

By **CATHY WOODRUFF**, Staff writer
First published: Sunday, March 25, 2001

Minorities on rise, not diversity

Albany -- Census figures indicate the level of segregation has grown in Albany since 1990

While Albany's minority population has grown to more than one-third of the city's total, neighborhoods are not becoming the tapestries of diversity those numbers might suggest, a University at Albany sociologist has found.

In fact, African-Americans in the Capital Region are increasingly likely to live in largely black neighborhoods, according to research by John Logan, director of the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research at the University at Albany.

African-Americans make up 19 percent of the residents of Albany, Schenectady and Troy, but they tend to live in neighborhoods that are 41 percent black, Logan found. Ten years ago, the neighborhoods were 36 percent black.

"The most important finding here is that, for the three cities, the level of segregation between blacks and whites is so persistent," Logan said. "We have to face the question of what are the consequences of that segregation."

Logan is studying patterns of ethnic and racial segregation as the U.S. Census Bureau releases its state-by-state counts. So far, he said, his findings for Albany, Troy and Schenectady are consistent with almost every place he has examined except Las Vegas, where racial integration actually is increasing significantly.

Albany County Legislator Lucille McKnight,



who lives in the city's South End, said she has noticed that she has more black neighbors and fewer white ones these days. Quite a few of the newcomers are buying homes, she said.

"I don't have a problem with it, but if we don't get the best services, I'm concerned," said McKnight, who is black.

Logan said that is one of the issues he hopes his research will help cities deal with.

"The pattern we find in city areas is that often neighborhoods where minorities are segregated offer less and are traps that are an obstacle to mobility," Logan said. "If that's so in Albany, it would be an important question for public policy to address."

Census 2000 figures show there are now 26,915 Albany residents, 28 percent of the 95,658 total, who identify themselves as black or African-American. That compares with 20,869 people, 21 percent of the population, in 1990, when the final count was 101,082.

Meanwhile, the number of people who identified themselves as white dropped from more than 75 percent of city residents 10 years ago to 63 percent in 2000.

Democratic Assemblyman Jack McEneny, who managed the Albany district office for the Census Bureau in 1980 and was involved in the 1990 census effort, said some adjustments should be made in those numbers for people of mixed race who previously identified themselves as black or white but now can check a box identifying themselves as being of "two or more races."

But even with a reasonable statistical adjustment, he said, "what you're talking about is a massive turnover" in Albany's racial and ethnic composition.

Albany's population count in the 2000 census dipped below 100,000 for the first time in nearly

a century, and McEneny and others said it's reasonable to assume that departures by middle-class families of all backgrounds, not just whites, contributed to that dip. That suggests an influx of minority residents from other places during the last decade, said McEneny, other experts and neighborhood leaders.

The portion of the city's residents who are members of an ethnic or racial group other than white or black -- including Hispanics and Asians -- also grew in the last decade, from 3.8 percent to 8.7 percent.

Several neighborhood leaders said the street-by-street diversity in their neighborhoods appears to have remained relatively constant, but they have noticed more minority newcomers in areas like West Hill and western portions of Second Avenue. The areas adjoin Arbor Hill and the South End, respectively, where Albany's black population has long been concentrated.

Jane Coogan, membership coordinator of the New Scotland-Whitehall Neighborhood Association, said she has seen little change in the racial composition of her largely white neighborhood, which attracts many doctors and nurses who work at St. Peter's Hospital and Albany Medical Center, as well as students attending Albany Law School and the Albany College of Pharmacy.

Residents of Center Square and other neighborhoods near downtown said their streets have long had a greater racial mix than some other parts of Albany, and that continues without any apparent tip toward more whites or more minorities.

Henry Madej, president of the Pine Hills Neighborhood Association, said he has noticed more ethnic diversity in his neighborhood in the last five years, but he is unsure whether much of that change stems from new homeowners and other residents settling in.

Pine Hills is a favored location for College of

Saint Rose and University at Albany students to socialize and live in off-campus apartments, and Madej speculates that many of the new faces he sees on the streets and in local businesses are students.

As Albany's minority population grows, public service employers, including the city school district and the police department, continue to try to make their staffs better reflect the city's overall composition.


In the Albany Police Department, just under 10 percent of the city's 331 police officers, detectives and command officers are black, 3 percent are Hispanic and 1 percent are Asian, according to counts provided by Detective James Miller, department spokesman.

At the Albany School District, 29 percent of the members of the support staff are black, but only 9 percent of teachers are, said district spokeswoman Lisa Stratton. Meanwhile, state Education Department statistics show that minorities make up 70 percent of the students in the district.

With 76 African-American teachers, Albany leads the Capital Region in minority faculty and has an active ongoing effort to recruit minority teachers.

"We have had some success," Stratton said, "but we certainly have a long way to go."

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 **Return to Top**

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