

**Extremists have hijacked the bike rides**

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By Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly



In years past, cyclists would ride together on city streets on the last Friday of the month, stopping at red lights, using bike lanes where they existed and generally observing the traffic laws that applied to them and to motorists. For some, the rides were nice communal exercises. For others, they were demonstrations of how bicycles present a practical alternative to automobiles, especially in car-congested cities.

This year, however, as the Republican National Convention approached, something important changed. The rides were hijacked by groups of cyclists intent on disruption and on violating the law.

Where once the cyclists were courteous observers of the rules of the road, the newcomers transformed rides into disruptive, often dangerous events.

For example, on July 30, hundreds of cyclists entered the lower portion of the northbound FDR Drive en masse and at night. They posed a real danger to themselves and to the motorists trying to dodge them. Fortunately, through police action and sheer luck, no one was injured that night.

On the same night, groups of cyclists sent teams ahead of them to "cork" or block side streets with bicycles so that the larger groups could run red lights without encountering crosstown traffic. The result was that thousands of cyclists proceeded unfettered north and south on midtown avenues while eastbound and westbound traffic was blocked for as much as 20 minutes at a time.

One member of my staff saw an ambulance stuck on an eastbound street and tried unsuccessfully to make the cyclists stop to free it. In another instance, a news reporter captured on video the disturbing images of cyclists pummeling a motorist who tried to proceed on a green light.

After the group Critical Mass called for large numbers to engage in similar tactics on Aug. 27 just before the GOP convention, the NYPD distributed flyers to thousands of cyclists who gathered in Union Square Park, warning them that they would be subject to arrest and their bicycles seized if they violated the law.

Despite these warnings, wholesale violations of the law occurred, and more than 200 arrests were made.

Now that Critical Mass has identified itself as an interested party, the Police Department has called on it to seek a permit if it intends to continue to use the rides in a way that puts so many in jeopardy. Otherwise, each and every participant is expected to obey the law or be subject to arrest. That includes observing traffic signals and riding in the curb lane no more than two abreast.

The Police Department is convinced that these rides can be achieved in a lawful and even celebratory way.

But there'll be little to celebrate if someone dies in an ambulance stuck in crosstown traffic or if a "corker" lets a car slip through and a cyclist is killed running the light.

For safety's sake, Critical Mass needs to act responsibly if it goes ahead and stages a ride tomorrow or any in the future.

In any case, the Police Department will do its duty and enforce the law.

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