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HEADLINE: Race gap wider among Albany homeowners;
Albany Nationwide difference in ownership rates between blacks and whites even greater in county, city

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BODY:

The gap in **homeownership** between blacks and whites in Albany is greater than in the nation, according to the latest figures released Wednesday by the U.S. Census Bureau.

In Albany County, about 63 percent of whites own their own homes while about 25 percent of African Americans do, a difference of 38 percentage points.

In contrast, nearly 73 percent of whites nationwide are homeowners compared to about 46 percent of African Americans, a 27 percentage point gap.

The level of **homeownership** for all groups is lower in the city of Albany than in the county, but the rate is still twice as high for whites as it is for blacks. Almost 46 percent of non-Hispanic white city residents own their homes, while about 22 percent of African Americans do. "This suggests that the racial disparity in homeownership is much greater than it is for the nation," said John Logan, distinguished professor of sociology at the University at Albany, who helped the Times Union interpret the census data.

"That does raise questions about what are the opportunities and what are the obstacles for homeownership here," said Logan, who is also head of the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research.

The data that Logan interpreted are part of a package for New York released by the Census Bureau. It breaks down such categories as age, sex and whether a housing unit is owner-occupied or rented for nearly 250 racial and ethnic groups.

Mayor Jerry Jennings said he was aware of the trend. He said that the city has expanded programs to make it easier for low- and moderate-income families to purchase homes.

"When I talk to people about owning their own homes, one of the most difficult things is committing to a mortgage," said Jennings. "We are trying to take the sting out of closing costs."

Among the programs offered by the city to low- and moderate-income people is a grant program to help cover down payment and closing costs.

Federal Reserve Board studies have found that it is more difficult for African Americans to get mortgage approval than whites with the same income, according to Logan.

"Why there is a bigger gap in Albany than in the nation, we can't say for sure," said Logan. "There must be something happening in this region that is making a difference."

In both the city and Albany County black homeowners are more likely to live in neighborhoods with a significantly lower percentage of homeowners than the areas where white homeowners live, according to Logan.

"It reveals the degree to which whites and blacks are segregated into neighborhoods of different quality and even homeownership does not bring blacks into neighborhoods that are equal to white homeowners," said Logan of the most recent census data.

Between whites and African Americans in both the city and the county, the difference is also greater than for any other minority group.

In both the city and county, other minority groups also lag behind whites in terms of homeownership, according to Logan. Nationwide, nearly 46 percent of Hispanics owned their own homes, but in Albany County that figure dips to 26 percent. And in Albany about 16 percent of Hispanics are homeowners.

For Asian Americans as well, the gap between them and whites is greater than for the nation as a whole. Nationally about 53 percent of Asian Americans are homeowners, but in Albany County only about 37 percent are. And in the city, the percentage of Asian-American homeowners dips to 24 percent.

Arbor Hill community activist Aaron Mair maintains that in the Capital Region as well as throughout the nation an African American can have a superior credit rating and "still run through a litany of mistrust."

Part of the reason for the lower rate of homeownership among African Americans may also be the fact that the area's highest rates of unemployment are in the inner-city community, Mair said.

During the second half of the 1990s, as the nation's economy expanded, minorities were the groups that made the greatest gains in terms of homeownership, according to Orwin Velz, an economist for Fannie Mae, the private corporation that is the nation's largest source of financing for homeowners.

From 1994 to 2001 the number of African-American homeowners rose almost 6 percent. For Hispanics, the group that scored the greatest gains, the increase was slightly more than 6 percent nationwide. In contrast, the increase in the number of white homeowners was a little more than 4 percent.

Among the reasons for those gains was the fact that the economy was strong, lenders were more sensitive to the needs of lower-income mortgage applicants, and interest rates were at an all-time low, said Velz.

Logan said he has not yet examined the most recent census data for other communities nor had he compared data for 1990 to determine whether homeownership increased locally among the different groups.

FACTS:RATING THE AMERICAN DREAM Homeownership in Albany lagged behind the nation in 2000. WHITEAFRICAN AMERICANHISPANICASIAN AMERICAN City of Albany46%22%16%24% Albany County63%25%26%37% Nation73%46%46%53% Source: U.S. Census Bureau

GRAPHIC: PHILIP KAMRASS/TIMES UNION PROFESSOR John Logan looks over census data on homeownership Tuesday in his UAlbany office.

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[◀previous](#) Document 7 of 11. [next▶](#)

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