

FEET TO THE STREET

*A Guide to Protest Safely
What to Wear, Bring and Do*



Janelle Rydell

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Disclaimer – I am not a lawyer or doctor. This is informational only & not legal or medical advice. Talk to a licensed lawyer or medical professional with any questions or concerns you may have.

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Introduction

“There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.” ~Elie Wiesel (Holocaust Survivor)

I didn't grow up in the streets protesting. I wasn't born an activist. Like many, I watched the world shift, rights stripped away, voices silenced, power abused, and realized that staying quiet was no longer an option.

I'm new to protesting, but not new to paying attention. I've spent my time learning about safety, about rights, about how systems of control operate not just in America, but across the globe. This guide is the result of taking time to educate myself, driven by a simple truth: you don't have to be a seasoned activist to stand up, you just have to refuse to be silenced.

I believe in more than just defending American rights. I believe in defending **human rights**, for **every** person, everywhere. Freedom of speech, freedom to assemble and freedom to exist without fear. These aren't privileges, they're fundamental rights. When those rights are threatened, we must fight back, not with violence, but with knowledge, solidarity, and courage.

I am in my 50s and although I have written to my representatives, called them and gone to committee hearings, I had never, until now, put my feet to the street. My first protest was very inspirational, motivating and I met a lot of great people. Make no mistake, the first protests were not really that dangerous but that will change as more civil unrest occurs and more people take to the streets.

We will be faced with police, counter-protesters and bad actors/agitators, posing as a protester only to create chaos and violence. This foresight left me with the need to find out the best practices for protecting, not just myself, but the others marching along side of me.

This book is written by someone who understands what it feels like to step into protest spaces for the first time, knowing the risks but refusing to back down.

Silence is exactly what oppression feeds on, and I won't give it that satisfaction, and neither should you.

The following pages covers anything from masks and phones to what to do if the police approach or arrest you. My hope is that this will help all of us peacefully exercise our rights in fighting this fascist regime as safely as we can but also to give thought to what is to come as the protests continue to grow. There are some responses/actions that repeat in different sections of the book. I repeated them anyway. It is that important that each situational possibility be outlined independently, even if some responses are similar to another situation.

At the end of this guide you will find links to resources for further in-depth reading. I have tried my best to give an overview of what I found to be very important and keep this short. I wanted to make sure everyone reads it to the end. There is also a checklist that consolidates what was covered, so you can quickly prepare and get yourself out the door.

Please, pass this on to as many people as possible. I truly feel this information is vital to our cause.

There is no payment required and I do not ask for your email to download it. The information is far too important to ensure we all stay as safe as we possibly can. However, it would be very helpful and appreciated, that if you would ["buy me a coffee"](#) so that I can continue doing the work I am doing and still pay my bills. :)

If you are inspired and feel that I provided value, you can show a one time appreciation. As little as \$3 or as much as you want. I sincerely thank you in advance.



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Chapter 1: Protest Preparation

Showing up unprepared is how people get hurt. It's how people disappear. You don't just walk into a protest, you plan for it. Every single step, from what you wear to who knows where you are, could be the difference between coming home safe and becoming a headline.

Protesting is a right, but the system doesn't always respect it. So you need to arm yourself with knowledge to ensure you come home safely.

Be Well Rested

I myself, have a hard time with this because my mind keeps me awake, especially when I am anticipating something. However, it is best to get as much sleep as possible the night before. This ensures you have the energy for the march. It also helps you stay focused and aware of your surroundings, which is absolutely imperative.

Know the Details Before You Go

Don't just show up. Know the when, where, and why. What's the protest about? Who's organizing it? Is it a peaceful march, a sit-in, a rally?

Map your route. Know your exits. You need more than one way out, because sometimes things go sideways. Set a meetup location with those you are with if you get separated. Don't just rely on your phone to call or text them, have it written down, and have it memorized.

Tell Someone You Trust

Someone who's not going with you needs to know your plan. Where you're going, who you're going with, when you expect to be back. If feasible, set up check-in times. If they don't hear from you when they are supposed to, then they know something may have happened. Give them names. Give them numbers. They need to know who to call. Have a backup plan.

Know the Risks

Be honest with yourself. Are you ready for what could happen? Peaceful protests can turn violent in seconds, and it's not always the protesters who escalate. Cops can show up with riot gear for a candlelight vigil. Counter-protesters can come with bad intentions. Bad actors/agitators can and will infiltrate the group of protesters with the intention of turning it violent. Your skin color, your gender, your body, are all factors with how you will be treated.

“If anyone thinks that we are not going to demonstrate and protest, they had better roll up the sidewalks.” ~Benjamin Hooks, NAACP executive director

Chapter 2: What to Bring and Wear

I hadn't even given thought to what clothing you should or should not wear. Somethings on the “bring” list, didn't even cross my mind. What you bring and what you wear is very important. So, let's get into it.

What You Wear and Don't Wear Matters

A protest is not a fashion show. Fashion makes you stick out, you want to blend as one collective. You're dressing to protect yourself, to stay anonymous.

- **Wear solid, neutral colors.** No logos. No political statements. Don't make yourself a target.
- **Avoid jewelry.** Especially necklaces, hoop earrings, anything that can get pulled.
- **Cover identifying features.** Tattoos. Hair color. Unique shoes. Anything that makes you easy to pick out in a lineup or a surveillance photo.
- **Shoes that can run.** You don't know how far you'll walk. You don't know how fast you'll need to move. Flip flops and sandals are a liability. Boots or sneakers are your best options.
- **Wear a mask.** Not just for COVID. Not just for tear gas. For protection against facial recognition. Anonymity is a shield.
- **Protective eye wear if you can.** Swimming goggles, lab goggles, if there's a chance of tear gas, this will matter. Something to think about is not wearing contact lenses if you normally do. Why? If tear gas is used it can get behind the lens and you will not be happy with the outcome. Wear regular glasses. This will give you an extra layer of protection between the tear gas and your eyes.
- **Gloves.** If you're going somewhere cold, you'll want them. But even if it's warm, gloves

can help protect your hands in a scuffle or when handling objects.

What to Bring

You need to move light. Only bring what helps you. Leave behind anything that could work against you if you're stopped, searched, or arrested.

Your essentials:

- **Water.** One bottle at least. Hydration is a must!
- **Snacks.** Something you can eat quickly: nuts, protein bars, dried fruit.
- **Phone** (more on this in the next chapter, but keep it low profile).
- **Portable phone charger.** If you have one, because your battery *will* run out if you're out there long enough.
- **Cash.** Not cards. Not apps. Just enough for emergencies.
- **ID.** This one is complicated. If you're part of a vulnerable group or if arrests are expected, you might choose *not* to carry ID. But if you do, keep it secure. This is a judgment call, some say bring it, some say don't. Know the laws in your area. I personally will have mine. Please be aware of your states "**Stop and identify**" **statutes**. I believe there are 14 states that require identifying yourself under certain situations: Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Utah, and Wisconsin.
- **Legal contact info.** Write it on your arm, on a card in your pocket, on a tag in your shoe. Wherever. Just have it. If you don't have a lawyer, know how to get in touch with organizations that help. You can find links to some [helpful resources](#) at the end of this guide.
- **Bandana or cloth.** Soaked in vinegar or lemon juice, sealed in a plastic bag. For tear gas, as mentioned above. It helps neutralize the irritant and can give temporary relief. This is a short term strategy. Tear gas gets on your skin and clothes and you can still

breathe it in from that.

- **Mini first aid kit.** Gloves, gauze, band-aids, painkillers, a small bottle of saline or water for eyes.
- **Hand sanitizer and tissues.**
- **Earplugs.** Sound cannons (LRADs) can cause permanent hearing damage. It's rare, but it is better to have them and not need them, than to need them and not have them.

Don't bring:

- Anything illegal.
- Anything sharp or weapon-like. They will use it against you.
- Drugs, even if they're legal where you live.
- Extra keys. If you're arrested, they can be taken and used.

The goal is simple: stay safe, stay effective, go home safe so you can come back and do it again.

"When an individual is protesting society's refusal to acknowledge his dignity as a human being, his very act of protest confers dignity on him."

~ Bayard Rustin, Civil Rights Movement leader

Chapter 3: Cell Phone and Digital Safety

Your phone is not just a phone, it's a tracking device. Law enforcement knows it, the government knows it, and you need to know it too.

Protests are heavily monitored, and technology is how they do it. Your phone is also your lifeline, so you need a plan. You need to know how to use it safely.

Prepare Your Phone Before the Protest

- **Turn off biometrics.** No Face ID, no fingerprint unlock. Police can legally compel you to unlock your phone using biometrics, but not your passcode.
- **Use a strong passcode.** Something complex, something secure.
- **Disable location tracking.** Turn off location services entirely. They're watching. Don't make it easy.
- **Airplane mode or power off.** When you're moving to and from the protest, especially if sensitive, shut down connections completely.
- **Remove sensitive apps.** Anything you wouldn't want searched, delete or log out completely. Think messages, email, cloud services and social media.
- **Encrypted messaging.** Use apps like Signal for communication. Never use unencrypted SMS or Facebook Messenger for protest coordination.

Photos and Videos: Think Before You Shoot

Documentation can be powerful, but it can also be dangerous. Here's what you need to know:

- **Disable auto-backup.** Photos and videos can automatically upload to cloud storage, where law enforcement can subpoena them.
- **Avoid faces.** Don't photograph other protesters without consent. Facial recognition is

real, and innocent people get identified, targeted, and arrested.

- **Be careful what you post.** Never live-stream. Post after you're safe and out of the area. And still be selective about what you share.

Side note: I had been sharing photos and videos from previous protests, but will no longer be doing this. Things are ramping up and I personally, do not want to be responsible for someone being identified.

Social Media: Proceed With Caution

Social media platforms are goldmines for surveillance. Posting your location or intent before or during a protest puts you and others at risk.

- **Share details minimally and vaguely.** Don't broadcast specific locations or actions beforehand. Obviously, the word has to get out that there is an upcoming protest and we all need to get the message out. However, right before or during, it is best to not give too many details. Maybe go with vague: "Don't forget today! Feet on the Street!!"
- **Watch your words.** Assume everything you post could end up in court.

Surveillance Awareness

Police can and do use technology to track and identify protesters:

- **Stingray devices** mimic cell towers to intercept communications and track location. Airplane mode or phone off is the best defense.
- **Facial recognition** software can identify you from images and videos, even with masks on. Covering as much as possible helps. Masks are a choice, I personally will have one with me and listen to my gut whether to use it or not.
- **Drones and helicopters** equipped with high-resolution cameras can capture faces, identifying features, and license plates.

If Stopped or Arrested

THIS IS IMPORTANT! If you are stopped by police and they begin questioning you ask the following:

- **Am I being detained?** If they say yes, ask “what are the charges”, but do not argue. Then immediately invoke your right to remain silent. If they say no, then ask the next question.
- **Am I free to go?** If they say no, then reconfirm: “Then I am being detained?” If they say no again, then walk away. It is best that this is being recorded as evidence if they try to charge you with resisting arrest when you walk away, when they said you were not being detained. Be sure when recording, whether yourself or someone else, that this is discrete and not antagonistic.

Police may try to access your phone. Here’s your plan:

- **Never consent to a search.** Clearly state, “I do not consent to a search of my phone.”
- **Invoke your right to silence.** Do not provide passcodes, ever. “I’m invoking my right to remain silent” and “I want a lawyer.” This is your only answer.
- **Know that police lie.** It is not illegal for the police to lie to you but you should never lie to them. This is why silence is the best weapon. They may say you have to unlock your phone. You do not. They tell you that, if you don't, they can arrest you. This is not true either.

After the Protest

When you get home:

- **Change passwords** to your phone, email, and messaging apps.
- **Delete protest-related messages** and photos once you’ve secured them or passed them to trusted organizers.

- **Check your phone settings again** for any unauthorized access or changes.

Your phone is a powerful tool, but it's also a vulnerability. Keep it safe and it will keep you safe.

"Those of us who shout the loudest about Americanism in making character assassinations are all too frequently those who, by our own words and acts, ignore some of the basic principles of Americanism:

The right to criticize.

The right to hold unpopular beliefs.

The right to protest.

The right of independent thought."

~ Margaret Chase Smith, first woman to serve in both houses of Congress

If you are finding value in this book, please consider a small donation so I can keep doing this kind of meaningful work. Thank you.



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Chapter 4: Staying Safe in the Crowd

People are powerful. People change history. However, crowds of people can also be chaotic and dangerous. Your safety comes down to situational awareness and preparation. Here's how you stay alert, safe, and effective.

Situational Awareness: Know What's Happening Around You

Protests are dynamic. Peaceful demonstrations can quickly shift. Pay attention!

- **Know your exits.** Always have at least two ways out. Situations escalate quickly, and knowing your exit can be the difference between safety and danger.
- **Watch body language.** Are people tense? Is there yelling or sudden movements? Are police changing stances or positions? Be aware & notice these signals early so you can be prepared.
- **Identify threats.** Counter-protesters, plainclothes police, and provocateurs. Identify them, tell those around you and keep your distance.
- **Trust your instincts.** If something or someone feels wrong, it probably is. Speak up. Tell the people around you. Warn your group. Silence can put everyone at risk.

Stay With Your Group

Going alone leaves you vulnerable. Groups offer protection, accountability, and support. If you do arrive alone, make a new friend! Stay together.

- **Buddy up.** Always have at least one person who stays with you. Make a pact: you leave together.
- **Regular check-ins.** Establish specific intervals to ensure everyone's safe and accounted for.
- **Set a meeting spot.** In case you get separated, have a clear, safe location to

reconnect.

Move Smart, Not Just Fast

Crowds surge. At any moment, something may happen that creates fear, which can lead to a stampede. If things go wrong, movement matters.

- **Never fight the flow.** If caught in a surge, move diagonally to the edges. Don't try to go directly against the flow. You won't win.
- **Don't panic.** Easier said than done, but panic leads to injury. Stay calm, breathe deliberately, and move steadily.
- **Watch the ground.** People fall. Debris, uneven surfaces, and dropped items. Stay aware, step carefully and if someone has fallen, please help them get up!

Avoid Escalation

Protests provoke emotion, that's their power/blessing and also their risk/curse. You must keep your emotions in check.

- **Never throw anything.** Even small items can trigger police violence and mass arrests.
- **Don't respond to provocation.** Counter-protesters or agitators may attempt to escalate. Do not engage. Walk away. I am going to repeat that: **DO NOT ENGAGE!**
- **De-escalate if you can.** Calm words, a neutral tone, steady body language can defuse tension (we'll cover more on this next chapter).

Chemical Agents: Tear Gas and Pepper Spray

If police deploy tear gas or pepper spray, you need immediate response.

- **Don't rub your eyes.** Use water or saline solution only. I found that the "milk" option is debated. There are those who swear by it, and those who warn against infection. If there is a risk of infection, I personally, would prefer not to use that method.

- **Stay calm and breathe shallowly.** Panic makes you breathe faster, increasing irritation. If you find you are breathing fast, self-soothe by telling yourself to breathe slowly and focus on each inhale and exhale.
- **Remove contaminated clothing.** As soon as you safely can. Chemicals linger and can burn.

If Arrests Start Happening

Mass arrests are a police tactic meant to intimidate and disrupt.

- **Don't run aimlessly.** Stay calm, move purposefully to a safe location.
- **Avoid confrontation.** Hands up, open palms. State calmly: **"I am complying."**
- **Witness and document safely.** If safe, discreetly record arrests. Don't interfere physically or verbally.

Know Your Limits

Be real with yourself. If you're exhausted, overwhelmed, or scared, take a step back. Rest. Regroup. This isn't weakness, it's strategy and safety. Staying safe means staying alert.

"Protest is an act of love, not one of anger." ~ U.S. Rep. John Lewis

Chapter 5: De-escalation Techniques

De-escalation is extremely important. In many big protests, there are volunteers who are trained to de-escalate situations. These trained volunteers may not always be available, so it is good to know what to do in these situations. Police, counter-protesters and agitators want the escalation. Do not play into this. There is too much at stake and too many people will get hurt if you let your emotions get the better of you.

Stay Calm

Your voice and your body communicate everything.

- **Control your tone.** Keep your voice calm, firm, neutral. Never yell. Keeping your composure can often times defuse aggression before it starts.
- **Watch your body language.** Open hands, relaxed stance. Don't cross arms, clench fists, or look confrontational. Have confidence, not aggression.
- **Eye contact.** Maintain a soft but direct eye contact. Don't stare intensely or aggressively, but don't look away either.

Words Have Power. Choose Them Carefully.

What you say, and don't say, can change the outcome entirely.

- **Speak slowly, clearly.** Aggression feeds on chaos and this is what they want. Calm communication starves their efforts!
- **Use neutral language.** Avoid accusations or insults, even if provoked. ***"I understand you're upset, but let's keep this peaceful,"*** works better than ***"calm down"*** or ***"you're wrong."***
- **Redirect conversations.** Move away from hot-button issues to common ground. Find something neutral or positive to talk about if possible. So, here is my personal thought

on this...I think walking away is better because we aren't dealing with normal communication anymore. MAGA does not have the capabilities to communicate. Anything can be twisted. With that said, it doesn't hurt to try if you are unable to just walk away or they insist on their continued aggression. (More below on if de-escalation isn't working.)

Set Clear Boundaries

You don't have to tolerate aggression. De-escalation means clearly communicating what is acceptable and what isn't:

- "Please step back."
- "We're here to protest peacefully, please respect that."
- "I'm not engaging in this conversation if it escalates."

Recognize When De-escalation Isn't Working

Sometimes, you can't defuse the situation, and that's okay. Knowing when to stop trying is essential.

- **Withdraw safely.** If a person continues to escalate despite your efforts, remove yourself from the interaction.
- **Alert others.** Warn those around you if someone is aggressive, provocative, or dangerous.
- **Don't get isolated.** Stay near your group. Aggressors target those who are alone or appear vulnerable.

If Confronted by Counter-Protesters

Their goal is disruption, yours is not. Here's how to handle it:

- **Don't debate.** They aren't there to listen; they are there to provoke. You won't change

their minds, but you can control your reaction.

- **Stay united.** Keep your group tight and communicate clearly. Stand in solidarity without confrontation.
- **Disengage quickly.** If someone aggressively confronts you, calmly back away and regroup somewhere safer.

If Authorities Escalate

Police escalate too, and de-escalating authority is different:

- **Stay visibly non-threatening.** Hands up or visible. Clear body language of compliance.
- **Repeat calmly: “We’re peacefully exercising our rights.”** Do not argue or raise your voice.
- **Record interactions discreetly.** Documentation can protect everyone. Authorities behave differently when they know they’re watched.

De-escalation is Power

You’re there to be heard, not silenced through aggression. Remember, every peaceful protester who refuses to engage with violence strengthens the legitimacy of your cause. Control your emotions and response and this will go a long way in helping keep things peaceful.

“You are never too small to make a difference”

~Greta Thunberg

Chapter 6: Handling Counter-Protesters

Counter-protesters come for conflict. They want reaction. They want disruption. Do not give them what they want. Your strength comes from discipline, awareness, and strategic non-engagement.

Know Their Tactics

Counter-protesters provoke intentionally. They bait, hoping you bite. Recognize their methods.

- **Verbal Provocation:** Insults, hate speech, and mockery are designed to trigger emotional reactions.
- **Physical Provocation:** Invading personal space, shoving, or gestures aimed at intimidation.
- **Filming and Doxxing:** They might film you, attempting to identify and harass you later online.
- **Infiltration:** They blend in, cause disruption, and try to escalate peaceful protests into chaos.

Never Take the Bait

Reacting emotionally hands them exactly what they want.

- **Stay calm, stay silent.** Ignore attempts at verbal provocation. Do not respond, argue, or explain your position.
- **Maintain your boundaries.** Clearly and calmly ask them to respect your space. If they persist, move away without confrontation.
- **Stay focused on your message.** Their goal is distraction. Keep the goal of the protest clearly in mind.

Document Safely

If counter-protesters escalate or become aggressive, documentation is invaluable, but please be cautious.

- **Film discreetly.** Don't antagonize them with obvious filming. Capture faces and incidents quietly, and subtly.
- **Protect your footage.** Send it to secure cloud storage or trusted friends immediately. You may need this later.
- **Don't compromise safety for documentation.** No footage is worth getting injured or arrested.

Stay United and Organized

Your strength is in unity. Solidarity defeats provocation.

- **Form a human chain or circle.** Shield vulnerable protesters if counter-protesters approach aggressively.
- **Use pre-agreed signals.** Non-verbal signals within your group can help alert others to trouble without escalating tension.
- **Have trained peacekeepers.** Identify trusted people in your group who know how to defuse tension and safely handle escalation. I had also mentioned above that there may be trained volunteers for de-escalation. If one is nearby, get them.

Engage Strategically, If At All.

Sometimes conversation is unavoidable. If it happens, control it.

- **Speak minimally.** Keep your words short, neutral, and clear. The less said, the less ammunition you provide.
- **Redirect hostility.** Pivot the conversation to shared human values: safety, peace, mutual respect. If it doesn't work, stop engaging immediately.

- **Never isolate yourself.** Always have backup. Conversations with counter-protesters should never happen alone.

Know When to Walk Away

Walking away isn't surrendering, it's tactical preservation.

- **When hostility escalates, leave.** If counter-protesters become too aggressive, get your group out immediately.
- **Don't let pride trap you.** Leaving is strategic, not cowardly. Your safety and the safety of those around you, matters more than you "making a point", one that will more than likely, be lost on the counter-protester.

After the Encounter

Post-event actions protect your community and yourself:

- **Debrief quickly.** Discuss with your group what happened. Report concerning behavior to organizers or legal observers.
- **Check in emotionally.** Dealing with aggression is draining. Take care of yourself and each other.
- **Report harassment or violence.** If laws were broken, consider filing formal complaints or reports. It is important to hold aggressors accountable.

Counter-protesters thrive on chaos and conflict. Deny them both. Stay focused, disciplined, and unified.

"Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty"

~Henry Thoreau

Chapter 7: Know Your Rights

Protesting is your right. Knowing them empowers you. Ignorance weakens you. The difference between safety and vulnerability can be as simple as knowing exactly what you're legally entitled to do.

The First Amendment: Your Right to Protest

You have the constitutional right to peacefully assemble and speak your mind, but that right comes with limits.

- **Public property:** Streets, sidewalks, and parks are generally open for protest. Private property can legally exclude you.
- **Permits:** Some cities require permits for large events or amplified sound. Know local laws beforehand. Lack of permit alone rarely justifies arrests, but it can give police a reason to disperse crowds, which can agitate and lead to violence.
- **Time, place, and manner restrictions:** Authorities can regulate when, where, and how protests occur, but restrictions must be reasonable, clear, and content-neutral.

Filming Police

You have a legal right to film police officers performing their duties in public spaces:

- **Maintain safe distance.** Don't interfere or obstruct police action, doing so can justify arrest.
- **Don't hide your camera.** Secretly filming can trigger accusations of interference. Make your filming obvious but discreet.
- **Police *can NOT* legally demand your footage.** They require a warrant to seize your phone or recordings. Don't let them tell you otherwise!

Interacting with Police

Be strategic and controlled if police confront you.

- **Ask if you're free to go:** If yes, calmly leave. If no, ask why you're being detained.
- **Remain silent.** Clearly state: "I'm exercising my right to remain silent." Then do exactly that.
- **Don't consent to searches.** Say clearly: "I do not consent to a search."
- **Request a lawyer immediately if arrested.** Repeat this request firmly and clearly.

If You're Detained or Arrested

If you're taken into custody, know exactly what to do, and what not to do.

- **Don't resist physically or verbally.** Stay calm and clearly state your rights.
- **Invoke your right to remain silent immediately.** Say nothing beyond requesting your lawyer.
- **Memorize or have legal contact info accessible.** Know exactly who to call.
([Resources at the end.](#))
- **Don't answer questions without a lawyer present.** Police will pressure, provoke, and lie to get you to talk.

Searches: Know the Rules!

Police can only legally search you or your belongings under specific circumstances.

- **If you consent:** Which you should never consent to a search.
- **Incident to arrest:** If arrested, they can legally search your person.
- **Probable cause or warrant:** They must articulate a clear reason for the search.
Question calmly and clearly why you're being searched. Reiterate your lack of consent.

Rights at Checkpoints or “Kettling”

“Kettling” is a tactic police use to trap protesters and potentially make mass arrests.

- **Remain calm and don’t panic.** Keep your hands visible, remain peaceful.
- **Request permission to leave.** Clearly, calmly ask, “Can I leave?” Record their response if possible.
- **Document everything safely.** Police abuses at kettling incidents are common and your documentation is critical in holding them accountable for violating your rights or causing you or others unnecessary harm.

Afterward: Document and Report

If your rights are violated, documentation is your strongest weapon.

- **Write everything down immediately.** Names, badge numbers, locations, times, and actions.
- **Collect video evidence safely.** From your own device or fellow protesters.
- **File official complaints promptly.** Reports, lawsuits, and media accountability hold authorities responsible and protect future protesters.

Rights Are Power

Rights mean nothing without awareness. Arm yourself with knowledge, stand firm, and protect yourself and your community. If you know your rights, you can assert them confidently. If you don’t, they can, and will be taken from you.

“If you don’t know what your rights and liberties are, you have no idea when they are being taken from you by the State.” ~Brian Cates

Chapter 8: What to Do if Police Get Involved

Police presence at protests is pretty much a guarantee (even if you don't see them). Their behavior, however, is not. Knowing exactly how to respond if the police escalate, confront, or arrest is critical. Preparation, knowledge, and composure can keep you safe, and might even save your life. (I'm not trying to be hyperbolic.)

Recognize Escalation Early

Police escalation may or may not happen, but it is a good idea what signs to look for.

- Sudden changes in posture or equipment.
- Officers putting on gas masks or riot gear.
- Formation of lines or encircling the crowd.
- Increased verbal aggression or threats.

When you see these signs, calmly but urgently alert those around you. Move slowly, and purposefully away, putting some distance between you and the police threat.

If Police Confront You Directly

Interactions can quickly turn volatile. You must stay composed and assert your rights clearly.

- **Keep your hands visible.** Hands up, open palms, clearly showing you are unarmed.
- **Ask calmly:** “Am I free to go?” If yes, leave calmly. If no, ask clearly why you're being detained.
- **Invoke your rights to silence.** “I'm exercising my right to remain silent.” Then, do exactly that. Don't answer questions, even casual ones.
- **Never consent to searches.** Clearly state, “I do not consent to a search.”

Handling Police Aggression

If police become aggressive or violent:

- **Stay calm and controlled.** Aggression will escalate the situation. Remain visibly non-threatening.
- **Do not resist physically.** Even minor resistance can justify further violence. Your safety and those around you, comes first.
- **Document if safe.** Record discreetly. Filming abuses holds police accountable. Keep your device secure as police may try to seize or destroy footage.

Dealing with Tear Gas and Pepper Spray

Chemical weapons are used for crowd control. It won't be pleasant but knowing some helpful tips will minimize some of the discomfort and pain.

- **Cover your mouth and nose immediately.** Use masks or bandanas soaked in vinegar or lemon juice.
- **Don't rub your face or eyes.** Flush eyes with clean water or saline solution immediately.
- **Remove contaminated clothing quickly.** Chemicals linger and cause prolonged pain and injury.

Mass Arrests – Be ready and alert.

- **Comply calmly.** Physical resistance won't help and could endanger you and others.
- **Invoke your rights clearly.** *"I wish to remain silent and I want a lawyer."* Repeat as is necessary.
- **Stay together if possible.** Groups offer safety. Witnesses reduce risk of abuse.

If Arrested

Getting arrested doesn't mean you did something wrong, it means you challenged authority and they don't like that. Here's what will help you survive it.

- **Do not speak without a lawyer present.** Police will provoke, threaten, and lie. Stay silent.
- **Remember names and badge numbers.** Quietly note and memorize. This information will matter later.
- **Don't sign anything without legal advice.** Signing can compromise your rights or legal defense.

Post-Arrest. Immediately After Release

- **Document everything.** Write detailed accounts of what happened immediately.
- **Seek medical attention if needed.** Injuries must be officially documented.
- **Contact legal support.** Immediately convey your experiences to legal counsel. They'll advise you of your next steps. See [resources](#).

Hold Authorities Accountable

After police interaction, accountability protects you and future protesters.

- **File official complaints immediately.** Use your documentation as evidence.
- **Consider legal action.** Lawsuits can hold police departments accountable for their actions.
- **Share your story.** Media and/or trusted organizations can highlight systemic abuses safely.

Police involvement at protests isn't always fair or safe and you can't control what they do, but you can control your response. How you react can determine if you get injured and if you go home that night. Be safe!

Chapter 9: Legal Resources and Support

Knowing where to get legal support, how to protect yourself afterward, and who to contact when your rights are violated is critical.

Legal Preparation Before the Protest.

Preparation begins long before you get to the protest.

- **Know your legal hotline.** Groups like the National Lawyers Guild often provide local legal hotlines specifically for protesters. Save their number, memorize it, write it on your body.
- **Have emergency contacts ready.** A lawyer, trusted family member, or friend.
- **Share your legal plans.** Tell someone exactly where you'll be, what you're doing, and who to contact if you don't check in afterward.

Legal Observers: Who They Are and How They Help

Legal observers are your allies. They're trained volunteers documenting police activity and protester rights violations.

- **Identify legal observers immediately.** Usually in bright vests or clearly marked clothing.
- **Report violations to them quickly and calmly.** They document police misconduct, unlawful arrests, and abuses of power.
- **Respect their neutrality.** They won't intervene physically but will document meticulously.

Finding Legal Representation

Reliable legal representation can be stressful and difficult. Here are some suggestions to help you if it becomes necessary. (Some links are below in [resources](#).)

- **Local activist legal groups.** National Lawyers Guild, ACLU, NAACP, and other civil rights organizations often provide free or low-cost representation.
- **Legal aid organizations.** Local nonprofits that specialize in civil rights cases often prioritize protesters.
- **Social media and trusted networks.** Trusted protest networks often share vetted legal resources and updates.

What to Expect from Your Lawyer

A good lawyer will:

- **Advise clearly on your rights and options.**
- **Defend aggressively against false or exaggerated charges.**
- **Help file official complaints against abuses.**
- **Represent you in court proceedings or negotiations.**

If your lawyer doesn't meet these standards, seek alternate representation immediately.

Documenting Your Experience

Your documentation supports your legal team and is fundamental to your defense.

- **Immediately after an incident:** Write down everything. Who, what, when, where, badge numbers, statements, actions taken.
- **Collect video/photo evidence securely.** Upload safely to trusted cloud storage immediately.
- **Get witness statements.** Anyone who saw the incident clearly should be documented

and shared with your lawyer.

Post-Protest Legal Action: Complaints and Lawsuits

Complaints, lawsuits, and public accountability protect future protests and protesters.

- **File official complaints promptly.** Police departments, oversight bodies, or federal agencies like the DOJ take formal complaints seriously. Honestly, I am not so sure about the DOJ currently, but you should still file complaints regardless.
- **Consider class-action suits.** When abuses are widespread, collective legal action can have powerful impacts.
- **Share strategically.** Your story can hold authorities publicly accountable and protect others.

Legal Rights Are Human Rights

Legal support isn't a privilege, it's your right. Your freedom to protest is protected by law. When violated, your response must be swift, informed, and uncompromising. Legal support ensures that the next protester won't face the same abuses you did.

“Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth.”

~William Faulkner

Chapter 10: After the Protest

The protest doesn't end when you leave the streets. What you do afterward is just as important as showing up. This is where you protect yourself, your community, and the movement.

Check In. Physically and Mentally

I personally have been finding that I have to do a mental “check in” every day to see if I need to take a breather. This is essential to the very long fight we have in front of us. I felt I needed to point this out, because this is also important, although not necessarily related to the protest, but please take care of yourself!

Okay, back to checking in after the protest...

First priority: Are you okay?

- **Check for injuries.** Adrenaline can mask pain. Once you're safe, assess yourself fully.
- **Hydrate and eat.** Your body just went through stress. You need to replenish it.
- **Check in with your group.** Make sure everyone made it home safe. If someone's missing or detained, activate legal support immediately.
- **Acknowledge the emotional impact.** Protests, especially those involving police or counter-protester aggression, may leave you traumatized. Don't ignore it. Talk to someone you trust.

Support Those Arrested

If anyone from your group, or the wider protest, was detained:

- **Amplify legal fundraisers.** Bail funds and legal defense funds need immediate support.
- **Stay informed.** Follow updates from legal teams or activist groups.

- **Offer practical help.** After being released consider offering rides, meals, and emotional support. Community care can really make a difference for the person who was arrested.

Digital Hygiene

After the protest be sure to clean your digital footprint.

- **Delete sensitive messages.** Clear out coordination chats, locations, and protest plans.
- **Change passwords.** Assume your phone or accounts could have been compromised.
- **Avoid posting risky content.** No faces, no incriminating details. Protect your people.

Reflect, Recover, and Regroup

You showed up. You made your voice heard. Now what?

- **Reflect on what worked and what didn't.** What could be improved for next time? Communication? Safety protocols? Legal readiness?
- **Take care of yourself.** Burnout helps no one. Rest. Process. Rebuild your energy.
- **Stay connected.** Protesting isn't a one-time event. Stay involved with organizers, legal teams, and activist communities.

The Fight Continues

One protest isn't going to right this ship. Far from it. This is a very, VERY long fight. Every action builds pressure, awareness, and momentum. Each protest needs to grow in numbers and also needs to become "sustained protests". After protests is when movements grow stronger or fall silent. We must choose to continue to use our voices and to stay loud.

Chapter 11: Special Considerations for Marginalized Groups

Protesting isn't the same experience for everyone. If you're Black, Brown, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, disabled, undocumented, or part of any marginalized group, the risks are higher. The system doesn't treat everyone equally, and pretending otherwise is dangerous. It helps if we are all aware of this.

Increased Targeting Is Real

Law enforcement and counter-protesters disproportionately target marginalized people.

- **Racial profiling is constant.** Black and Brown protesters are more likely to be stopped, searched, assaulted, or arrested.
- **LGBTQ+ individuals** face targeted harassment, especially trans and non-binary protesters.
- **Disabled protesters** risk being overlooked in safety planning, or worse, intentionally targeted because of mobility aids or medical needs.
- **Undocumented individuals** face life-altering consequences if detained.

If You're Part of a Marginalized Group, Take Extra Precautions

You shouldn't *have* to take extra steps, but, unfortunately, you do. Here's how to protect yourself.

- **Know your specific risks.** Understand how your identity could make you a target, and plan accordingly.
- **Avoid going alone.** Always protest with a trusted group who understands your vulnerabilities and will have your back.
- **Have legal support locked in before you go.** Not just a hotline. You need to know exactly who to call and who will advocate for you.

- **Limit identifying details.** Cover tattoos, wear neutral clothing, and avoid sharing personal information if confronted.
- **Undocumented?** Strongly consider avoiding high-risk protests. If you do attend, never carry ID or documents revealing your status.

Allyship.

Allyship is the active support for the rights of a minority or marginalized group without being a member of it.

If you're not part of a marginalized group, your job is to show up *correctly*.

- **Use your privilege as a shield.** Place yourself between police or counter-protesters and marginalized protesters when tensions rise.
- **Don't center yourself.** This isn't about being a "hero." It's about protection and solidarity.
- **Amplify marginalized voices.** Don't speak over them, support their leadership and messaging.

Medical and Accessibility Considerations

Disabled protesters and those with medical conditions need tailored plans.

- **Plan routes with accessibility in mind.** Know where safe spaces are, and avoid areas difficult to navigate.
- **Carry necessary medical supplies.** Bring extras in case protests last longer than expected.
- **Identify medics or first aid-trained allies in advance.**

Trans and Non-Binary Protesters

The risks of harassment, misgendering, and violence are amplified more now than ever.

- **Have legal contacts familiar with LGBTQ+ rights.** Not all lawyers will know how to handle trans-specific legal issues.
- **Avoid carrying documentation that outs you.** If possible, limit exposure of IDs that don't match your name or gender presentation.
- **Buddy system is non-negotiable.**

Community Defense

Marginalized communities have always led resistance movements, and built their own protection networks when the system failed them.

- **Stay connected to grassroots organizations.** They know the landscape better than national groups.
- **Participate in community safety training.** Learn skills like de-escalation, first aid, and legal observing within your community context.
- **Look out for each other. Because no one else will.**

You Shouldn't Have to Do This...But You Do!

It's brutal truth: the more marginalized you are, the more dangerous protesting becomes. But history shows that marginalized communities are also the heart of every movement for justice.

Prepare and protect each other.

"If I were to remain silent, I'd be guilty of complicity."

~Albert Einstein

Chapter 12: Protest Safety Checklist

When it's time to put your feet on the street, you need a checklist. Quick. Clear. No second-guessing. This is your go-to guide before every protest.

✓ Before You Go

- Tell someone where you're going and when you'll check in.
- Know the protest location, route, and exit points.
- Save legal hotline numbers. Write them on your body.
- Memorize emergency contacts.
- Dress in neutral, non-identifiable clothing.
- Pack light, pack smart (see below).

✓ What to Bring

- Water and snacks.
- Face mask (for health *and* anonymity).
- Goggles or protective eyewear (if risk of tear gas).
- Bandana or cloth soaked in vinegar in a sealed plastic bag (for chemical agents).
- Portable phone charger.
- Cash, not cards.
- Small first aid kit.
- Legal contact info written down.
- Any essential meds (plus extra).

- Hand sanitizer and tissues.
- Earplugs (if risk of sound cannons).

✓ **Digital Safety**

- Disable Face ID / Touch ID.
- Turn off location services.
- Use encrypted messaging apps (Signal).
- Remove sensitive apps or data.
- Keep phone on airplane mode when not in use.

✓ **During the Protest**

- Stay with your group, never protest alone.
- Keep situational awareness, know your exits.
- Don't engage with counter-protesters.
- Stay calm if police approach. Keep hands visible, no sudden moves.
- Document safely, avoid filming faces.
- Don't carry anything illegal or compromising.

✓ **If Police Get Involved**

- Ask: "Am I free to go?"
- State: "I do not consent to a search."
- Invoke: "I'm exercising my right to remain silent."
- Don't resist—stay calm, stay quiet.

- Call legal support as soon as possible.

✓ **After the Protest**

- Check in with your group and make sure everyone is safe.
- Document any incidents immediately.
- Secure photos/videos in encrypted storage.
- File complaints if rights were violated.
- Support arrested protesters and donate, amplify, assist.
- Rest, recover, and stay connected for what's next.

Final Note:

We as a nation, are in uncharted territory. It is scary. We cannot afford to let fear keep us silent. Courage isn't the absence of fear, but standing up and speaking out despite of it.

Protesting is a right. Protecting yourself while doing it is survival. Stay smart. Stay safe. Stay loud. Put your feet to the street and make some noise!

Before we went on any protest, whether it was sit-ins or the freedom rides or any march, we prepared ourselves, and we were disciplined. We were committed to the way of peace - the way of non-violence - the way of love - the way of life as the way of living.

~U.S. Rep. John Lewis

Resources & Further Reading

The more you know, the harder you are to be silenced, intimidated, or controlled. I gave you information that I felt resonated with me the most. For more information, these resources will keep you informed, prepared, and connected before, during and after the protest.

Legal Support & Civil Rights Organizations

- **National Lawyers Guild (NLG)**

Legal observers, protester defense, and legal hotlines nationwide.

www.nlg.org

- **American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)**

Defending civil rights, protester rights guides, and legal action.

www.aclu.org

- **Know Your Rights by ACLU**

Comprehensive guides on protesting, dealing with police, and more.

ACLU Protest Guide

- **Civil Liberties Defense Center (CLDC)**

Focused on activist defense and environmental justice movements.

www.cldc.org

Protest Safety & Digital Security

- **Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF)**

Digital security tips for protesters—protect your phone, data, and privacy.

www.eff.org

- **“Surveillance Self-Defense” by EFF**

Step-by-step digital safety guide for activists and protesters.

Surveillance Self-Defense

<https://ssd.eff.org/>

- **Amnesty International: Protester Safety**

Global protest safety tips and human rights protections.

www.amnesty.org

Bail Funds & Mutual Aid Networks

- **The Bail Project**

National nonprofit working to combat mass incarceration through bail assistance.

www.bailproject.org

- **National Bail Fund Network**

Directory of local bail funds across the U.S.

Community Justice Exchange

<https://www.communityjusticeexchange.org/en/nbfn-directory>

- **Mutual Aid Hub**

Find local mutual aid groups for protest support, legal aid, and community defense.

www.mutualaidhub.org

Further Reading

- [**“Know Your Rights: Demonstrations and Protests” – NLG Handbook**](#)
- [**“Digital Security for Protesters” – EFF Guide**](#)

Stay Connected

Movements don't end when the streets empty. Stay informed, stay organized, and support those still fighting.

- Follow local activist groups.
- Support independent media covering protests and civil rights.
- Keep learning. Authoritarianism thrives on ignorance, don't give it room to grow. This is how we win!

"Say what you want but you NEVER say it with violence!"

~Gerard Way

This book became an obsession of mine. I felt that if I was frantically reading multiple books and articles on this topic, that it would be beneficial to those who don't have the time to read everything I did. Please pass it on. We all need to be informed. Once again, if you are so inclined, a small appreciation for the work I did, would go a long way. Thank you so much.



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