

community board was warned that the board's approval of a proposed site would guarantee her daughter two broken legs and a bed in the home. The board voted against the site. "Definitely a vote by intimidation," said one board member, noting that others had been similarly approached.

Scot Booth, the state's community-placement specialist for Staten Island, says he needed a police escort to get him away from an angry crowd at a public hearing on proposed sites after he received threats on his life.

Bomb threats, broken windows, vandalism, violence, and early-morning phone threats have been introduced in New York City as the newest method of treatment for our mentally retarded. "It's like the Ku Klux Klan," sighed one woman after she gave in to the

pressure and withdrew her house from consideration. "And this came from people who used to be my neighbors and friends." The FBI has begun investigating such incidents.

At the root of these savage actions is a piece of paper known as the Willowbrook consent decree. When it was signed by Governor Hugh Carey in April 1975, the New York Civil Liberties Union praised it as a landmark victory for the country's most vulnerable population. The decree carries out a federal-court ruling made after the horrendous conditions at the Willowbrook State School for the Mentally Retarded, on Staten Island, became publicly known. It mandates the de-institutionalization of the facility and the relocation of the patients in home-

like settings in their original communities so as to provide "the least restrictive environment."

Even though a national Gallup poll indicates that only 9 percent of the population would object to having a supervised home for the mentally retarded on their block, the President's Committee on Mental Retardation saw fit to footnote: "Their statements may not always be reflected in their subsequent actions." Which has been proved shamefully true in New York City.

On September 9, 1965, Senator Robert Kennedy stood on the grounds of Willowbrook denouncing it as "a snake pit" with "intolerable" and "zoo-like" conditions and declared, "I think all of us are at fault. And I think it's long overdue that something be done about it." And for a while something was. Willowbrook stories filled the press for two years. Then the name slowly disappeared.

Seven years later, Geraldo Rivera brought his WABC camera crew to B Ward, Building No. 6, and for the first time a camera's eye brought the writhing forms of flesh—neglected people, condemned to filth and forgotten misery—into comfortable living rooms throughout the New York area, and soon across the nation.

New witnesses to society's crime watched with shock as Rivera said, "This is what it looked like. This is what it sounded like. But how can I tell you about the way it smelled?" After a visit to the wards, the usually creative Joe Flaherty of the *Village Voice* struggled with metaphor to describe "children with faces like twisted 8's, children with legs like rickety I's, children with eyes poked out, producing a light and a dark zero, bodies scattered over the floor like spilled bingo pills—all adding up to a hopeless naught. And the bureaucrats there want to blame it all on the cash register in Albany."

When the director of Willowbrook was asked about the frequency of "rare" deaths at the institution, his response was, "Three or four times a month."

On March 17, 1972, a suit was filed against the governor of New York and ten other state officials. One year later, on April 10, 1973, Federal Judge Orrin Judd decried the conditions at Willowbrook as "inhumane and shocking" and demanded immediate remedy. After two years of stalling, the state affirmed his decision when Carey signed the Willowbrook consent decree. The decree not only prohibited common abuses ("straitjackets shall never be used, nor shall any resident be tied, spread-eagled to a bed or subjected to . . . corporal punishment. . . .

