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The Femme's Guide to Riot Fashion

This Season's Hottest Looks for the Discerning Anarchist Femme

Elle Armageddon

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With the current surge in political activism over the last year, femmes all over the world have been wondering: *How can I participate in the revolution, and look hotter than a Molotov cocktail while doing it?* Look no further: we've got you covered better than a balaclava!

Disclaimer: for the purposes of this article, "rioting" designates any kind of assertive protest activity. As right-wingers try to stigmatize and suppress protest activity of all kinds as "rioting," we aim to normalize it as something everyone can participate in.

There are several important considerations to keep in mind when assembling the perfect outfit for insurrection, including hair, makeup, mask, and which articles of black clothing will be both comfortable and fabulous.

Femmes with long hair will want to consider a style that keeps their hair out of their eyes and also does not impede their ability to put on a gas mask. French braids and their "inside-out" counterparts, Dutch braids, work remarkably well

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for these purposes, are compatible with any hair type, and offer the added benefit of keeping your hair from looking a mess if you wind up spending the night in jail. Femmes with shorter hair may not have the same considerations with regards to keeping their hair out of their eyes; but regardless of hair length, all femmes will probably want to think about also covering their hair as an identity-protecting measure.

There are a number of stylish ways to cover up your hair in order to avoid being identified. Hoodies, hijab, and balaclavas are among the most popular, but beanies and wigs can also fulfill this purpose. No matter what head covering you choose, you'll want to make sure that it is comfortable to wear for long periods of time, provides full coverage, and won't slip or come off if you need to engage in physical exertion. You'll also want to make sure that you choose an option that you won't need to remove in order to put on a gas mask or respirator, if those are things you intend to carry and potentially use. Ideally, it should be compact enough to conceal in the event that you need to change your outfit in order to make a safe and speedy getaway.

As far as makeup is concerned, you should avoid putting anything oil-based onto your skin: in the event of chemical weapons deployment, oils cause contaminants to stick to your skin, making them harder to remove. When preparing for a demonstration, it is best to forgo your moisturizer and consider applying an oil-free sunblock instead.

A layer of glitter or highlighter dusted over your cheeks can serve double duty, showing off your glorious bone structure while simultaneously providing a helpful way to determine which side of your bandanna was in contact with your face and which side is saturated in tear gas particulate. For a finishing touch, a layer of your favorite waterproof mascara can help make your gorgeous eyes really pop behind your mask. If it will stand up to a breakup or watching *Casablanca*, it will probably stand up to tear gas and liquid antacid and water.

Whatever you decide to wear to your next action, the most important part of throwing down on the front lines is the comrades you make along the way. Get yourself a crew of other badass riot femmes, watch each other's backs as you serve up stunning looks beyond the barricades, and remember: always anti-fascist, never anti-fashion!

Author's Note: The repeated use of the word "femme" throughout this piece is deliberate. "Femme" should not be read as synonymous with "woman." "Femme" is a queer identity, and is gender non-specific. This piece is not written for an audience of women, but rather by a nonbinary femme, for femmes of all genders. The advice shared in this article is the result of several years of experience on the front lines of heated street demonstrations, and is meant to help counteract the pervasive narrative that black bloc tactics are employed exclusively by cisgender, heterosexual men. Even within radical discourse, femmes' contributions to militant action are consistently erased, while we are pigeonholed into doing the bulk of support labor. The best practices shared here are couched in satire and tongue-in-cheek humor, and are a direct effort at reclaiming the space femmes consistently hold on the front lines of the struggle.

When choosing a mask, you'll want to select for a few different factors: it should be comfortable to wear for long periods of time, provide full facial coverage, be a tight enough weave to serve as a barrier between chemical weapons and your respiratory system, and also be cute as heck. While a standard black balaclava or bandanna will probably suffice, you may want to consider layering a few different masks on top of each other for effect. For example, a balaclava can provide anonymity while not inhibiting your gas mask or respirator from sealing properly around your nose and mouth, and a black bandanna on top of it can both help you blend in as well as help to better conceal the contours of your face. More layers means more looks, which gives you more options in the streets—so long as you don't overheat!

If you're feeling fancy, a lightweight glitter bandanna can be worn over the top of everything, sending the message that those who would sacrifice fashion for security deserve neither and will lose both. As an added bonus, a glitter bandanna or other "cute" facial covering can help de-stigmatize masking up by making you look less intimidating and more approachable, thus reducing the risk of some spineless liberal making a grab for your face.

Now that we've got hair, makeup, and masking sorted out, it's time to talk about riot fashion from the neck down. You'll want to choose an outfit that allows you to blend into the crowd around you, doesn't restrict your movement, and, most importantly, covers distinguishing features such as scars, birthmarks and freckles, piercings, and tattoos. It is a generally good idea to wear a lightweight, full-coverage under-layer and additional layers over it as needed, both for insulation and in order to conceal your identity.

When selecting your wardrobe, make sure to choose pieces of clothing that allow you to bend, kneel, run, jump, reach, and climb, and that also make you feel good about yourself. Confidence is a key element of both style and riot safety. It is also

worth keeping in mind that organic materials (like cotton and wool) will absorb chemical contaminants, while synthetic materials (like nylon) will help keep your body insulated and provide a better barrier between pepper spray and your skin, but will melt if they come into contact with something hot such as a tear gas canister. As a strong, fierce femme, you shouldn't feel forced to choose between the two. Instead, consider layering as a way to get the best of both worlds, and remember: black is a universally-flattering color for all body types and skin tones!

In any ensemble, it's important to think about the lines of your outfit. In form-fitting clothes, you run less risk of being grabbed by adversaries or getting stuck on fences, while looser-fitting clothes are better for concealing your body type and protecting your privacy. Neither choice is inherently better; both involve advantages and disadvantages. The important thing is to choose what feels good to you.

Now, every fabulous femme knows, shoes make or break an outfit—and riot fashion is no exception! As with the rest of your ensemble, you're going to want to choose footwear that is comfortable and easy to move in. Contrary to other scenarios, you'll want to select for function over form, and choose a pair of shoes which do not make you stand out from the crowd. Days (and nights) in the streets can be long; you are a gorgeous creature who deserves to treat yourself, so you may want to consider springing for squishy, supportive insoles for your steel-toed combat boots if you decide go that route. Alternatively, you could wear sneakers, which don't provide quite as much foot protection or ankle support but are easier to run and climb in. Depending on your risk level, it may even be worthwhile to designate a pair of shoes solely for rioting and never wear them for any other purpose. In that case, you might choose to keep them in someone else's house.

You'll also want to think about accessorizing your riot-chic outfit for maximum style. Jewelry is usually a bad idea, but gloves are a GREAT idea, and you can always add a black back-

pack, black flag, or both to finish off your look. An umbrella can be useful for obscuring your identity or blocking chemical weapons spray, and you could also consider something like a utility belt for supplies you need quick, easy access to, whether that means spare bandannas for femmes less prepared than you, first-aid supplies, snacks for your comrades, or an emergency glitter supply. Another timeless and essential accessory for the fashionable riot femme is a bottle of liquid antacid and water, which can help counteract the effects of tear gas and pepper spray.

For femmes who wear corrective lenses, it is important to remember that contact lenses can trap chemical contaminants against your eyes, causing lasting damage. That said, glasses are often a very distinctive feature and may risk exposing your identity; you also don't want to risk getting them shattered right in front of your eyes. A potential workaround for this is to wear contact lenses, and then cover your eyes with some sort of protective goggles—ski goggles, for example—to preserve your privacy without risking long-term eye damage.

If you're interested in stepping up your accessory game and adding a gas mask or respirator to your ensemble, you'll want to choose one that fits snugly around your nose and mouth, seals appropriately, and has a filtration rating appropriate for your needs. For most scenarios, an N95 rating should be sufficient; but if you're anticipating exposure to pepper spray, specifically, or if you are asthmatic or otherwise especially sensitive to chemical contaminants, you may want to consider an R- or P100-rated filter instead. Bearded femmes should consider shaving a day or two before the action (but not on the day of, as you do not want tear gas or pepper spray to get into tiny cuts where your facial hair used to be!), as gas masks and respirators do not properly seal over hair. Some femmes do have success with using a balaclava to mitigate this problem, but others report no added benefit from this tactic.