

## **Critical Response #6 - Riot Grrrl**

The emergence of the Riot Grrrl movement began in the early 1990s, when a group of women in Olympia, Washington, held a meeting to discuss how to address sexism in the punk scene. The women decided they wanted to start a “girl riot” against a society they felt offered no validation of women’s experiences. And thus the Riot Grrrl movement was born.

The Riot Grrrl movement believed in girls actively engaging in DIY *cultural production*, i.e. creating their own music and fanzines rather than following existing materials. The bands associated with Riot Grrrl used their music to express feminist perspectives and other political viewpoints. Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, and Heavens to Betsy created songs with extremely personal lyrics that dealt with topics such as rape, incest, male privilege and eating disorders.

When corporate media scrutiny and exploitation in the mid-1990s reached a peak, prominent women within the movement called for a media blackout and refused to talk to the press. Denied access to many of the women important to the movement, the press coverage slowly faded and Riot Grrrl continued as an underground culture. Riot Grrrl was influential in the punk rock and alternative music scenes, as well as in other independent media and allowed young women to assert themselves in the male dominated arenas of both music and zines.

Today, I want you to first read the Riot Grrrl manifesto and listen to some the music from bands associated with the movement, beginning with Bikini Kill. Then, I want you to read two pieces that look at the history and legacy of riot grrrl, including an NPR piece published around Riot Grrrl’s 20th anniversary and an interview with Mimi Thi Nguyen, a longtime fanzine writer and professor, who offers a thoughtful but also critical assessment of riot grrrl - one that asks us to think carefully about the role that women of color played in the movement and, by extension, how those voices are both remembered and forgotten in the stories that get told about riot grrrl two decades later.

For your assignment, I’m interested in hearing your response to the manifesto, the music, and the articles. What did you find most interesting about the bands and the movement, more broadly? What specific insights did you gain about the way riot grrrl advocated feminist politics through DIY punk practices (music, zines, etc.)? And, finally, what are some important lessons we can learn about riot grrrl from Mimi Nguyen’s interview?

Your paper should be 1-2 single-spaced pages, checked for clarity, spelling and basic grammar. Due Week Thirteen by 6pm, via Canvas.