

ORWELLIAN RIOT GEAR: Police “As Far As the Eye Can See”

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Guest post from my [favorite photographer, Julie Dermansky](#).

[“Summit ends without giving Chicago a black eye,” the May 22 Chicago Tribune](#) proclaimed, but I had one. On Sunday, I was shooting in the midst of a crowd on Michigan Avenue when my camera got smashed against my face as police pushed protestors back, batons swinging. The bruises didn’t surface until 48 hours later as I drove away from Chicago. And much of the story of what happened in Chicago is surfacing after the fact too.



Police film protester with an “Orwell Was Right” sign in Grant Park

The overwhelming police presence on the streets was mind boggling. They were also out in force at every metro stop, waiting on line to use the bathrooms at downtown restaurants. They were everywhere, in their spanking clean uniforms, their shiny new helmets, perfect for photo ops. There were more of them on the streets than protesters, most of the time. You saw them on foot, on horses, Segways, and bicycles (one cop told me they could use some new ones), in SUVs, police cars, helicopters and city buses with LED signs that blinked “Chicago, My Kind of Town.”

Officers were used as human barricades in an effort to keep the demonstrators on main arteries, but when protesters changed course in their uncharted marches they were permitted to go where they wanted to avoid confrontation, as long as they didn’t try to get too close to McCormick Place where the NATO summit and many of the dignitaries were staying.

On the surface things seemed calm and almost cozy, compared with some of the battles between demonstrators and police in New York City. It certainly seemed like democracy in

action on the streets of Chicago. In fact, what happened to demonstrators and indie media types away from the main action was something else, as reported by Natasha Lennard in her story [“Chicago’s Fishy Arrests”](#) and [Ryann Devereaux’s story about Chicago police accused of targeting journalists](#).

Police superintendent Garry McCarthy claims the number of protesters was no more than 3,000 and that Occupy Chicago’s protest ultimately failed. If that is the case, what’s his explanation for the overkill in police power, both visible and invisible (undercover agents and surveillance teams)? Who’s to blame for the failure to assess what was needed for crowd control beforehand and the waste of so much money, both federal or local. Were journalists who were detained a threat to homeland security or was a man who carried a sign that said “George Orwell was right” on to something?

[My first dispatch about the NATO summit protests on the Atlantic’s web site here.](#) It’s an overview of what I saw on the days leading up to and the first day of the summit.

Here are cops as far as the eye can see on Michigan Ave, keeping watch on about 200 protesters who were hanging out in Grant Park [Note: all videos – as well as photos – were shot by Dermansky].

And here are Cops boarding a Chicago City bus:

And here is a man holding a “George Orwell was right” sign being filmed by the police:

[To see more of my images on the Anti-NATO protests check out the selection syndicated through Corbis.](#) I will have some on flickr soon.





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Police Disperse Crowd That refuses to leave by pushing/hitting people with billy clubs



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Chicago Police in Shiny New Riot Gear



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Woman at Anti NATO protest in Chicago

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