

Willowbrook's past reaches into present

History of campus put in perspective at CSI seminar

A Jack Gorelick was not impressed with the lunch he ate in the Cafeteria yesterday. He was, however, stirred by "the life, the vibrancy" on the Willowbrook campus. "To get a sense of a new mission" was overwhelming, he said.

It almost overshadowed the stench of the old Willowbrook State School. But he will never be rid of the fetid smell of human feces and urine that characterized an era of inhumane treatment of the mentally retarded.

Willowbrook — Now and Then" was the subject of a seminar yesterday that was part of the dedication of CSI's psychology, sociology and anthropology building. The college, which is part of the City University of New York, opened its newly consolidated campus last fall on the grounds of the old state school for the mentally retarded.

Gorelick, a psychologist who was involved with the closing of Willowbrook, and other speakers credited the college for understanding the need to remember the past.

"If we don't know where we're coming from, we don't know where we're going," he said.

CSI plans to install "Willowbrook: People, Place and Time," a permanent multimedia exhibit tracing the history of the institu-

tion and those who lived and worked there. Smaller displays will be scattered around the campus, chronicling the history of particular sites.

When the Willowbrook State School occupied the campus, "You would see these wonderful lawns, and there was nobody out," Gorelick said. He would tell morning visitors not to eat breakfast before arriving to spare them from vomiting.

"The stench was something if you ever experienced it, you'll never forget it. I could smell it here today. I can hear the echoes,

I can hear the screams. I can see the people running around naked, battering each other," he said.

Dark gray walls and floors created a prison-like atmosphere on wards where 50 to 75 children were supposedly watched by two staff members, said Murray Schneps, whose daughter lived at Willowbrook.

"People who were harmless and helpless were being destroyed where we sit," he said.

As an attorney, Schneps became involved in the 1972 class action lawsuit that led to the landmark Willowbrook Consent De-



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people with developmental abilities and has led to the closing of many institutions.

It started with little things ensuring the basics of food

cree in 1975. The court-ordered agreement spurred massive reform in the care and housing of

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