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Sisters Outside: Tracing the Caribbean/Black Radical Intellectual Tradition

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Deported from the United States during the McCarthy period, Claudia Jones, the only black woman to become a political prisoner because of membership in the US Communist Party, was meant to be erased. Making her way to London in 1955, doubly and then triply “diasporized,” as Stuart Hall would put it, Claudia Jones arrived just around the time of the massive influx of Caribbeans into London, which began with the *Windrush* (1948); Jones was therefore able to have a role in shaping the nature of black community in London. Far from ever abandoning her Marxist-Leninist politics, she found ways to reshape it. As I argue in *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*, Jones’s politics expanded Marxism to account for black women, people of color, and African Caribbean migrants to Europe. So great was her impact that her burial to the left of Karl Marx is as fitting a statement of the nature of her politics as of her life.

A number of scholars have tried to identify the contours of this black radical tradition. Cedric Robinson’s *Black Marxism* perhaps has the most explicit detailing of its historiography, in chapters titled “The Historical Archaeology of the Black Radical Tradition,” “The Nature of the Black Radical Tradition,” and “Historiography and the Black Radical Tradition.”¹ Robinson

¹ See Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of a Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed, 1983).

identifies three intellectuals as illustrative of the black radical intellectual tradition: W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Richard Wright. In a concluding, general listing of a range of contributors, Robinson also includes Angela Davis, but from a reading of this text one would hardly get a sense that women were a part of any black radical tradition. I see this not so much as a conscious omission as one limited by its time, that is, the absence of gender from the frameworks of analysis in early black or left studies scholarship.

Taking it a step further, Robin Kelley sees the articulation of the black radical tradition as being conveyed through the work of several scholars and activists all trying to figure out the “global implications of black revolt” and to find a way to “usher it in,” generally as “some kind of diasporic sensibility, shaped by anti-racist and anti-imperialist politics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and deeply ensconced in black intellectual and historical traditions, profoundly [shaping] historical scholarship on black people in the new world.”² If this is so—that there were “several scholars and activists” involved in this process—then for those who have an intellectual and political interest in full representation, the next question to ask is, *Where are the women in this process?* This is one of the larger purposes of a work such as *Left of Karl Marx*.

The “sisters outside” framework—an already-created category developed by Audre Lorde and captured in her book *Sister Outsider*,³ referring to a particular placement of herself outside of the mainstream heterosexual, feminist, American frameworks—is useful in this consideration of the erasure of Caribbean women from Caribbean radical traditions, as from US civil rights discourse. I also wanted to signal the other evocative meaning of “outsiderness”: a reference for those who have an immigrant identity outside of the nation-state and are referred to as “aliens” or “outsiders.” Indeed there are a series of outsiders even within the Caribbean (for example, other smaller-islanders, like Grenadians, in some larger islands like Trinidad, or poorer Caribbeans, like Haitians, arriving in places like Martinique). But “outsiderness” also has another meaning in the Caribbean family: to refer to children born outside of a traditional European-style marriage, the so-called outside children who do not benefit from family coverage in the homes of their fathers.

In this article’s particular application of outsiderness, black women have become sisters outside the black radical intellectual tradition; Caribbean women, sisters outside the Caribbean radical tradition and US African American civil rights discourse and sisters outside Pan-Africanist discourse. In other words, while there has been, for example, tremendous headway in black women writers claiming a space within the canon of African American or Caribbean letters, the same has not happened substantially in intellectual and political traditions.

Several Caribbean scholars (women *and* men) have an explicit self-definition in a black/Caribbean/radical intellectual tradition, from Sylvester Williams to Sylvia Wynter, C. L. R.

2 Robin Kelley, “But a Local Phase of a World Problem: Black History’s Global Vision, 1883–1950,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 1047.

3 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing, 1984).

James to Amy Ashwood Garvey. Winston James does not include any women as thinkers in his *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, though he mentions Claudia Jones in the blurb of his book. Anthony Bogues sees two streams of black radical intellectual production: the heretic and the prophetic. Importantly, and of relevance to us today, he describes what he calls the “fallacy” that thinkers such as C. L. R. James, Frantz Fanon, and Du Bois are never credited with originality, with the assumption that their ideas exist only in relationship to or because of the already-accepted systems of thought; they get validation only through the named giants such as Marx. But there are more streams than these two, and Bogues’s work, besides referencing Ida B. Wells, does not deal in any way with women as radical intellectuals.⁴

The articles presented here by Kevin Gaines and Patricia Saunders raise additional and important questions about the relative invisibility of Claudia Jones from serious belonging in the black US civil rights pantheon as well as in Pan-Africanist common knowledge. From different angles, the writers extend the discussion raised in *Left of Karl Marx* by supplying additional readings that advance our understandings of an important historical period (the early civil rights and international decolonization period) and its leading exponents.

Gaines’s entry point is his knowledge of St. Clair Drake through the larger field of his work *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (2006). It is a fascinating angle because it allows what *Left of Karl Marx* envisioned: a re-engagement with black left activism in its various dimensions. St. Clair Drake, as expressed in his essay “The Black Diaspora in Pan-African Perspective” (which Gaines cites), had then made a certain kind of “left of Karl Marx” assertion that in the analysis of the black experience, which maximizes the usefulness of the process and the results for Liberation activity,

the most useful model for such purposes is one that modifies traditional Marxist-Leninist analysis to include not only the political economy of capitalist-imperialist expansion (studies of the “base”), but also the effect of *dependency* upon Third World peoples, political, cultural, and psychological, as well as economic.⁵

The emphasis for me here is on the word “modify,” for this is precisely what Claudia Jones tried to do in her application of Marxist-Leninist theory. Drake even spends some time defending Marx on the question of race and summarizing some of the limits of Marxism for political economy, but also clarifying the usefulness of Lenin’s critique of imperialism to subsequent “generations of Asian and African nationalist leaders—even anti-Communist ones.”⁶

4 See Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth Century America* (London: Verso, 1999); and Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (London: Routledge, 2003). However, I hasten to add that the work is indeed coming out now, and we are in the process of a larger intellectual project in which scholarship on Caribbean and African diaspora subjects is having a new energy. Veronica Marie Gregg’s *Caribbean Women: An Anthology of Non-Fiction Writing, 1890–1980* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), published after Bogues’s work, provides a range of scholar-activists whose ideas need to be accounted for in the Caribbean radical intellectual tradition. The recent work on Sylvia Wynter is also a testament to this expanding study, as is the interest in Claudia Jones’s contributions to our understandings.

5 St. Clair Drake, “The Black Diaspora in Pan-African Perspective,” *Black Scholar* 7, no. 1 (September 1975): 3; emphasis in original.

6 Ibid.

Gaines points out that in rendering Jones a “tragic” figure, she would have been a “cautionary example for Drake and those of his generation” because of the brutal treatment which she received. But this is precisely the point that my book makes, that is, that a specific targeting of black radicalism had in many ways “deported the radical black subject” from consideration, not just the subject Claudia Jones herself but what she represented in terms of ideas and practice. So, basically, this brings us to the contemporary period of recovery.

What I like are the links that Gaines is able to make here, as well as his ongoing and open question about the possible impact of someone like Claudia Jones, from both her activism and her subsequent treatment: “What lessons from Jones’s life and career might be found in Drake’s subsequent reflections on the African diaspora and black liberation?” This is an interesting question, because here is where we get back to the path of contemporary iterations of African diaspora studies and of the earlier black studies project and black intellectual approaches that move from an ongoing engagement with the needs of black community to what Houston Baker calls “betrayal.”⁷

Gaines suggests that it was a matter of “pragmatism and survival” that required those of Drake and his mindset to “avoid speaking of [Jones].” But this itself may also point to an important weakness in black political and intellectual work that often remains silent in the face of glaring inequities. While progressively Pan-Africanist then, Drake and others became very uncomfortable with explicitly leftist identifications. I hasten to add that this is perhaps still the case, as even in Gaines’s response he replaces the fact that Jones is buried to the left of Marx with his phrasing “adjacent to Karl Marx,” which while accurate does not capture the symbolic and rhetorical assertion that the book makes nor does it capture the actual location of Jones’s remains—indeed “left of Karl Marx” in Highgate Cemetery, as those not overwhelmed by the towering Marx bust soon discover: a Trinidadian woman buried left of Karl Marx.

Gaines sees this avoidance as not only the fault of the disciplining of black American activists during the McCarthy period but also because the general suspicion of Marxists was but one feature of black political practice in the 1950s. For example, he concludes that Drake, “along with many black activists who had been active in left-liberal civil rights organizations, including Paul Murray and Ralph Bunche, had been chastened during the high tide of cold war repression for past associations.” Thus it became pragmatic, and for some, “beyond the pale of respectability,” to avoid conversation on left figures like Claudia Jones.

Still Gaines’s recognition that activism and location in the United States during that pivotal postwar period was “critical for [Jones’s] emergence as a leading Caribbean activist-intellectual” is an important point. In addition, Jones’s internationalist orientation allowed a grounding of the transnational in imperialism. Gaines’s work also provides a bit more information on the members of Sojourners for Truth and Justice—such as Dorothy Hunton, wife of Alpaheus Hunton, and Shirley Graham Du Bois, wife of W. E. B. Du Bois—who exercised

7 See Houston A. Baker Jr., *Betrayal: How Black Intellectuals Have Abandoned the Ideals of the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

“diaspora citizenship” by relocating to Ghana residentially in the wake of combined Jim Crow and cold war repression.

What I find valuable in Gaines’s assessment is the additional light on the reasons for the erasure of Jones, besides the obvious issue of absence. Gaines concurs that “the political and ideological strictures of cold war anticommunism lingered long after the mid-1950s, not only restricting the freedom of expression and mobility of black dissenters but subsequently shaping the perspective of scholars of US civil rights and antiracist struggles.” Thus the US academy tended to dismiss the black left and emphasize mainstream civil rights organizations. It is here that the work on Drake becomes valuable, for Gaines finds Drake’s early insistence on a “Marxian intellectual approach to the African diaspora” as pushing back against these tendencies.

For Gaines, the recovery of a figure like Claudia Jones is enabled by a series of movements that include finding ways of overcoming these already-identified “cold war structures” and “internal racist biases.” Gaines sees these as overlapping developments that include the recovery of a black Marxist intellectual tradition. Leading scholars in this process, such as Cedric Robinson and subsequently Robin Kelley, similarly create a body of scholarship, and the work of students who succeed them will help flesh out some of these themes. Gaines’s essay offers a nice perspective of this particular conjunction, especially his new reading of black struggles within a transnational analytical framework.

Beyond the NATO-ish “black Atlantic” that has been applied in recent years, namely, the black North Atlantic, is an international black activism that Gaines sees as operating within the African diaspora’s larger framework. He is able to pull out a significant conclusion about Jones: despite the toll on her health produced through incarceration and her earlier experiences of poverty in the racially stratified United States, her exile allowed her to have a central role in the development of the black British community. Ironically then, it was being a colonial subject, exiled in Britain, that offered the context for a set of relationships with those of similar histories. Thus Jones entered history significantly in this context. In fact, two plaques honoring her as the mother of the Notting Hill Carnival were unveiled in London on 22 August of this year, at the start of the fiftieth anniversary of the carnival.

Gaines’s fascinating conclusion is that “the formation of transnational black counterpublics transcended the divide between Communists and anti-Communists symbolized by the juxtaposition of Jones and Drake.” This seems to be the case as well in other contexts, like the Sojourners for Truth and Justice where, in spite of internal debates, there was room for women activating an early black feminist agenda. While the hardcore opposition between Garveyites and Communists has been well noted, there have been a variety of similar collaborations, even with ideological differences, that have gone unnoted. (One interesting conjunction is that of Booker T. Washington and the early Pan-Africanists. Washington, defined as an integrationist par excellence and a foe of Du Bois, did not attend the first Pan-African conference in London in 1900, yet he is identified by J. R. Hooker as publicizing the conference and encouraging

many US African Americans to attend, thus helping to create the large and powerful US contingent to that historic event.)⁸

It is worth recalling “From Center to Margin,” an earlier essay by Gaines that addressed the pivotal role of Toni Cade Bambara’s *The Black Woman* in the articulation of black feminism. But the new research provides additional contexts and history for the works of people like Alice Childress and the radical Harlem Writers Guild. Gaines’s argument then was that “the origins of black feminism existed in a symbiotic relationship to a black radical culture of internationalism, largely based in northern black urban centers such as Harlem and Chicago.”⁹ And it is here that the recognition becomes clearer that people like Claudia Jones are the “missing links” in this chain of activism.

Contemplating a figure like Claudia Jones, beyond the recovery it demands, entails a rereading of figures like St. Clair Drake within the context of transnational black radicalism. For scholars like Drake, the logic of being a “committed black scholar”—and his bracketed “and one would hope that most of them would be committed”—provides a refreshing antidote to a certain individualistic and opportunistic turn in Africana studies and the challenge in African literary circles about why one should be committed and to what one should be committed.¹⁰ Drake’s identification is clear that it should be a commitment to “Liberation activity.” And significantly, his African diasporic approach is one that charted a political and research agenda incorporating black British, Caribbean, African American, and African subjects and practice. It is significant then that it is the work of Cade Bambara in editing *The Black Woman* that performs the interventionist work and therefore creates the intellectual and political bridge between the generations of activism and, indeed, scholarship. Gaines is cognizant of this, as is Patricia Saunders; both recognize this emplacement in the recovery of a radical black female subject. One has to include then, as *Left of Karl Marx* does, the reference to Francis Beale’s “Double Jeopardy,” which is also included in *The Black Woman* and which describes an economic basis for black feminist activity.

Saunders’s “Woman Overboard: The Perils of Sailing the Black Atlantic, Deportation with Prejudice” is first of all a wonderfully titled essay; it made me recall Audre Lorde’s “sister outsider” formation, which I use as a title for this response. And indeed Saunders’s article lives up to its titular promise. Saunders, as a scholar of Caribbean literature and black women’s writing in the diaspora, applies another, more contemporary legal formation: “deportation with prejudice.” “With prejudice” is an amazingly weighty term if ever there was ever one; many of us experience “residence with prejudice,” in this case, racial, ethnic, and the like.

Interestingly, the case against Jones and her codefendants was remedied in a subsequent case—*Yates v. the United States*, 354 U.S. 298 (1957)—which argued that having political

8 J. R. Hooker, *Henry Sylvester Williams: Imperial Pan-Africanist* (London: Rex Collings, 1975), 28–30.

9 Kevin Gaines, “From Center to Margin: Internationalism and the Origins of Black Feminism,” in Russ Castronovo and Diane D. Nelson, eds., *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 294.

See also Toni Cade Bambara, *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (New York: Signet, 1970).

10 Drake, “The Black Diaspora in Pan-African Perspective,” 3.

views was not the same as acting on them. This allowed for a new trial, and Jones could have returned to have her case overturned. But by then many of her colleagues who had been so embattled had moved on to other lives or indeed had had their lives significantly destroyed by the state. In my view, Jones as well was by then so heavily involved in the London community that a return to the United States would no longer have interested her. She had other vistas that she wanted to engage—China, Japan, and Russia, and definitely her own developing African Caribbean community in London.

I find compelling the arguments that Saunders makes and find helpful the questions she raises, as well as her answers, as she attempts to understand and tease out the reasons for Jones's absence from a variety of formations. Gaines provided one articulation of this that rested on cold war repression of other black activists. Saunders's early questions address Jones's "unrecoverability" based on place of origin, her location as a black British subject. But most important is Saunders's question: "Are there other relevant critical debates that have not yet been brought to bear on histories of Caribbean radicalism in African American political and cultural history . . . ?"

While she answers this affirmatively, Saunders's substantive assertion is that "Jones's ideological positions and activist praxis are represented and rendered (in equally meticulous detail and complexity) by black women writing during the same period as Jones's activism." To cement her very credible assertion, she goes to the work of both Paule Marshall and Zora Neale Hurston. The fact is these literary works do fulfill the restitution of the issues that were paramount among black activists of the time. And in my view, these signal a point that is made by Gaines about the radical Harlem Writers Guild and its influence: that these writers sought out radical subjects that were everywhere in their orbit and community experience. It allows us to talk, then, about some generic commonalities that seem to run through this time period.

Essentially, these commonalities to me are the "recoverable" subject matter of black radicalism that *Left of Karl Marx* helps to initiate. The recent work on the Sojourners for Truth and Justice by Erik McDuffie is but another point of connection and affiliation.¹¹

Saunders provides a fascinating reading of Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), finding numerous co-articulations, from "day work" to the role of the mother, and showing how ethnic lines are drawn on each side and how other "deportable subjects" are produced within the diasporized communities, that is, those "not solely the dominion of the nation-state." Both Deighton and Suggie become "alien/outside" in this upwardly mobile Barbadian community and are summarily removed as well. And for Saunders, Claudia Jones, with her Marxist-Leninist politics, would have also been "unrecognizable" among a Caribbean/black community struggling to make a living in the United States. Still, in some ways, Saunders sees her almost like Silla, willing to do whatever is needed to exercise her political convictions. To

11 See Erik S. McDuffie, "A 'New Freedom Movement of Negro Women': Sojourning for Truth, Justice, and Human Rights during the Early Cold War," *Radical History Review*, no. 101 (Spring 2008): 81–106; and Erik S. McDuffie, "Sojourners for Truth and Justice," in Carole Boyce Davies, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora*, 3 vols. (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 3:845–48.

Saunders, Claudia Jones is not so much an anomaly, but someone who has a certain belonging among the women in these narrative representations of the black trans-Atlantic and in the larger canon of black diaspora writing.

But this is precisely the point: Jones was not a fictional character, and reading her like one in a sense denies the agency that she fought to achieve. For one thing, her work among black working women, and in particular her struggle for the rights of domestic workers that I document, resonates with the same issues raised by Marshall and would have definitely made Jones recognizable. And she was herself a Caribbean working-class woman with family similarly located and therefore also was recognizable at this level. Reports are that Claudia spent a great deal of her time doing community work, helping people with housing both in Harlem and in London, working on immigration issues and for black political rights. And these accomplishments are sometimes more recognizable to community than to those in the academy. True, looking back from our relatively tame political lives, someone who made the choices that Claudia Jones and her colleagues made would come across as larger than life, as fictional almost, except to those who knew them personally. And even then, as often happens to figures like Jones, whether Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, or Harriet Tubman, with time they enter a certain mythology that renders them larger than life. It is always helpful in these contexts to remember that Harriet Tubman is buried in Auburn, New York, where she ended her years, married to a man who was at least twenty years her junior.

An interesting point that Saunders skillfully navigates around, and one that was not substantially raised in *Left of Karl Marx* (though it appears in Winston James's *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*), is the troubled location of the "West Indian" radical or Caribbean person in general. Saunders's interesting discussion about the logic of "belonging" in its various discursive registers is one that problematizes residential time. We do know, as Winston James shows us and Harold Cruse had asserted in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), that many of the New York radicals and Communists were "West Indian men," who, although they saw their plight as tied to US African Americans (of longer residence), were not American. The Claudia Jones case further complicates this Crusean position, for clearly Jones was a woman and also a Communist. One of the points I make in *Left of Karl Marx* is that in Cruse's formulation, the particular subjectivity of a Claudia Jones is rendered nonexistent. Paradoxically, it is also too problematic a subjectivity for the US government in its ability to account for women and black people in alliance with the working class.

Jones, for her part, was well aware of this complication that her gendered identity posed and said as much to interviewers whenever she was questioned. And both Gaines and Saunders agree that ironically it was her subjectivity as a "British subject" of African Caribbean origin that became the more integrative lever in her second wave of political activity in England, including her recognition of the nature of British colonialism. And importantly, there are still ongoing (though useless) debates in the United States (a nation of immigrants) about the logics of belonging based on generations of arrival.

Still, for me, Jones's internationalism in the United States had already provided her with the tools to read both the US and British varieties of imperialism as well as the related "immigration" policies, such as the then-impending Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1964. She does this well in her essays "The Caribbean Community in Britain," written for *Freedomways*, and "American Imperialism and the British West Indies."¹²

Saunders offers a very evocative reading of Jones's letter and poem written from Ellis Island, working the imagery of "ships" in relation to Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which also began with the "ships at a distance" image. This she sees as a more telling link than the Frederick Douglass construction of freedom in the vessels at a distance. Perhaps we can say they all belong to the same field of captivity and constructions of freedom and may be less gendered than evocative of containment.

But there is another letter Saunders cites: the one Jones wrote to Eric Williams in which she requests help with obtaining her passport and suggests two levels of discrimination as operable—being a Caribbean person and being a Marxist. These two selected identities here, along with two others we already know—her black and female identities—had been the causes for an ongoing personal history of difficulty. One would have to ask the activist, then, to renounce or give up her politics (as some did), but what about place of origin, gender, race? Better to fight, Jones would say, for a world where these oppressions do not have viability, as she claimed her political positions would fight.

The critique of the limitations of Marxism has been mounted by generations of intellectuals and activists.¹³ Many would abandon Marxism for this reason even if they worked with other organizations that included left positions and politics. The work of Oliver Cox and of a range of intellectuals—including George Padmore, and Aimé Césaire in *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955)—signify here. Some would also see a theoretical model that offered the best analysis of class, but needed contemporary applications, revisions, and expansions.

Angela Davis, the one visible Communist to make it through into the contemporary, sees a link "between the internationalism of Karl Marx's era and the new globalisms we are seeking to build today." The commodity that Marx identified in *Capital* "penetrated every aspect of people's lives all over the world in ways that have no historical precedent," she asserts in an interview, as she makes links with the global assembly line that has already been well documented.¹⁴ She also identifies her affinity with the Pan-Africanism of Du Bois, which made links with people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

This is what, in my viewpoint, put Claudia Jones and a range of left individuals like her on the other side of Marx, which can also be read as "beyond Marx." Claudia Jones would

12 Claudia Jones, "The Caribbean Community in Britain," *Freedomways* 4 (Summer 1964): 340–57; Claudia Jones, "American Imperialism and the British West Indies," *Political Affairs* 37 (April 1958): 9–18.

13 For a discussion of some of the internal contradictions of Marxism, see, for example, Louis Althusser, "Marx in His Limits," in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–1987* (London: Verso, 2006), 7–162.

14 Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (New York: Seven Stories, 2005), 25.

eventually do the same, in her work on the *West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News* (I identify this in chapters 2 and 5 of my book). As in her column *Half the World in the New York Daily Worker*, Jones spent a great deal of her time identifying the “half the world” logic in terms of accounting for women’s lives globally located in struggle, and black women in particular as domestic workers in the United States. In the *West Indian Gazette*, she gave space and voice to the articulation of political movements across the African world and with Amy Ashwood, who was on the newspaper’s editorial board and who had had a major role in founding the UNIA’s *Negro World*, Jones was able to give the newspaper its Pan-Africanist orientation.

Of course the specifics of black women’s location in society and the fact that, as people such as Sojourner for Truth and Justice members and others articulated, black women worked without any of the rewards, provide a whole other angle of reading this. Angela Davis’s early work on black women in the community of slaves began some of this discussion, one filled with a variety of other scholars, particularly the black women historians who provided some of these analyses. And the Davis interviews published in *Abolition Democracy* make interesting links with prison, torture, and related dehumanizations already in existence, allowing us to see the injustices against the larger working class rooted in part in the culture of torture perfected during New World enslavement.

I see my own work, then, as in the process of giving space and attention specifically to this erased person, Claudia Jones—definitely a transatlantic activist, a black radical intellectual from the Caribbean, who, in my own arguments, revolutionized Marxism-Leninism, in particular because she addressed in her time those issues that Marx and Lenin left unarticulated.¹⁵

Indeed, it is my assertion that correcting the erasure of thinkers like Claudia Jones who had already intervened, providing superb analyses of the issue of black women’s “super exploitation” and bridging to an understanding and articulation of the role of the “third world” in left politics, is part of the ongoing filling in of the blanks or connecting of the dots as it relates to the histories that we continue to live.

This is the point of departure that allows a work like *Left of Karl Marx* to identify the ways in which Claudia Jones, an African Caribbean activist/intellectual, redefined Marxism-Leninism to meet the needs of an analysis of the position of the black working class, issues of race, and the redefinition of the Caribbean diaspora in England as products of migration. For Jones would not be definable as a “black Marxist.” Indeed, she would be left out of all of those initial analyses of Marxism, which is of course the point of my book. As I argue, Marx, located specifically in historical time, was unable to account for issues of race, gender, and various black identities manifested in the twentieth century. Marx himself spoke about the need for new generations to remake philosophy in their own contexts. On that same Marx

15 Lenin had subsequently included the issues of colonialism and imperialism and the “negro question,” but from all accounts these were well instigated by the black leftist activists who attended the various Communist Internationals. Lenin would also similarly address the “woman question.”

bust in Highgate Cemetery, with its WORKERS OF ALL LANDS UNITE, is another sentiment: the philosophers of the world have interpreted the world, it is up to those following to change it. The limits of Marxism are many and, according to Robinson's well-developed argument in *Black Marxism*, it is only with Lenin that one begins to get any discussion of the colonial question and the "negro question," spurred on, we know, by black activists who demanded that these issues were put on the table.

Aimé Césaire, in his letter as he abandoned the Communist Party, talks about some of the limitations of Marxism:

What I demand of Marxism and Communism is that they serve the black peoples, not that the black peoples serve Marxism and Communism. Philosophies and movements must serve the people, not the people the doctrine and the movement. . . . A doctrine is of value only if it conceived by us and for us, and revised through us.

. . . We consider it our duty to make common cause with all who cherish truth and justice, in order to form organizations able to support effectively the black peoples in their present and future struggle—their struggle for justice, for culture, for dignity, for liberty. . . . Because of this, please accept my resignation from the Party.¹⁶

The "Party" here is of course the Communist Party and many other black intellectuals and activists would leave the party finding it not radical enough, namely, not equipped or unwilling to deal with race.

For Claudia Jones, the Communist Party and Marxism would be made to serve the people as Césaire wanted it to. Communism would become no more than a theoretical horse that Jones would ride in order to get to the issues that concerned her—the treatment of the oppressed black working-class subject. Still, those like Benjamin Davis and Claudia Jones who stayed in the Communist Party would suffer the reprisals for maintaining this intellectual and organizational connection.

The role of a women's organization like the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, of which Claudia was a member, again deserves recall, for the Sojourners also articulated a black left feminism. As a black women's organization it put together a call for black women's activism on myriad oppressions. According to McDuffie, they combined "Communist Party positions on race, gender, and class with black nationalism and black radical women's lived experiences."¹⁷ The Sojourners also made connections between their domestic condition and the international experiences of black women in places like South Africa. Members included Beulah Richardson, actress; Charlotta Bass, journalist; Eslanda Goode Robeson, wife of Paul Robeson; Shirley Graham Du Bois, wife of W. E. B. Du Bois; and Alice Childress, writer. McDuffie indicates that McCarthyism also shut down the Sojourners as it did the CPUSA's leadership, but there was always the same tension with the Communist Party (at that time represented by people like Claudia Jones) and the Sojourners, again on the race/class divide. But it would

16 Aimé Césaire, quoted in Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 260.

17 McDuffie, "A 'New Freedom Movement,'" 82.

provide an interesting context for understanding the field in which Claudia Jones operated. And significantly, McDuffie credited Claudia Jones with popularizing the “triple oppression” position—race, class, and gender—which would reappear as a Communist Party position.¹⁸

And Claudia Jones has to be credited for asserting, for all time, for the record, the place of the intellect for black women, in a public place—a US Courthouse, one of the centers of public discourse. Consider her “Speech to the Court” (1953), which Veronica Gregg in *Caribbean Women* retitles as “‘The Thinking Process . . . Defies Jailing,’” from one of the critical lines. Claudia’s declaration, “You dare not, gentlemen of the prosecution, assert that Negro women can think and speak and write!” has crucial meaning here.¹⁹ It signifies a claim for black women to intellectual work—thinking, speaking, and writing—which therefore, along with activism and the struggle for liberation of black people from racial, class, and gender oppression, also make them black radical intellectuals.

Claudia Jones, definitely a transatlantic activist, a black radical intellectual from the Caribbean, I argue, revolutionized Marxism-Leninism, particularly because she addressed in her time those issues that Marx and Lenin left unarticulated. Far from ever abandoning her Marxist-Leninist politics, she reshaped it in ways that expanded Marxism to account for black women, people of color, and African Caribbean migrants to Europe. In the end, these political and activist positions have become her lasting legacy. A postage stamp issued by the Royal Mail in October 2008 is but the most recent of these recognitions. Jones reenters history by different means—reenergized academic attention, intellectual discussions, a series of necessary homages for this sister who remained outside of the black intellectual tradition for far too long.

18 *Ibid.*, 85.

19 Claudia Jones, “‘The Thinking Process . . . Defies Jailing,’” in Gregg, *Caribbean Women*, 235.



Claudia Jones, circa 1951.

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