

# The War Against the Mentally Retarded

By Robert Keating

“...Bomb threats, vandalism, violence, phone threats have become our newest method of treatment for the mentally retarded...”

A hidden war is being waged in New York City. Middle-class and affluent neighborhoods are doing battle against the area's mentally retarded. At issue in the conflict is the return of the handicapped population from the closing state institutions to their old neighborhoods. Instead of seedy

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hotels, they're moving into nice apartment buildings and houses on the block. And suddenly the city's concerned support of the mentally retarded has given way to a pattern of aversion and abandonment. In the words of a Staten Island woman, “We don't want them. Put them back in Willowbrook.”

In the winter of 1978 the quiet town of Huntington, Long Island, lost both

its electricity and heat. But especially cold was the new home of ten mentally retarded adults at 66 Greenlawn Road. The houseparents, Josephine and Jack Farneti, had been getting threatening phone calls for over a week. Usually a peaceful community, Huntington had turned crazy in its efforts to prevent the ten retarded persons from moving in, which was to happen any day. So on the icy evening



**At home:** This drawing and those on the following pages depict daily life in the hostel on 89th Street in Jackson Heights, which neighborhood groups want closed.