

ALBANY

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THE CAPITAL CITY OF New York State, situated on the west bank of the Hudson River about 140 miles north of New York City, has a large range of urban, suburban, and rural land uses within its limits. Albany is obviously an old city. While it shared in the common urban experience of rapid growth during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, its population in recent decades has remained close to the 127,000 reached in 1930. The 1960 census reported that Albany contained only about 130,000 residents.

There has long been a Negro community in Albany, but in recent years it has expanded considerably in size. In 1950, Albany had 5,759 Negro residents; by 1960 this had increased to 10,736 and unofficial estimates in 1965 placed this figure at possibly 15,000 in spite of the clearance of a substantial residential area which had been largely inhabited by Negroes. Presently, most Negroes live in two older areas of the city. The 1960 census reported a scattered number of Negro residents in some other parts of the city, but in most cases these were few in number. This housing pattern is, in part, probably a result of former practices of racial discrimination, but it is also linked to the economic circumstance of most of Albany's Negroes; the areas which have the most Negroes are those with the poorest or oldest housing.

EDITORS' NOTE: *This is a report, condensed by the staff of the Law & Society Review, of Dr. Marden's larger study ("The Albany Public Schools and Some Aspects of Providing for Equal Educational Opportunity," 68 pp.) conducted in 1965-66 for the United States Office of Education.*

While there is a wide range of education, income, and occupation to be found in Albany's Negro population, the median census figures for "school years completed" and for "family income" in the census tracts with considerable Negro populations show both at low levels. It should be noted, however, that these figures are also very low in some areas of the city with very small percentages of Negro residents, so that limited education and poverty in Albany are by no means exclusively Negro problems. There are only a small group of professional and white-collar workers in Albany's Negro community, and this would be even smaller if it were not for the presence of the state government and the State University. Local Negro civil rights organizations are weak and not well organized—which may be due, in part, to the existence of a tightly knit political machine that operates effectively without Negro participation.

THE ALBANY SCHOOLS

The problem of racial imbalance in the Albany school system is confined to the elementary level. Of the twenty-one elementary schools, five are racially imbalanced; one is nearly 100% Negro and four are in the 60–80% range. There is one school in the 40–50% range, three from 20–30%, two from 10–20% and ten from 0–10%.

About 1,800 of the approximately 2,400 Negro elementary pupils in Albany attended racially imbalanced schools in 1964–65. Over 1,100 of these students attended schools in very old buildings, which makes it very difficult to carry out the type of school program needed. However, this factor is not based upon racial discrimination since several schools with a majority of white pupils are just as inadequate. Both types of schools have substantially the same class size, teacher stability, teacher training programs, proportion of experienced teachers, and expenditures per pupil. Furthermore, the high staff morale in the racially imbalanced schools may make these schools superior in some respects. Thus, there seems to be no general pattern of discrimination based upon race in the Albany public schools. Limitations of program and of facilities have the effect of providing unequal educational opportunities for many public school pupils, regardless of race, as compared with the students in other school systems in New York State. The Albany Board of Education and administrative staff are aware of these deficiencies in the system, and they have taken a number of positive steps to improve the situation.

On June 15, 1963, State Commissioner of Education James E. Allen, Jr. issued a special message to all school boards in New York State calling

for the submission of a report by each board on (1) the existence of any condition of racial imbalance in its schools (defined as existing in any school which had 50% or more of its students from any given racial minority), (2) the school district's policy on this matter, (3) a progress report on steps taken to eliminate such imbalance or trend toward imbalance, and (4) the plan of the school district for further action, including an estimate of the time required for a solution. The Albany Board of Education, however, professing belief that the effects of urban renewal may well eliminate the problem of racial imbalance in Albany's schools, had not (as of the summer of 1966) submitted a comprehensive plan for positive action.

The decision to launch the urban renewal program, described as one of the most imaginative and wide-ranging plans in the country, was linked to a proposal by Governor Rockefeller that an extensive area to the south of the state capitol building be cleared and utilized for a major expansion of state office buildings. The plan has had the effect of relocating a number of Negro residents. While the project may lead to greater racial integration of the area, the effect on public school population is uncertain because it is difficult to forecast the family composition of those moving into the area, or the extent to which they will patronize the public schools. (Fifty per cent of Albany school children attend private and parochial schools.)

Albany claims that making a major impact on the neighborhoods is the first step in approaching the racial balance problem in the schools. Urban renewal appears to be the single most important concern of the business and political leaders of the community. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that the Albany Board of Education can argue that it must wait for a decade for the dust to settle, meanwhile continuing to have a number of elementary schools which are racially imbalanced.