

Tenants Complain Of 'Gestapo Tactics'

FBI Invades Harlem Building In Futile Hunt For Fugitive

In the early hours of Saturday morning, dozens of armed men cordoned off four blocks of Morningside Avenue in Harlem and entered an apartment building at No. 92. They broke apart doors and furnishings and, according to the building's residents, manhandled and detained several tenants, all at gunpoint. Only when asked repeatedly, the residents say, did the intruders identify themselves as agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and say they were looking for Joanne Chesimard, who escaped last November from a New Jersey

prison where she was serving a life sentence for the murder of a state trooper.

The agents, the tenants insisted, advised no one of his rights, and showed no warrant.

Recently, the F.B.I. in New York confirmed that it had raided the building in the futile search for Miss Chesimard, a reputed member of the Black Liberation Army, which claimed responsibility for a number of police killings in the early 1970's. The bureau would not comment on the charges made by the tenants, who include a

high school student, a teacher, a television producer, a freelance filmmaker and a nurse.

A spokesman for the bureau, Quentin Ertel, would say only that the F.B.I. had an arrest warrant for Miss Chesimard and had reason to believe that she was there.

"We're not going to discuss or confirm or deny any of the actions that went on in the building," he said.

All the tenants of the building, like Miss Chesimard, are black. The F.B.I. agents, they said, were white, and questioned them at the point of machine guns and shotguns.

They say they were badly frightened then and are angry now. One of them in particular, Ebon Adelona, who holds two degrees in nursing and is a doctoral candidate in anthropology at Columbia University, said she planned to sue. Mrs. Adelona's door was shattered from its three locks, and she says that she and her 5-year-old daughter were awakened in the middle of the night to find a cluster of men aiming a flashlight and the barrels of shotguns and machine guns at her from down a darkened hall. Mrs. Adelona said that she was ordered to raise the pant legs of her lounging suit for an agent who wanted to examine her legs, presumably to determine if she were Miss Chesimard.

Mrs. Adelona said that she had helped to raise money for Miss Chesimard's defense in the past and that among a group of five other women and six children in her apartment for a baby shower on Friday night was a lawyer who had been on Miss Chesimard's defense team. But she said she had never met Miss Chesimard.

Others in the building had their own complaints. Carlton Thompkins, a student at Manhattan Community College, said he was handled and searched by three different sets of agents as he tried to leave the building to meet his mother at the bus stop down the street. Douglas Harris and Michelle Hodges-Harris - he is an independent filmmaker, she an assistant producer for a local television show - said they were awakened at 4 A.M. by men pounding on the door, demanding that it be opened 'or we'll break it down.'

The tenants, many of them residents for years in the building, between 122nd and 123rd Streets, had prepared a statement by yesterday morning for release to news organizations. 'The tenants association at 92 Morningside Avenue,' the statement said, 'intends to ask our Congressman, Charles B. Rangel, and the Congressional Black Caucus to convene hearings on the conduct of the F.B.I.'

In Washington, Mr. Rangel sent a letter to Attorney General Benjamin R. Civiletti saying that, if the tenants' reports were correct, 'the raid was Gestapo-like and disgusting.' He added: 'Rights were violated and innocent lives were endangered. Inexcusable. I urge you to investigate the incident immediately.'

William N. Tandy, interim United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, said yesterday that an arrest warrant issued by a Federal district judge in New Jersey, which the F.B.I. said it had, would give the Federal Bureau of Investigation authority to go wherever they thought Miss Chesimard was. 'But certainly in this day and age,' he said, 'you don't go around willy-nilly breaking down people's doors.'

The Supreme Court of the United States ruled early this month that police must have a warrant before entering a suspect's home to make a "routine" arrest. The opinion invalidated laws in New York and 22 other states permitting arrests to be made in the home without a warrant.

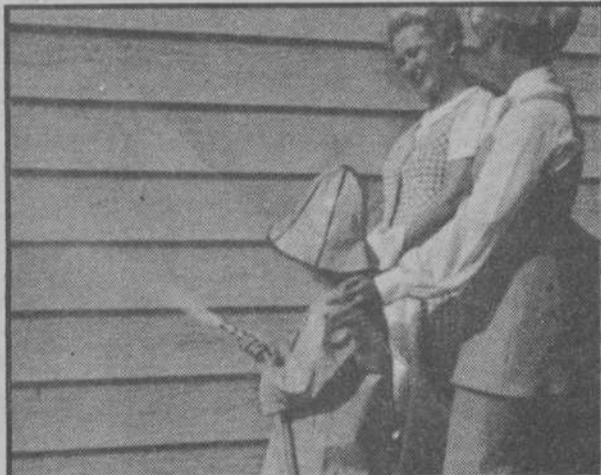
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