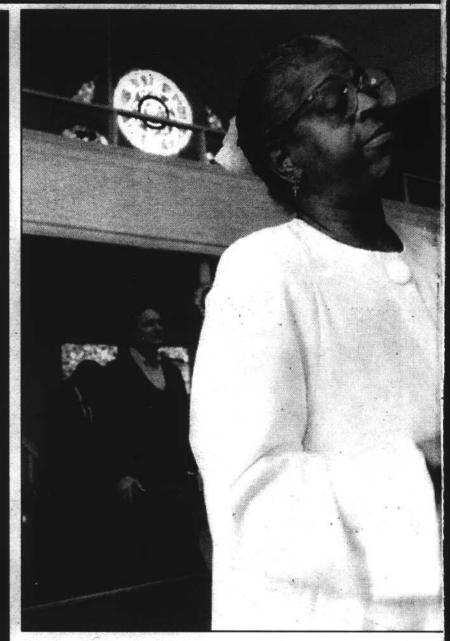For more than three months, the nine crime databases were mapped by a computer program called a geographic information system. More than 26,000 crime records were checked by hand to ensure both accuracy and that the computer could handle all the data.

The number of crimes in each census tract were calculated first. The numbers then were loaded into another program to calcula te the crime rate: Reported crimes per 100 people.

Below is a sample of the Daily Nebraskan's crime study findings. The neighborhoods are ranked by crimes per 100 people. An all-study-group rate and an all-Lincoln-rate are included to provide context to the neighborhood rates.

Assault

Neighborhood	No.	Rate
West Downtown	31	3.73
Country Club	190	2.87
Irvingdale/Indian Village	166	2.77
Clinton	116	2.58
Hartley	82	2.4
Near South/Everett	103	1.93
Malone	*50*	*1.91*
East Downtown	36	1.88
Antelope Park	63	1.3
Group Total	837	
Lincoln Total	4162	
Group Rate		2.37
Lincoln Rate		2.17

Auto Theft

Neighborhood	No.	Rate
West Downtown	8	0.96
Irvingdale/Indian Village	44	0.74
Country Club	41	0.62
Antelope Park	25	0.52
Near South/Everett	22	0.41
Malone	*10*	*0.38*
Hartley	12	0.35
Clinton	12	0.27
East Downtown	3	0.16
Group Total	177	
Lincoln Total	508	
Group Rate		0.49
Lincoln Rate		0.26

Burglaries

Neighborhood	No.	Rate
Country Club	113	1.71
Irvingdale/Indian Village	98	1.64
Hartley	51	1.49
West Downtown	11	1.32
Antelope Park	62	1.28
Clinton	46	1.02
Malone	*24*	*0.92*
Near South/Everett	44	0.83
East Downtown	14	0.73
Group Total	463	
Lincoln Total	1706	
Group Rate		1.22
Lincoln Rate		0.88

Narcotics

Neighborhood	No.	Rate
West Downtown	26	3.73
East Downtown	21	1.10
Irvingdale/Indian Village	65	1.09
Clinton	39	0.87
Malone	*21*	*0.80*
Near South/Everett	39	0.73
Country Club	48	0.73
Hartley	21	0.61
Antelope Park	29	0.60
Group Total	309	
Lincoln Total	1017	
Group Rate		1.07
Lincoln Rate		0.53

THERESA MCWILLIAMS claps along with the worship service at the Ch NAACP, said reconciliation of perceptions must start in the church.

Data show different pic

Rick Wallace wears many different hats in Lincoln. He is president of the local NAACP, a private businessman and a member of more than a dozen civic and church groups. He also serves as an economic adviser to the mayor.

The new data on Malone surprised Wallace.

"This information tells me we need to stop believing the perceptions that exist," he said. "This information says a lot about the mindset of this community — from police to firemen to realtors. They all want us to believe that this is the neighborhood where we have all the crime problems."

Wallace said the data did more than shatter old stereotypes — it raised new questions.

"When you get this kind of startling statistical clarity, you have to ask: What is the real percentage of minority ownership in this community?" Wallace said.

"We're talking crime and assaults, I know. But there is a bigger picture here."

Perceptions and fear of crime often taint the bigger picture, agreed Lincoln Police Chief Tom Casady. It is a problem Lincoln police deal with every day, he said.

If people perceive an area as unsafe, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, Casady said. Law-abiding people will not go to that area, but criminals will, because no one is there to stop them.

"Dealing with fears and dealing with perceptions is an important part of what we do," Casady said.

When Jose Soto, director of affirmative action and diversity at Southeast Community College, arrived in Lincoln in 1978, he heard many of the stereotypes regarding Malone.

Since then, Soto said, he has heard little to contradict them.

People often seek to reinforce stereotypes, he said, and it is usually not minorities who perpetuate them.

"(The data) makes me question why the neighborhood is getting a bad rap," he said. "I keep thinking that somehow, at the base of this, is racism in all its infamy."

Perceptions, Mayor Mike Johanns said, are like bad habits — tough to break.

"Once that perception is locked in, it's hard to get people free of those misperceptions," he said.

BAD FOR BUSINESS

A neighborhood perceived as having a crime problem will have many problems — such as an inability to attract new businesses.

Malone is no different.

The neighborhood's perceived high-crime rate has driven both people and business from the Malone area, those concerned with the neighborhood said.

The business mix there now is commonly found in many poor, high-crime areas: thrift stores, mini-marts, check-cashing outlets, liquor stores and fast food restaurants.

But is Malone a high-crime area?

An analysis of the latest computerized crime data revealed that it is not.

Overall, Lincoln's crime rate is among the lowest in the country for a city its size.

Most of the nine crime categories used for this story — assault, auto theft, burglary, disturbances, larcenies, narcotics, robbery, vandalism and miscellaneous weapons offenses — had rates with one or less than one incident per 100 people in 1995.

When compared to each of eight other neighborhoods near the downtown core, Malone ranked no higher than fifth in any of the nine major crime categories.

Malone ranked fifth in narcotics, seventh in assaults and burglaries and sixth in auto thefts.

The comparison areas included census tracts that closely bordered