

Hoover Draws Angry Response For Comment on Central Park

By JOHN SIBLEY

Officials here reacted indignantly yesterday to J. Edgar Hoover's assertion that "no one dares walk in the daytime" in Central Park.

"It's the kind of statement," declared Police Commissioner Michael J. Murphy, "that people make all the time without any basis in fact."

Park Commissioner Newbold Morris commented sardonically: "Well, I must be a very brave man, I walk in the park alone nearly every day, and often at night. I've never even been threatened."

Mr. Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, had described Central Park as a hoodlum haven. He made the comment during an extraordinary press conference Wednesday, in which he also criticized the Warren Commission and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Park Not 'Deserted'

Commissioner Murphy was asked for comment as he arrived at the New York Hilton Hotel to address a luncheon of the Real Estate Division of the Greater New York Councils of the Boy Scouts of America.

He said he had read the F.B.I. chief's statement and declared curtly: "I don't agree with it."

"I was in the park two days ago and it didn't appear to me to be deserted," Mr. Murphy said. "People seemed to be enjoying themselves."

The Police Commissioner added, however, that he was taking no official cognizance of Mr. Hoover's remarks. As far as he was concerned, Mr. Murphy said, the statement would not affect cordial relations between his department and the F.B.I.

Mr. Morris, while disputing the Hoover statement, acknowl-

edged that many New Yorkers shared the F.B.I. director's view. He said the press was partly to blame, because it had given undue prominence to news of crime in the park.

"If you want to be sure of getting on Page One of The Times," the Park Commissioner commented, "get murdered in Central Park. If you get murdered on 14th Street, no one will notice."

The Way 'It Should Be'

This comment was echoed by Deputy Police Inspector Johannes F. Spreen, who is liaison officer to the Department of Parks and keeps his office in the 22d Precinct stationhouse, in the park.

"If a girl wants to get on TV and in the newspapers," Inspector Spreen said, "all she has to do is come into the park at 10 P.M. and holler 'rape!'"

People are more shocked by crime in the park than elsewhere, he observed. "And in a way, that's as it should be," he added. "The park should be a sort of sanctuary where people are free from molestation."

Inspector Spreen said that about 100 felonies a year were committed in Central Park. Some of these, like auto theft, are not crimes of violence.

There were four murders in the park during the first six months of this year; previously there had been none since 1955. There was one forcible rape last year; none so far this year.

There are usually 35 muggings and about a dozen felonious assaults in a year.

A large majority of the offenders are juveniles, Inspector Spreen noted. Of the 59 persons arrested in the park for robbery (both misdemeanors and felonies) through the end of October this year, 52 were under 16 years old.