

METRO

‘Orwellian’ NYPD swarms parks to enforce social distancing

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An NYPD officer hands out masks to two women at Gantry State Park in Long Island City today.

Billy Becerra

Spring 2020 was in full swing Saturday in the Big Apple — but to some coronavirus-lockdown-weary New Yorkers who ventured outside, it felt more like “1984.”

As temps climbed into the 70s, more than 1,000 **NYPD officers made their presence known** across the five boroughs as they enforced state social distancing mandates requiring masks and at least six-feet of space between people to contain the spread of the killer bug.

“It’s Orwellian to be **watched like this**,” one freaked-out 36-year-old park-goer told The Post as she tried to enjoy the sunshine at Staten Island’s Clove Lakes Park.

“It’s friggin’ nuts,” the person said of the patrols of NYPD cars, park police officers and bike cops — whose helmets were equipped with video cameras.

“It’s like something out of “1984,” she continued, referencing George Orwell’s dystopian classic. “What is this, a military state now?”

Thousands flocked to Central Park, where the Sheep Meadow was evenly blanketed with small groups of sun-bathers and picnickers.

Though there were few masks, the groups themselves — typically two, three or four family members or friends — did keep six feet or more away from each other.

“They’re just doing their jobs,” shrugged Mariam Dar, 34, a finance worker who lives near the park, said as she snacked on crackers on a blanket with her fiancé and her brother.



A cop tells a cyclist in Manhattan she must wear a mask and maintain social distancing when she is off the bicycle.

Robert Miller

But in tiny Silver Lake Park, also in Staten Island, witnesses told The Post they were stunned by the show of force — two foot patrol officers, a pair of squad cars, one undercover car, one uniform state Department of Environmental Conservation car, and a Parks Department vehicle.

In Queens, mounted police and unmarked cars joined the patrol at Flushing Meadows Corona Park, where the soccer fields' goal posts were taped up to prevent the too-close contact that comes with organized games.

When one group of soccer players devised a work-around — setting out sneakers to designate the goals — cops descended on foot.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen,” one said. “Bring it in, bring it in. Break it up. You can kick the ball back and forth, but these goal posts, they have to go, Okay?”

The group, only some of whom wore masks, dispersed without trouble, one player sadly telling The Post, “I mean, we wanted to play. It's nice outside.”

Orchard Beach in The Bronx today

Beachgoers hang out at Orchard Beach in The Bronx today.

Richard Harbus

Since March 16, the NYPD has made 60 arrests and handed out 343 summonses related to social distancing.

“The public should expect to see social distancing patrol officers on foot, on bikes and in vehicles ensuring that social distancing procedures are followed,” said NYPD spokeswoman Sgt. Jessica McRorie.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo said he understood the need to catch some rays when the mercury rises.

“Go for a walk, but respect the social distancing and wear a mask,” he said during press briefing in Queens.

“I’ve said to law enforcement all across the state: Enforce the mask executive order,” he continued, when asked about protesters sans masks who on Friday called for the state to reopen.

He added: “It’s reckless, it’s irresponsible and it’s not about your life, it’s about other people’s lives.”

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