

The Resurgence of Riot Grrrl: An Essentials Playlist

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([Claudio Schwarz](#) / [Unsplash](#))

TW: gender-based violence, bigotry, adult language

I don't know if you have noticed, but the world is on fire and everything sucks. The capitalist, imperialist, white supremacist, heteronormative patriarchy is working as it was designed to ruin the planet. When I get sucked into the doom-scroll, it is hard to get out of the fear, anger, and/or sadness. From the ashes of our impending apocalypse, rose my new coping mechanism: feminist punk.

Riot grrrl is an underground subculture of punk designed to create a safe space for women that did not exist in the punk scene at the time. [Kathleen Hanna](#), known as the poster child for the riot grrrl movement, was famous for telling girls to come to the front at her shows, and pushing boys to the back. It was also common for the community to act as security with bands getting off stage to throw out folks who made the space unsafe.

The movement began in Olympia, Washington and Washington, D.C. in the early 1990s, but all but dissipated by the end of the 1990s. In the past year or so, there has been a resurgence of riot grrrl culture. From new bands to new movies and tv shows to an active hashtag on TikTok, angry girl punk is back - and hopefully better and more intersectional than ever.

Join me for your listening pleasure as I take you through the wild world of riot grrrl (or [riot ghoul](#), if grrrl is not your vibe). There are a lot of themes of gender-based violence and bigotry, as well as the use of “adult language,” so if that is not something you are down for, maybe don’t listen to the songs, or come back when you are ready.

White Boy

“White Boy” by Bikini Kill

Bikini Kill is the quintessential riot grrrl. The lead singer is [Kathleen Hanna](#), the aforementioned riot grrrl poster child. The other band members of Bikini Kill also played an important role in forming riot grrrl, including writing its [manifesto](#).

“White Boy” as a song is a great example of what demarcates riot grrrl music. It’s really not about the music as much as it is about what is being said and what needs to be heard. Oftentimes, girls would form bands and learn to play their instruments [on the job](#).

The song opens with the sound of a man talking about how girls are “asking for it” and calling women “dumb hoe[s]” before leading into angry guitar riffs. Kathleen isn’t singing for musical quality, but is screaming at the white boy, singing “don’t laugh, don’t cry, just die!”

I’m sure we can all think of a white boy or two that make us want to scream along to this song. It’s simple, it’s provocative and cathartic as hell.

Rebel Girl

“Rebel Girl” by Bikini Kill

“Rebel Girl” might be one of the most famous feminist punk songs of the time. For many, including myself and the main character of *Moxie*, “Rebel Girl” is one of the first tastes of riot grrrl culture we find.

Moxie is a Netflix original film that premiered in 2021. The main character, Vivian, finds her mom (Amy Poehler)’s box of memories from her riot grrrl years. With the help of many characters, Vivian starts a zine, a club, and a revolution at her high school protecting girls from being cast off, objectified, and assaulted by faculty and students at the school.

This movie is pretty inspiring and almost makes me wish I could go back to high school and do this myself (keyword: almost). It also captures the spirit of riot grrrl as the DIY, grassroots

movement it was in the 90s. Vivian creates a zine through the art of collage, makes a “shitload” of copies, and distributes them around the school anonymously. Classic riot grrrl.

▶ The Linda Lindas - "Racist, Sexist Boy" (Live at LA Public Library)

“Racist Sexist Boy” by The Linda Lindas

The Linda Lindas are a punk band based out of LA. They are a group of Asian and Latinx kids as young as 10 years old. You may be familiar with them after their performance of “Racist Sexist Boy” in the LA Public Library went viral, but they also performed a cover of “Rebel Girl” in *Moxie* as themselves.

Born well after the fall of the riot grrrl era, they exemplify what the movement is all about. The song “Racist Sexist Boy” was written after a boy in class told one of the members that his dad told him to stay away from Chinese people. This song calls out all the racist sexist boys (especially in a time of [heightened violence](#) against the AAPI community) and amplifies the voices of these young women.

▶ Bashir With The Good Beard | We Are Lady Parts

“Bashir With The Good Beard” by Lady Parts

Earlier this year, Peacock dropped an original series called *We Are Lady Parts*. I knew I was going to love it as soon as I read the description. I devoured the first season in one sitting, have made everyone close to me watch it, and have rewatched it a number of times since. I could write an entire dissertation on this show, its depiction of unique, complex, and varying Muslim women, and its endearing universal messages about friends, family, and femininity.

For now, I will just urge you to watch the show, which follows a nerdy university student who ends up joining a punk band formed of all Muslim women on her quest to find a husband. She works to overcome her stage fright and is introduced to a new way to interact with the world. This song is performed in a vital turning point in the show, but honestly I could have put every one of their songs on this list. This show is the reason I got into feminist punk rock, and I hope it converts you too.

▶ Call You Out

“Call You Out” by Mommy Long Legs

Mommy Long Legs is my favorite band that I have discovered in my riot grrrl journey. Their songs are very anti-establishment, a little weird, and their voices just sound relatable, as if they are people I know.

“Call You Out” is the song to listen to understand what riot grrrl is all about. It calls out fragile masculinity and white feminism, tells the subject of the song (those who they are calling out) to get over themselves, and, of course, calls to burn it all down. It is *the* song to get you pumped to change our world for the better.

▶ I Eat Boys Like You for Breakfast

“I Eat Boys Like You For Breakfast” by Riot Grrrl Sessions

I included this song originally because I am obsessed with the line “My vegan habit does not count ‘cause you have got no brains at all.” Plus, the song makes me feel powerful. After looking into the story of Riot Grrrl Sessions, however, it definitely could not be excluded from this list.

Riot Grrrl Sessions is a group of Swedish women, non-binary, and transgender artists who collaborated to create a 13-track album. They came together to write and record all the songs in one weekend. The collaborative element of the album, along with the intermix of band members, is reminiscent of original riot grrrl bands.

▶ Meet Me @ The Altar: Hit Like A Girl (LYRIC VIDEO)

“Hit Like A Girl” by Meet Me @ the Alter

If we are going to be “technical” about it, this is more pop punk than punk rock, but the song feels like a spiritual reset. It takes a small step back away from rage against what forces oppose women and marginalized genders, and goes back to empowering the one who can change the world.

It is really important for us to learn from the mistakes made by the riot grrrls before us. Feminist punk is not just for white women, cis-women, rich women, educated women, able-bodied women, or straight women. Feminist punk is for everyone, so it needs to be intersectional. It doesn’t matter who you are, if you are an intersectional feminist, you can be a riot grrrl (or ghoul)

There are so many more songs that could have been included on this list, including some songs from [riot grrrl TikTok](#).