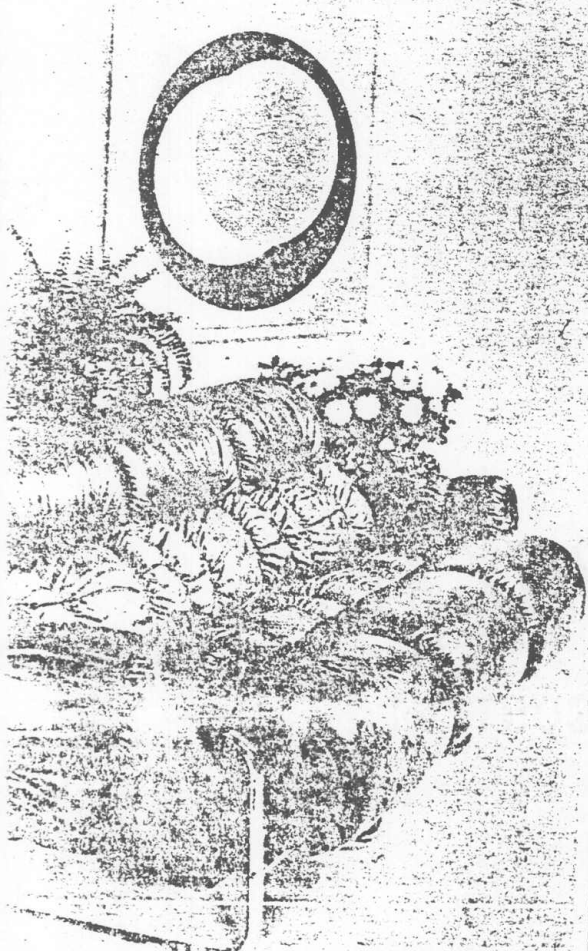




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populations in state hospitals means that unprepared people are being dumped onto unprepared communities. The predictable consequences have been profits for operators of inadequate facilities; worries for residents of Queens, Brooklyn and other dumping grounds, and opportunities for politicians to make scare pronouncements. "The snake pits are being transferred from the institutions to the neighborhoods," declared Queens Borough President Donald R. Manes recently. And it may be taken as an omen that the city fathers of Long Beach, L. I., passed an ordinance a few weeks ago banning persons in need of "continuous" psychiatric, medical or nursing care from its hotels and boarding houses; the measure is aimed directly at the hundreds of people who have recently been released from the state's Hoch Psychiatric Hospital in West Brentwood and have no place better to go.

Nevertheless, the movement is on to make the Willowbrooks and St. Elizabeths more like Bronx State or eliminate them altogether. Its final outcome will rest less with the courts than with the citizens who will have to pay for new facilities and perhaps grow accustomed to accepting the mentally handicapped into their towns and neighborhoods. The costs may be high, and there are no guarantees of success; this is a field that contains far more expertise than certain knowledge.

Yet do we have a choice? Dr. Roos accuses us of dismissing the mentally retarded and the mentally ill as somehow less human than ourselves. The big state hospitals, even where they have not stunted their charges and demoralized their staffs, stand as monuments to our fears of these strange people inside. By hiding them away, attempting to break the connection between us, we deny their humanity and reject our own. The mental-health lawyers are compelling us to find the means to bring as many of them as possible back among us. We have reason to be grateful, for our own sakes. ■



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