

# Willowbrook: Debates go on and so do the wasted lives

By SYDNEY FREEDBERG

A 36-year-old man in a straitjacket is led by an attendant to a stark hallway far from the confusion of the main ward.

The attendant, acting on orders, loosens the overgarment that binds his body, especially the hands.

With an aimless, jerking motion, he raises his left hand to his face and strikes. Hard. And again. To the other cheek, this time.

By the fifth blow his face is an illumined red mask, but the man shows no sign of pain.

The violent motions, rhythmic and steely cool, proceed like clockwork in this stark hallway.

The man shoots back an occasional glance through watery azure eyes. With-

out restraints, though, he's still not free. The eyes never discover other eyes.

But when the attendant takes the long-sleeved blue canvas into his hands, the jolts to the face stop. At once.

The conditioned man stands at attention like a captive warrior. He says nothing. He just stretches his arms to the fullest, halfway between head and face, and awaits his shackles.

With demanding exactness, the attendant rejackets the man, making sure shoulder and arm straps are fastened tightly at right angles. Packaged now, this troubled human mind is kept from wreaking havoc on the body.

It's about 10 o'clock in the sunny morning in Willowbrook Developmental Center's barren Building 9, home for 128 grown retarded men, most with the mental age of infants.

The man in the straitjacket is led back to the darkened ward to which he's been assigned for more than a generation.

There, amid concrete walls that are the boundary of their world, he and about 30 others await feeding.

The building supervisor and an institution administrator stayed behind that day to offer an explanation one that was later disputed by other professionals.

Those at Willowbrook explained they don't know why the man continuously hurts himself.

His sorry fits of rage, they said, have been occurring for years, and the psychologists, psychiatrists and therapists never have been able to unravel his

(Continued on Page 8)