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Escaping the Master's House: Claudia Jones & The Black Marxist Feminist Tradition

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Abstract

In this Senior Project, I will argue that the path to liberation is through the discourse of Black Marxist Feminism as articulated by Caribbean political activist, Claudia Jones. The intersectional nature of such a discourse will encompass all who are oppressed —Black people, women, and workers. I explore what it means to be Black through the lens of Marcus Garvey, to be Woman through the lens of Monique Wittig, and to be a Worker through the lens of Karl Marx in order to understand Claudia Jones' standpoint on what it means to be at the intersection of all three. The purpose of this senior project is to center Claudia Jones because her work laid the foundation for liberation of all. I show that the oppressive structures of racism, sexism, capitalism, and imperialism will cease to exist with the establishment of Communism.

Introduction

Black Marxist Feminism is the route to the liberation of all, because the liberation of the Poor Black Woman (PBW) would mean the end of imperialism, racism, sexism, and capitalism. Claudia Jones is the embodiment of this multifaceted fight for liberation as she fought against the “gross neglect of Negro women¹” that personally affected her life day in and day out. Jones became the articulator of this oppression by highlighting the fact that the subjugation of Black people, women, and workers is structural; these groups need to be made inferior in order for the capitalist system to thrive. Capitalism needs the structural subordination of certain groups in order for the system to exist. This senior project will explore how the intersectional politics of Claudia Jones is instrumental to dismantling the systems of racism, sexism, capitalism, and imperialism.

Claudia Vera Cumberbatch was a black, immigrant, working woman who was born in Belmont, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad in 1915². She died December 24th, 1964³, two years after her country became independent. Her compounded reality was felt as soon as she arrived in Harlem in 1924,⁴ in the mist of the Harlem Renaissance, the rise of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and the rise of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA). In this hot-bed of race and class consciousness, she came to understand that she was the “Other,” her identities existing only in relation to the White, the Man, and capitalism and not in as ends in themselves. Her

¹ Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 3.

² Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2011), 96.

³ Davies, XXVII.

⁴ McDuffie, 96.

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consciousness of the compounded oppression came about with the death of her mother, Sybil Cumberbatch, when she was thirteen. She claimed later that her mother “died, in essence, from exhaustion from working long hours in a filthy Harlem garment factory, tending to her family, and confronting racism in the United States.”⁵ Jones saw first hand the effects of capitalism, sexism, and racism on a PBW. Claudia Jones organized around the country and wrote to speak out against the oppressive forces of capitalism, starting with changing her last name to “Jones” and joining the Young Communist League USA to advocate against the Scottsboro Boys case in 1936.⁶ There is no clear reasoning as to why she chose to change her last name but it has been theorized that she did it to appear “more American” and to protect her family from possibly being linked to her communist work⁷.

I choose Claudia Jones to be the focal point of this project because she put forth the argument that sexism and racism stems from capitalism; She chose to spread awareness of this through publications like “Claudia’s Comments” and *The West Indian Gazette*, despite the criminalization of her ideology under the Smith Act of 1940 and the McCarran-Walter Act.⁸ The Smith Act of 1940 “made it a criminal offense to advocate the violent overthrow of the government or to organize or be a member of any group or society devoted to such advocacy.”⁹ The McCarran-Walter Act “focused upon denying immigrants who were unlawful, immoral,

⁵ McDuffie, 97.

⁶ Davies, XXIV.

⁷ McDuffie, 94.

⁸ Davies, 134.

⁹ "Smith Act," Encyclopedia Britannica Online, Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d. Web, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Smith-Act>

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diseased in any way, politically radical etc.”¹⁰ Both of these Acts contributed to the deportation of Claudia Jones because she was still in the process of getting her citizenship in the United States when she was arrested under the Smith Act and the McCarran-Walter Act denied her citizenship. Jones’ criminalization highlighted the human rights violations that occurred against the marginalized. She, along with four other members of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA), argued that their rights were being violated under Articles 2 and 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).¹¹ These articles state that people have a freedom of political opinion and cannot face arbitrary arrest.¹² The suppression of perceived “radical” political opinions is what has killed many movements, but Jones refused to be silenced. She showed that racism and sexism are tools (of subjugation) from the Master in order to maintain the Master’s house of capitalism.¹³ By doing away with the tools, according to Jones, the house would be left to crumble.

In this essay, I will argue that in order for us to understand how Claudia Jones got to Black Marxist Feminism, we need to understand what it means to be Black, to be Woman, and to be a Worker. This will lead us to the culmination of what it means to be at the intersection of all

¹⁰ "U.S. Immigration Legislation: 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act (McCarran-Walter Act)." U.S. Immigration Legislation: 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act (McCarran-Walter Act). N.p., n.d. Web. http://library.uwb.edu/static/USimmigration/1952_immigration_and_nationality_act.html

¹¹ Davies, 136.

¹² "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." United Nations. United Nations, n.d. Web. <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

¹³ Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, Edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. (New York: New, 1995), 285.

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three identities. This dissection of identities is necessary because The Poor Black Woman (PBW) has been lumped into the struggles for Black people, women, and workers without any true position within them. The PBW is the proletariat who is always spoken for, but never about, which is why these groups have yet achieved liberation. The triple oppression¹⁴ that the PBW faces is not addressed in Black Nationalist Movements like that of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), in Feminist ideology like that of Monique Witting, and in Workers' unionization like in Karl Marx's writings. Exploring these identities through the lenses of these figures will help us better understand why Claudia Jones opted to make her own ideology that centralizes the PBW. There has been a lack of exploration of the intersection of these identities and Jones' ideology showcases the silencing in that of Garvey, Witting, and Marx, and their failure to conceptualize the intersection of any identity within the context of racist, sexist, and capitalist oppression.

There has not been a lot of literature on Claudia Jones. One can assume that this is the case because she was a Black immigrant communist woman during the height of the criminalization of communism, the subjugation of Black people, immigrants, and women already a part of the fabric of the United States. The most extensive piece of literature on Claudia Jones is Carole Boyce Davies' *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*. This is the only novel that is centered around Claudia Jones, showing her development into communism, her deportation, and her continued work in London until her death. Davies shows how Claudia Jones' identities of "black, woman, Caribbean-born, pan-Africanist,

¹⁴ Claudia Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!" in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, Edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. (New York: New, 1995), 110.

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antiracist, anti-imperialist, feminist”¹⁵ shaped Claudia Jones’ consciousness. Her standpoint forced her to try to escape her compounded oppression through alternative means instead of working within the systems founded on her oppression.

I found Claudia Jones in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City. The Claudia Jones Memorial Collection (1935-1998) humanized Claudia Jones with its countless letters of correspondence between friends and comrades, the photos with political figures like Amy Ashwood Garvey, her poetry, and clippings from *The West Indian Gazette*. Davies’ *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* highlights the fact that Claudia Jones is buried literally to the left of Karl Marx, but the archive highlighted that she did not have a headstone on her grave until twenty years after her death.¹⁶ The importance of Claudia Jones was forgotten, not having a headstone solidifying that. Claudia Jones’ work as a Black marxist feminist was taken for granted it seems with no one able to mark her legacy of being left of Marx.

I chose the advocate of Blackness to be Marcus Garvey because he started one of the largest international Black Nationalist Movements, the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The UNIA “had over eight hundred chapters in forty different countries on four different continents; it had nearly a million members and two or three times as many participants in its activities.”¹⁷ Marcus Garvey and the UNIA best represented Blackness and race pride in

¹⁵ Davies, 5.

¹⁶ Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library Claudia Jones Memorial Collection 1935-1998, Box 3, Folder 3.

¹⁷ Theodore G. Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement*, (Berkeley, CA.: Ramparts, 1971), 13.

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that period because of their wide reach. Garvey advocated for the liberation of Africa and its peoples in order for the “Negro” to truly have a fair chance within the capitalist system that all of the world partakes in. Blackness, to Garvey, meant inferiority within the context of land that did not belong to Black people. Thus the “dark continent” had to be liberated for and by Black people in order for the full potential of Blackness to come into fruition. Garvey was a big proponent of racial pride and self-reliance — ideals that have been maintained in Black culture to this very day and are evident within Claudia Jones’ ideology. To be Black, to Garvey, is to be proud and to be able to produce for self. In order to debunk all the false preconceptions of Blackness that stem from structural discrimination, Black people have to prove themselves as true and important producers within society, especially capitalist producers who can produce for self. Garvey realized that Blackness would always be regarded as the Other within the borders of their oppressors.

In examining what it means to be a Woman, I engage with “The Category of Sex” by Monique Wittig, as Wittig explores concepts of “the One” and “the Other”¹⁸ in the context of sex. She explains that to be Woman is to be always in relation to what is Man. In order for Man to be the One, Woman had to be established as the Other in all facets of society. This explains Her relegation to the private sector, furthering Her subjugation because whatever may happen to Her now occurs outside of the lens of the public. Her sex becomes her marker of the naturalization of her production; the Woman’s work in the home and her production and parenting of children are seen as natural attributes of the Woman as opposed to work within

¹⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Arnold V. Miller, and J. N. Findlay, “Phenomenology of Spirit,” (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977).

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itself. Because of this, the Woman is oppressed through the minimization of what are perceived as Her functions. With the minimization of work comes the minimization of value, as the Woman is disrespected with no or little forms of justice for said disrespect. Her disrespect manifests in the naturalization of her work and in instances of domestic violence, where the police would not even intervene to save Her from such conditions.¹⁹ She is left to fend for herself in a society that has made it such that she cannot truly do so. Her identity is contingent on that of Man within society, always posed as his opposite in order for the binary of male and female to function, just as the Slave will always need a Master. In order for this inequality of the sexes to cease, Wittig advocated for the complete eradication of the binary in itself.²⁰ It is not until then that the Woman will be liberated.

To be a Worker is to live the structural alienation of which Karl Marx speaks. In *“The Communist Manifesto, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, Wage-Labour and Capital, and Capital*, Marx highlights that there needs to always be a surplus of workers in order for capitalism to work. This surplus allows for super-exploitation because the Worker then become disposable and solely of instrumental value. This degradation of the Worker is then reflected in his pay, one that keeps him within the cycle of poverty and labor surplus. The Worker is further degraded in the fact that his labor is not his own. The alienation of the Worker from his product strips him of his intrinsic value because the Worker would not be able to be the Producer. The Worker cannot be nothing more than an instrument of the product. Marx argues for the dismantling of capitalism because it a system that is built on the backs of other without the

¹⁹ Monique Wittig, "The Category of Sex," Comp. Diana Leonard and Lisa Adkins. *Sex in Question: French Materialist Feminism*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), 28.

²⁰ Wittig, 29.

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proper recognition or treatment, a system that has to have a surplus of Workers in order for it to function. Capitalism proved to be an oppressive system, to Marx, that needed to be done away with in order for all people to be liberated through Communism. Class status would then no longer be the reason why people cannot access certain resources; it would not be the reason why people are stripped of their intrinsic value. History has shown us that capitalism has always manifested in the structural oppression of the many for the success of the few and Marx advocated for the revolutionary overthrow of this system.²¹

Claudia Jones lived the life at and wrote about the intersection of Blackness, Womanhood, and a Worker, choosing to advocate for all three of her identities. Too many times the Poor Black Woman (PBW) has been forced to sacrifice one identity in order to make progress towards liberating another. Black feminist scholar, Patricia Hill-Collins stated:

African-American women's oppression has encompassed three interdependent dimensions. First, the exploitation of Black women's labor essential to U.S. capitalism...Second, the political dimension of oppression has denied African-American women the rights and privileges routinely extended to White male citizens...Finally, controlling images applied to Black women that originated during the slave era attest to the ideological dimension of U.S. Black women's oppression... Taken together, the supposedly seamless web of economy, polity, and ideology function as a highly effective system of social control designed to keep African-American women in an assigned, subordinate place.²²

Claudia Jones chose to tackle all that comes with the PBW in order for Her and subsequently everyone else to be liberated. Living at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression brought Jones to consciousness. She chose to further explore the intersection of race, class, and gender

²¹ Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto." *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Edited by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 246.

²² Patricia Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 6-7.

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through Communism and writing. Her erasure is unfortunate, but expected, as every PBW is always relegated to the margins. I have chosen to have Claudia Jones as the center of this paper, where PBWs, especially those who fought for the liberation of all, should be.

To Be Black: Claudia Jones, Marcus Garvey, and Race

“Imperialism is the root cause of racialism. It is the ideology which upholds colonial rule and exploitation. It preaches the ‘superiority’ of the white race whose ‘destiny’ it is to rule over those with coloured skins, and to treat them with contempt. It is the ideology which breeds Fascism, rightly condemned by the civilized people the whole world.”²³

- Claudia Jones

To be Black in the 1920s and 1930s was framed significantly by the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) Movement led by Marcus Garvey. Claudia Jones essentially grew up with the UNIA, as it was established a year before her birth and was at its peak in her early twenties in Harlem. Claudia Jones grew up in the era of Black Nationalism in the hotbed of black diasporic radicalism which explains why Blackness has always been a central theme of her ideology. Blackness, according to Claudia Jones, is always in relation to gender and class.

To be Black is to constantly demand respect of self and from other. Marcus Garvey stressed that Black people must establish themselves and Africa, due to the lack of respect given to them; Black people cannot advance without self-established success. Black people have to learn self-reliance in order to be successful within the capitalist structure. He explained that the “Negro will have to build his own government, industry, art, science, literature, and culture, before the world will stop to consider him. Until then, we are but wards of a superior race and civilization, and the outcasts of a standard social system.”²⁴ Black people must be self-reliant and establish themselves within the same system that oppressed them in order for their emancipation to come about; they must fight to have a seat at the table. Black people cannot rely on progress being handed to them because it will never come. In the words of Claudia Jones, it is “a pious

²³ Davies, 87.

²⁴ Bob Blaisdell, ed. “An Appeal to the Conscience of the Black Race to See Itself” of the , *Selected Writings and Speeches of Marcus Garvey* (New York: Dover Publications, 2005): 140.

hope that the struggle for full economic, social, and political equality for the Negro people would be ‘legislated’ and somehow brought into being through reforms from on top.”²⁵ Claudia Jones believed that liberation would not be handed down to Black people, but demanded and fought for and by the people — a similarity between her and Marcus Garvey. Garvey highlighted that liberation will never come about for Black people until they liberate themselves and their homeland. There was an understanding that liberation will not be given because Black people were made inferior for the sake of exploitation so Black people will have to establish their own empire in Africa.²⁶ Claudia Jones differed from Marcus Garvey on the fact that equality could only come about on the African continent because she did not think it was practical to move all Black people back to Africa. Is that truly equality? According to Claudia Jones, there needs to be a fight for liberation all around the world, allowing Black people to be free wherever they may be.

Black people were a “nation within a nation”²⁷, and this narrative was resonated in Claudia Jones’ ideology. She saw that the treatment of her people maintained their exclusion in the countries in which they had no choice to be. Although Jones was not an advocate for the “back to Africa” aspect of Garveyism due to its impracticality, the ideal that Black people will never reach equality in the United States because of the structural racism ingrained in the country remained. The Garvey Movement was “an indigenous product, arising from the soil of Black super-exploitation and oppression in the United States. It expressed the yearning of millions of

²⁵ Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist*, (Chicago: Liberator, 1978), 551.

²⁶ Blaisdell, 72.

²⁷ Davies, 3.

Blacks for a nation of their own.”²⁸ This yearning for a “nation of their own” was transformed from that of a physical Black nation into every nation being a nation of equality for all within Claudia Jones’ ideology. Black exploitation was (and still remains) an international phenomena so it is not practical to “return home” but to fight for equality in the different countries that benefited from the forced dispersal of Black people. Black people were forced to sever ties with their homeland for the benefits of capitalism and were alienated in their host lands, causing them to become a stateless peoples, not truly belonging to a particular nation. Claudia Jones and Marcus Garvey both combatted this statelessness by building transnational networks with Black people globally; they created their own nation ideologically.

Black people had to possess as much knowledge and power in order for their nation-state to thrive. Garvey stated: “It is advisable for the Negro to get power of every kind. Power in education, science, industry, politics, and higher government. That kind of power that will stand out on its own, so that other races and nations can see, and if they will not see, then feel.”²⁹ Black people have to gain as much power as possible in order to show other nations that they can in fact possess and exercise power. Garvey called on Black people to see their situations in their respective countries and fix them by developing the race as a whole. If there is no development then there will never be respect for the race. Garvey explains: “not until the Negro is lifted to the highest standard of humanity; not until the Negro is given the privilege and opportunities of other races; not until then will we sit around the table of peace —the table at which humanity

²⁸ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina, 2000), 223.

²⁹ Vincent, 18.

will end its troubles.”³⁰ Black people have not been afforded the same opportunities as their white counterparts therefore they must fight to be afforded every opportunity they can to develop their African Empire.

The first step towards development is through the appeal to the consciousness of Black people’s position in the world and their potential. Garvey awakened the consciousness of Black peoples by highlighting how slavery has impacted Black people psychologically. The social construction of race was to maintain their subjugation.³¹ He further states “we are still slaves, we are industrial slaves, we are social slaves, we are political slaves, and the new Negro desires a freedom that has no boundary, no limit. We desire a freedom that will lift us to the common standard of all men...”³² He pushes this consciousness further as he calls for initiatives to demonstrate it; racial pride means nothing without material backing. In order to maintain the race, Black businesses needed to be established. Being black and proud is nothing if you do not have anything to be proud about. This appeal to consciousness was a central part of Claudia Jones’ work. As a journalist, her work was focused on highlighting the position of Black people internationally and advocated for the resolution — Communism. Communism would allow for Black people to escape from the exploitative nature of capitalism and afford them the same opportunities of which Garvey spoke. According to Jones, the humanity and dignity of the Black

³⁰ Blaisdell, 43.

³¹ Blaisdell, 140.

³² Blaisdell, 46.

race for which Garvey fought will be able to come to fruition fully within a Communist society because the end of capitalism would mean the end of racism.³³

To be Black is to be regarded as something other than human; one's subjugation comes from the mere fact that one is Black. This notion was deeply frowned upon by Garvey because there is no way to gain respect if one is not regarded as human. Black people have to first establish their humanity then rally for respect. Garvey explains:

No portion of humanity, no group of humanity, has an abiding right, an everlasting right, an eternal right to oppress other sections or portions of humanity. God never gave them the right, and if there is such a right, man arrogated it to himself, and God in all ages has been displeased with the arrogance of man.³⁴

Racism was a man-made phenomenon that went against God, according to Garvey. Because of this phenomenon, Black people were not unable to get a fair shake within the capitalist system. Claudia Jones explained the nuance of capitalism as she stated, "Discrimination is man-made and is based on the exploitation for profit at the expense of colonial and newly-independent peoples as an integral part of the imperialist system, which oppresses other nations using racialism to disrupt working class unity."³⁵ Racism and discrimination is always and has been tied to capitalism, as oppression has to happen in order for the system to work. This has led to the stripping Black people of their personhood, making it that much harder for them to reach their full potential as a race. This would be perpetuated with the return of African descendants because

³³ William P. Patterson, "Remarks on the Eve of the Deportation of Claudia Jones", Box 1, Folder 3, Claudia Jones Memorial Collection 1935-1998, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

³⁴ Blaisdell, 50.

³⁵ Claudia Jones. "Dr. Luther King's Warning." *West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian-Caribbean News* (London Dec. 1965), Vol 7.

the “newly independent peoples” of Africa will experience a new form of colonization. It is possible that the westernized descendants would try to “develop” the continent and subjugate the people of the continent in the process because the continent would no longer belong to the people who live there. The continent would become that of the descendants, the romanticism of Garveyism encouraging them to “civilize” Africa.

In order for the Black race to thrive, according to the UNIA, separation of all races in all senses had to come about.³⁶ Garvey and the UNIA advocated for the Black continent to be liberated and inhabited by Black people in order for equality of opportunities to materialize. There has been structures put in place to maintain “the Negro’s” position in the world that would be done away with under the African Empire, where “the Negro” would be favored instead of loathed. The subjugation of Black people is needed in order for Whiteness to succeed. This is perpetuated by the structure of capitalism, where there must be a worker in order for it to exist. Marcus Garvey advocated against racialized capitalism, not capitalism itself. He did not see that racism is a product of capitalism. Garvey’s westernization seems to have blinded him leading him to continue the implementation of a Western ideal, capitalism, in the Continent. This highlights the situation of the African Descendant who tried to reconcile with the severance of African culture with the Master’s tools. He tries to use the same system that oppressed his people to stop their exploitation. Claudia Jones harshly critiqued capitalism because she saw that her and the PBW’s oppression(s) was rooted in this system; Capitalism could never be the route to liberation. Jones recognized how racism and sexism were tools of the capitalist system³⁷ used to

³⁶ Vincent, 20-21.

³⁷ Davies, 79.

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designate and relegate Black people and Women to the position of laborer. In other words, a Black capitalist does not mean that exploitation will cease to exist. It, in turn, will manifest in some other form of subjugation that would most likely impact the PBW.

To Be Woman: Claudia Jones, Monique Wittig, and Sex

“The capitalists exploit women doubly, both as workers and women. Women have to face special oppression in every field in capitalist society — as a worker, a wife, homebuilder and citizen”³⁸
- Claudia Jones

To be Woman, according to Claudia Jones, is “to face special oppression”³⁹ which stems from the construction of Man. The male/female binary presents difference as natural/biological and this manifests economically and socially. The idea of man defines the idea of woman, making her subjugation unnatural, yet one of construct. Monique Wittig’s “The Category of Sex” highlights the special oppression that the Woman faces by addressing the material impact of the sex binary. Claudia Jones will then show the erased experience of the PBW within Wittig’s framework. In other words, race is ignored in Wittig’s framework as a factor that shapes a woman’s experience. Claudia Jones highlights the intersection of race and gender because it constitutes a different reality than that of a white woman. What it means to be a Black Woman, looking at the life of Claudia Jones, is to not belong to anyone but herself. Jones was briefly married to a Jewish man named Abraham Scholnick but was implicated in extramarital affairs with other Communist Party members.⁴⁰ She was not bound to a husband and had no children so she definitely did not fit into Wittig’s framework. PBWs rarely did.

To be Woman is to be a slave, made for the sake of oppression. Monique Wittig explains, “The perennality of the sexes and the perennality of slaves and masters proceed from the same belief, and, as there are no slaves without masters, there are no women without men... There is no sex. There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex

³⁸ Davies, 46-47.

³⁹ Davies, 46-47.

⁴⁰ Davies, 52-53.

and not the contrary.”⁴¹ The category of women is born out of the structural oppression, not of the natural inferiority of half of the population. Similarly, slavery was a structure of oppression that was justified as a “civilizing project” of Black people. In order for Woman to be liberated, according to Wittig, sex must be done away with,⁴² because to be Woman is to be lesser than socially and economically. The woman faces subjugation within both the private and public sectors because her work is not validated as such within the household and she is not valued as highly of her male counterpart. She must face such subjugation because the capitalist system cannot work without her exploitation. Just as Black people are and have been subjected to certain realities, as has the woman for the sake of production. Her (re)production is essential to maintaining and replenishing the working population, but this power is minimized in order to make sure she is unable to achieve status economically.

To be Woman is to be a social construct, where her sex is seen as a “biological” difference that determines a “natural division of labor in the family.”⁴³ Sex roles have been so far ingrained within our society that naturalization of certain functions. This is exemplified by the idea that, because women can give birth, all women naturally want to have children and then take care of said children. All women do not want to have children, but these women are looked down upon because it is “believe[d] that before society and in all societies they are subject to the obligation to reproduce.”⁴⁴ Woman’s minimization is perpetuated by this idea that gender roles

⁴¹ Wittig, 25-26.

⁴² Wittig, 29.

⁴³ Wittig, 27.

⁴⁴ Wittig, 28.

existed before the establishing of society, as it is made to seem that this is just the way it is and there isn't anything that can be done to unravel this social construct. This "natural division" minimizes the woman's work as such. Her relegation to the home allows for her exploitation as being a mother and doing housework has been deemed as a natural obligation of the woman. The heteronormative nature of sex means not only that women must be attracted to men, but have to also encompass all the stereotypes of women, like women are naturally nurturing.

Monique Wittig argues that the concept of sex is created through oppression because biological differences are used as the basis to subject women to the treatment that they face. Women are susceptible to cruel treatment because they are relegated to the private sector, where their husbands can do whatever they may please to them. She states, "Being murdered, mutilated, physically and mentally tortured and abused, being raped, being battered, and being forced to marry is the fate of women. And fate supposedly cannot be changed."⁴⁵ Women are treated in these manners, because they are socialized to believe that this is a part of their existence. Women have to be told how to avoid things like being raped, as if they are the ones asking for such treatment, whereas men are not taught to not perpetrate such behavior. The relegation to the private sphere is highlighted when women sign the marriage contract, as they shift from being a citizen of the state to a citizen of their husbands. Women are now agents of their husbands, perpetuated by the way offenses against women by their husbands are addressed by police:

"The police intervene with the specific charge of assault and battery when one citizen beats another citizen. But a woman who has signed a marriage contract has thereby ceased to be an ordinary citizen (protected by laws). The police openly express their aversions to getting involved in domestic affairs (as opposed to civil affairs), where the authority of the state does not have to intervene directly since it is relayed through that of

⁴⁵ Wittig, 26.

the husband. One has to go to shelters for battered women to see how far this authority can be exercised.”⁴⁶

Offenses that affect women, like domestic abuse, are seen to be outside of the laws’ jurisdiction, because the majority of them occur in the women’s realm, the private sphere. That being said, we are left to question who would protect a woman if the one person ordained to do so, her husband, is her violator. Until the concept of sex in society is done away with, Wittig argues, women will not get to be autonomous figures and offenses perpetrated against women will never be validated as true offenses.

Monique Wittig’s argument of the structural degradation of the Woman includes her equating the position of the Woman in relation to men to that of the slave in relation to the master, because the Black Woman becomes erased within this narrative. She speaks of slavery as 1) something of the past and 2) something outside of the scope of sex. Both approaches are problematic, because this makes it seem as though the Black Woman is partially liberated due to the fact that “the ‘declaration’ of ‘colour’ is now considered discriminatory”⁴⁷ because slavery was abolished and disregards the continued oppression experienced by Black people. Monique Wittig highlights that woman’s subjugation is and has always been tied to the body, but does not explore the nuanced experience of the PBW’s labor stemming from slavery and continuing to today. Claudia Jones explains the intersection of Woman and Worker as she states, “The capitalists exploit women doubly, both as workers and women. Women have to face special oppression in every field in capitalist society — as a worker, a wife, homebuilder and citizen”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Wittig, 28.

⁴⁷ Wittig, 29.

⁴⁸ Davies, 46-47.

Labor has been built into the very fabric of Woman, naturalizing Her work in the home. This is compounded when one looks at the situation of the PBW. Black women were not treated as women but were expected and forced to utilize their bodies to produce more labor for plantations. The slave women became machines physically and biologically. Sojourner Truth questioned,

“Dat man ober dar say dat womin needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber halps me into carriages, or ober mudpuddles, or gibs me any best place! And raising herself to her full height, and her voice to a pitch like rolling thunder, she asked, "And ar'n't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ar'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man -- when I could get it -- and bear de lash as well! And ar'n't I a woman? I have borne thirteen chilern, and seen 'em mos' all sold off the slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ar'n't I a woman?"⁴⁹

Truth showcased what it means to live at intersection of Blackness and Womaness, as she utilized as a Black person and Woman as modes of production. Because of this, she is left stuck between the masculinity often associated with Blackness and the biological stress of Womaness, without any clear path of what it means to be both.

Claudia Jones identified with Wittig's ideology, arguing and showcasing the doubly oppressive status of the Working Woman, but Jones pushes it further by highlighting the suppression of the PBW. The simplification of womanhood to what seems to be a white woman's position erases the narrative of the Black Woman, as her subjugation manifests in different ways. The Black Woman is related to the private sphere, but not her own. The Black Woman had to work as a domestic, leaving her to be away from her own family and work for small wage.

⁴⁹Sojourner Truth, "Woman's Rights." in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, Edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. (New York: New, 1995), 36.

Economically and socially, the Black Woman is valued as lesser than, as she works for little and still has to support her own family. Claudia Jones explained, “The very economic relationship of the Negro women to white women, which perpetuates ‘madam-maid’ relationships, feeds chauvinist attitudes and makes it incumbent on the white women progressives, and especially Communists, to fight consciously against all manifestations of white chauvinism, open and subtle.”⁵⁰ White women must break from the ideal that womanhood is all that they experience and fight as aggressively against white chauvinism as Black women. Until this break happens, the PBW will continue to be relegated within the fight of liberation. The PBW will have to do all for/ wait on white women knowing that She will not get anything in return. Claudia Jones called for white women to end the perpetuation of the Negro Woman as domestic worker, because continuing this relegation would mean that the PBW will never have the freedom for which She fights.

The lack of exploration of the differences that exist within women by Wittig completely erases the narrative of Claudia Jones and others like her. If the White Woman is used as the definition of what it is to be Woman, the Black Woman ceases to exist. The liberation of women cannot come about through the erasure of those who are not characterized as the epitome of what Woman is, but through their inclusion. If the Black Woman continues to be erased, liberation of women cannot come about because oppression will continue to plague those who adhere to this category.

⁵⁰ Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class*, (London: Womens, 1986), 169.

To Be A Worker: Claudia Jones, Karl Marx, and Class

“A people’s art is the genesis of their freedom.”⁵¹
Claudia Jones

To be a Worker is to be exploited and alienated, according to Claudia Jones. The Worker has always been framed through the lens of Karl Marx, a philosopher whose works were published between 1842 and 1894. He conceptualized what it means to be a Worker within the capitalist structure, highlighting the nuance of His exploitation. The theme of class and class struggle is central to Claudia Jones’ ideology as it is always in conjunction with race and gender. As highlighted before, she experienced the impact of exploitation of the PBW with her mother who “died, in essence, from exhaustion from working long hours in a filthy Harlem garment factory, tending to her family, and confronting racism in the United States.”⁵² Claudia Jones pushed for exploitation to be looked at through an intersectional lens because the PBW could not afford not to. The compounded exploitation because of the race and the gender of the PBW threatens her very livelihood. In the spirit of Karl Marx, Claudia Jones advocated for Communism to counteract such a threat. The full potential of the PBW could never materialize if they are not afforded the possibilities to succeed, Communism being the mechanism to give these opportunities. Claudia Jones joined the Communist Party of the United States because she felt as though Communism would be the route to true liberation. She outlined her path to such an ideology as such,

⁵¹ Davies, 167.

⁵² McDuffie, 97.

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“It was out of my jim crow experiences as a young Negro woman, experiences born of working class poverty that led me in search of why these things had to be, that led me to join the Young Communist League and to choose at the age of 18 the philosophy of my life - the science of Marxism-Leninism — that philosophy that not only rejects racist ideas but is the antithesis of them.”⁵³

Claudia Jones had to escape from capitalism in order for her identities as a Black Working Woman to exist in themselves as opposed to in relation to, Communism giving her that avenue. The exploration of this avenue laid out by Karl Marx will help us better understand Claudia Jones' class consciousness.

To be a Worker is to exist in order for others to profit. Karl Marx addresses the class struggles that have plagued Europe between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This antagonism can be simplified to the dynamic between the oppressor and the oppressed.⁵⁴ This antagonism has escalated to the point where the proletariat has lost his sense of self, as he is alienated from all he produces and is only left with the payment for his labor, wages. The proletariat has come to realize that all his work does not belong to him, but to his bourgeois counterpart. He became the slave to the bourgeoisie,⁵⁵ relying on the bourgeoisie to give them the wages they need to live. Marx explains the notion of alienated labor of the common state in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, as the worker becomes just another product of capitalism. The worker is left with no connection to what he produces, to other men as they are in competition, and with himself as his work does not belong to him. In order to stop this self-

⁵³William P. Patterson, “Remarks on the Eve of the Deportation of Claudia Jones” , Box 1, Folder 3, Claudia Jones Memorial Collection 1935-1998, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

⁵⁴ Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto." *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Edited by David McLellan, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 246.

⁵⁵ Marx, 251.

appropriation from persisting, Marx suggests that communism will instill back into the worker that they are ends as opposed to means to an end. Capitalism only promotes alienation, alienation that is harming the Worker and the community of men.⁵⁶

Marx highlights how private property sets the grounds for competition between workers and between workers and the owners of their work. The importance that is placed on being those who own property causes there to be a loss of community because all are focused on becoming the property owners and will do everything possible to obtain that goal or to maintain their standing as property owners. Marx states,

We presupposed private property, the separation of labor, capital, and land, and likewise of wages, profit, and ground rent; also division of labor; competition; the concept of exchange value, etc. Using the very words of political economy we have demonstrated that the worker is degraded to the most miserable sort of commodity; that the misery of the worker is in inverse proportion to the power and size of his production; that the necessary result of competition is the accumulation of capital in a few hands ... the whole society must fall apart into the two classes of the property owners and the propertyless workers.⁵⁷

Capitalism has become a system where the few property owners accumulate wealth while the many propertyless workers struggle to advance economically. The worker is left to depend on the few property owners, even though that means that the worker has to sacrifice his/her happiness. The worker must, then, come to terms with the fact that his/her work does not belong to him/her, but to those who hire the worker. Marx points to the inequality that is occurring in this process, because those who are propertyless do all the work but do not reap the benefits that the property owners do. The workers are paid wages before the product is completed without receiving any of

⁵⁶ Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts." *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Edited by David McLellan, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 86.

⁵⁷ Marx, 85.

the profit of the product itself,⁵⁸ leaving those who work do not own, the worker, as a means to an end. The worker is not and cannot be an end in his/herself. The work is not proportionately rewarded, as the worker cannot progress up the ladder because he/she does not own his/her work.

This is evident as Marx states,

The worker becomes poorer the richer is his production, the more it increases in power and scope. The worker becomes a commodity that is all the cheaper the more commodities he creates. The depreciation of the human world progresses in direct proportion to the increase in value of the world of things. Labor does not only produce commodities; it produces itself and the laborer as a commodity and that to the extent to which it produces commodities in general.⁵⁹

Workers become more and more expendable as their products are valued more in society because the property owners know that they can find another worker to do the same job. It has become more important to have the product than the people who make the product. Because of the lack of ownership of one's product, the laborer is simply a commodity producing other commodities. The worker gains self-recognition through externalization and objectification, according to Hegel, which are only beneficial to the worker when he is able to obtain that on which he worked. Without ownership, the worker's identity is outside of himself; the worker has no identity. The worker, thus, is more of a slave to capitalism as opposed to an important factor within it. The worker, then, becomes the Other, capitalism being the One.

Marx tackles the alienation of man from other men that is caused by the capitalistic system by pointing to how the propertyless react to their property-owning counterparts.

Antagonism occurs within this system as workers see that another man is oppressing him. There

⁵⁸ Karl Marx, "Wage-Labour and Capital." *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Edited by David McLellan, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 275.

⁵⁹ Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts." *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Edited by David McLellan, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 86.

is distrust within the community as all members do not and cannot see each other as equals.

Marx explains,

If he [the worker] relates to the product of his labor, his objectified labor, as to an object that is alien, hostile, powerful, and independent of him, this relationship implies that another man is the alien, hostile, powerful, and independent master of this object. If he relates to his own activity as to something unfree, it is a relationship to an activity that is under the domination, oppression, and yoke of another man.⁶⁰

The worker finds his work to belong to another as opposed to himself. This being the case, the worker does not view the “master of this object” as one to which he is equal. There is a clear constitutive relationship that is established. The master needs the slave and the slave needs the master for each to exist as such. The slave (the worker) will never form a relationship that culminates to more than master and slave because of the power that occurs in this relationship. The worker will always see his boss as his boss and the boss will see the worker as a worker, not simply as man. This system must be disrupted in order for this relationship to change.

Capitalism thrives on the surplus of labor, so structural employment had to come about in order to maintain it. Marx’s ideology of structural unemployment is explored in *Capital*, as he says,

If surplus laboring population is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this surplus population becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalistic accumulation, nay, a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable industrial reserve army, that belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost. Independently of the limits of the actual population, it creates, for the changing needs of the self-expansion of capital, a mass of human material always ready for exploitation.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Marx, 92.

⁶¹Karl Marx, "Capital." *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Edited by David McLellan, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 517.

Capitalism needs to have constant access to workers, causing the dependence of the worker on the capitalist system, as the worker knows that he/she could easily be replaced because there are always unemployed people. There grows the antagonism between the worker and the property owner, because the worker sees that he is of no value to the property owner. The realization of this structure by the worker could cause the unionization Marx advocated for to overthrow the bourgeoisie.⁶² It is not that there has been no attempt to overthrow the bourgeoisie, but that there have been successful attempts to undermine them, causing the relationship to remain. Marx and Engels explain in *The Communist Manifesto* that there has been a historical pattern that is bound to repeat itself with the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. There has always been an oppositional class relationship, which has just developed into the one that they speak of. This relationship will then lead to the societal reform. Marx and Engels state,

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman – in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary re-construction of society at large or in common ruin of the contending classes.⁶³

Marx and Engels have looked at the historical pattern of the economic structures of society as one of an oppressive dialectic – those who oppress and those who are oppressed. In time, these economic structures have been recreated, but with the same theme of oppression; It was the same oppression by different names.

⁶² Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto." *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Edited by David McLellan, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 252.

⁶³ Marx, 246.

To be a Worker is to be alienated. Capitalism needs to be dismantled in order for the proletariat to be liberated. To be Black, Woman, and Worker, according to Claudia Jones, is to be the proletariat. These identities are have always been in constant relation to each other starting with the establishment of slavery as a capitalist system. W.E.B. Du Bois explained that slavery stripped the intrinsic value of Black people claiming, “it was not as slaves that one could come to an understanding of the significance that these Black men, women, and children had for American development. It was as *labor*.”⁶⁴ Racialized slavery as a mode of production of labor dehumanized Black people, turning them into cogs in the machine of capitalism; Labor became the only importance of Black people. The alienation of the labor from its producer, as Marx explained, leads to the alienation of self.⁶⁵ Claudia Jones echoed this sentiment when she stated that “a people’s art is the genesis of their freedom.”⁶⁶ The alienation of the art from its people does away with their possible fight for their liberation. Freedom starts when people see the power that they produce.

The subjugation of the PBW for the sake of the system denies Her the ability to see all the power She possesses. The PBW has been subjugated and demonized, because, as Claudia Jones puts it, “the bourgeoisie is fearful of the militancy of the Negro woman, and for good reason. The capitalists know, far better than many progressives seem to know, that once Negro women undertake action, the militancy of the whole Negro people, and thus of the anti-

⁶⁴ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina, 2000), 199.

⁶⁵ Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Edited by David McLellan, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 92.

⁶⁶ Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 167.

imperialist coalition, is greatly enhanced.”⁶⁷ Mobilizing the PBW would mean an attack on imperialism, racism, sexism, and capitalism, as She experiences the utmost alienation. The PBW has the power to mobilize all Black people to fight against capitalism and imperialism because these systems were built on Her back. Claudia Jones categorized the position of the PBW within the capitalist system in "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!" as such:

Following emancipation, a large percentage of Negro women – married as well as single – were forced to work for a living...Negro women are still generally confined to the lowest-paying jobs. The Women’s Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, *Handbook of Facts for Women Workers* (1948, Bulletin 225), shows white women workers as having earnings more than twice as high as those of non-white women ... The super-exploitation of the Negro woman is thus revealed not only in that she receives, as a woman, less than equal pay for equal work with men, but in that the majority of Negro women get less than half the pay of white women ... The low scale of earnings of the Negro woman is directly related to her almost complete exclusion from virtually all fields of work except the most menial and underpaid, namely, domestic work.⁶⁸

To Be a Black, Working Woman has material impact, as they are relegated to domestic work and thus to a lower income and standard of living. The relegation of the PBW to menial roles based on her gender and race will always keep Her as a worker; The PBW as a worker will always mean relegation based on Her race and gender. She becomes a main source of labor because of Her super-exploitation. As a “reservoir for cheap labor,”⁶⁹ the PBW is always available and always available for cheap.

⁶⁷ Claudia Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, Edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. (New York: New, 1995), 108.

⁶⁸ Jones, 110.

⁶⁹ Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 61.

To Be A Worker: Claudia Jones, Karl Marx, and Class

Claudia Jones escaped from the Master's House with the complete rejection of capitalism and all that comes with that, as she saw that full liberation for all could not come about through said system. Her story highlights the important standpoint of PBWs around the world, their consciousness constructed through their very experiences.⁷⁰ From this perspective, one can conclude that Marxist thought was a refuge for those most affected by capitalism, even though they are not centered within said narrative. Claudia Jones is buried to the left of Karl Marx in the Highgate Cemetery in London⁷¹, which is fitting as she pushed Marx's ideology more left than it already was by identifying the PBW as the proletariat. Without a clear selection of who is the proletariat, the PBW was able to identify and center Herself within this ideology, especially when She thinks of why She has yet to be fully liberated; The PBW has always being lumped into struggles without being fought for within them. She is always asked to advocate for parts of Her identities, Claudia Jones and other Black Marxist Feminist refusing to do that anymore. The power of the PBW was recognized by these women and became the centered in the journey to liberation.

⁷⁰ Patricia Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 28.

⁷¹ Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 232.

To Be All Three: Claudia Jones and the Black Marxist Feminist Tradition

“We can accelerate the militancy of Negro women to the degree with which we demonstrate that the economic, political and social demands of Negro when are not just ordinary demands, but special demands flowing from special discrimination facing Negro women as women, as workers, and as Negroes ... Yes, and it means that a struggle for social equality of Negro women must be boldly fought in every sphere of relations between men and women so that the door of Party membership doesn't become a revolving door because of our failure to conduct the struggle.”⁷²

- Claudia Jones

To be Black, Woman, and a Worker is an existence where one is forced to choose which identity to advocate for. The proletariat is the working class black woman because race and class are intimately intertwined internationally and she has been economically exploited on the basis of her race and her gender. Claudia Jones refused to advocate for partial liberation, choosing to fight for the liberation of the Poor Black Woman (PBW) as a means to the end of complete liberation of all. The PBW's liberation would mean the end of capitalism, imperialism, racism, and sexism, almost all the structures of oppression (heteronormativity is not addressed), because the “gross neglect of Negro women”⁷³ would cease to exist. Jones highlights that the PBW experiences “triple oppression”⁷⁴, constantly experiencing oppression through her identities or race, gender, and class. Claudia Jones became the voice of the proletariat when she chose to articulate exactly how systems have affected the PBW to the PBW with her publications—“Claudia's Comments” and the *West Indian Gazette*—causing the PBW to build self-awareness about her multifaceted oppression. The PBW is not only Black, not only Woman, not

⁷² Davies, 29.

⁷³ Davies, 3.

⁷⁴ Claudia Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, Edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. (New York: New, 1995), 110.

only Worker, but all three and she has to deal with all that means/comes with. The PBW will have to address being inhuman, stateless, victimized, alienated, easily disposable, and Other.

Claudia Jones advocated for the movement to a Communist society, one where integration and equity for all could come about in order for the PBW to be liberated.⁷⁵ The access to the same resources for all would get rid of the structural minimization of groups and would finally allow for Black people, Women, and Workers to be considered as a part of the community; the One and the Other would cease to exist, leaving just one community. Communism would do away with the mutually exclusive relationships that have been formed historically in order to maintain capitalism of which Karl Marx speaks in *The Communist Manifesto*.⁷⁶ This resonates within Claudia Jones' ideology as she articulates the need for subjugated peoples to be able to exist as such as opposed to in relation to, which all stems from capitalism and imperialism. She wrote: "Change the mind of Man/ against the corruption of centuries;/ of feudal-bourgeois, capitalist ideas/ the fusion of courage and clarity/of polemic against misleaders/ who sought compromise with the enemy/these were the pre-requisites of Victory" (Written on the plane returning from a two-day visit from Yenan to Peking, August 28, 1964). There must be a break from the historical tradition in order for liberation to come about. This would mean the uprooting of systems and the raising of consciousness of everyone to see that the perpetuation of oppression in order for some to succeed is no longer sufficient. If this does not materialize, the exploitive system of capitalism will continue to subjugate through the

⁷⁵ Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 204.

⁷⁶ Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto," *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Edited by David McLellan, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 246.

means of imperialism, racism, and sexism. She explained that “imperialism is the root cause of racialism. It is the ideology which upholds colonial rule and exploitation. It preaches the ‘superiority’ of the white race whose ‘destiny’ it is to rule over those with coloured skins, and to treat them with contempt. It is the ideology which breeds Fascism, rightly condemned by the civilized people the whole world.”⁷⁷ Capitalism needs the subjugation of peoples worldwide in order for imperialist powers to feel justified the forced “civilization” of peoples. The subjugation of the Black person, the Woman, and the Worker makes it certain that capitalism thrives and that imperialism could be justified because these groups amount to at least half of the population worldwide.

Claudia Jones’ attempt to escape from the Master’s House was stifled through the criminalization of her ideology. Communism had to be criminalized in order to protect the house of capitalism with the Smith Act of 1940 and the McCarran-Walter Act,⁷⁸ which allowed for the prosecution of Communist Party members. Capitalism needed to create “second-class American citizenship for the Negro, McCarthyite fascism, powerful militarism, mass violence, hatred of creeping socialist, [and] stifling of liberal thought in conflict with any aspect of ruling class ideology”⁷⁹ in order for its maintenance. Claudia Jones and four other CPUSA members were arrested and found guilty of violating the McCarran Act for being an alien who had joined the

⁷⁷ Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 87.

⁷⁸ Davies, 134.

⁷⁹“Report of the C.E.C. To the Second Congress of the I.I.P.”, July 7-8TH, 1956. pg 3
Box 1, Folder 3, Claudia Jones Memorial Collection 1935-1998, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

Communist Party in 1948. She was ordered to be deported on December 21st, 1950⁸⁰. The idea of being deported from the “Land of the Free”, a land she lived in and fought for most of her life, because of identifying with different politics proved to be too paradoxical for Claudia Jones; fighting for freedom should not have resulted in her deportation. Jones highlighted this paradox in her statement on her deportation, where she stated:

“I was a victim of the McCarthyite hysteria against independent political ideas in the USA, a hysteria which penalizes anyone who holds ideas contrary to the official pro-war, pre-reactionary, pro-fascist line of the white ruling class of that country.

I was deported from the USA because as a Negro woman Communist of West Indian descent, I was a thorn in their side in my opposition to Jim Crow racist discrimination against 16 million Negro Americans in the United States.

[I was deported for] my work for redress of these grievances, for unity of Negro and white workers, for women’s rights and my general political activity urging American people to help by their struggles to change the present foreign and domestic policy of the United States.

I was deported and refused an opportunity to complete my American citizenship because I fought for peace, against the huge arms budget which funds should be directed to improving the social needs of the people.

I was deported because I urged the prosecution of lynchers rather than prosecution of Communists and other democratic Americans who oppose the lynchers and big financiers and warmongers, the real advocates of force and violence in the USA.”⁸¹

Claudia Jones was prosecuted for advocating against the human right violations that were entrenched in American culture. The United States had to get rid of Jones because of her constant agitation from angles of race, gender, and class. She denounced the discriminatory practices under Jim Crow, the United States imperialist nature, and the violence against her and her people. Her mere existence as a *conscious* PBW was a threat to all the systems the United States

⁸⁰ *New York Times*: "Ouster Ordered of Claudia Jones; Hearing Officer Finds Her an Alien Who Became Member of Communist Party Alien Registration Affidavit Additional Charge Sustained", 22 December 1950.

⁸¹ Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 143-144.

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stood/stands for so she had to get deported even though she came to this ideology in the United States. Claudia Jones acknowledged the oppression of the PBW and advocated against it, validating, mobilizing, and bringing into consciousness other PBWs to do the same — that was dangerous. The pillars on which this country stands would have toppled had the mobilization of PBWs continued. Claudia Jones' deportation reenforced the United States' unwillingness to change because her plan for an equal society meant the unity of women, workers, and Black people, the same groups that need to be subjugated for the sake of capitalism. The “Land of the Free” only applied to those who assimilated to American culture and blindly supported the acts of terror that the United States enacted domestically and internationally. Claudia Jones was an American who loved this country enough to want it to be better, but that love was transformed into the want to overthrow the government under the Smith Act. The deportation of Claudia Jones removed her from the country but did not stop her from fighting. She continued to fight in London until her death at the age of 49 in 1964.⁸²

⁸² Davies, XXVII.

Conclusion

Black Marxist Feminism is the key to the liberation of all, Claudia Jones being the best example of this intersectional discourse. She fought for all even though she knew all did not fight for her. She fought for all even in the face of her deportation from a country in which she spent nearly 35 of her 49 years. Claudia Jones manifested the power of the PBWs before her in every action she was a part of, in everything she did. Maria Miller Stewart said that PBWs need to:

“Possess the spirit of independence....Possess the spirit of men, bold and enterprising, fearless and undaunted...Sue for your rights and privileges. Know the reason you cannot attain them. Weary them with your importunities. You can but die if you make the attempt; and we shall certainly die if you do not...We need never to think that anybody is going to feel interested for us, if we do not feel interested for ourselves.⁸³

The fearlessness of which Maria Miller Stewart speaks was possessed in the life of Claudia Jones, but her fearlessness has been erased from the narrative of the fight for liberation. One could assume that Claudia Jones being who she was, Black, Woman, and a Worker, contributed to her erasure, or that her dying so young played a role, but her ideology is one that needs to be shared. Her thought centered the one group of people who have been silenced even in the perceived fights for their liberation i.e. the UNIA Movement, the Women’s Rights Movements, and the Labor Movement. Black people, Women, and Workers have been knocking on the door of liberation, not knowing that the Poor Black Woman has the key. Claudia Jones was one of these women who recognized her importance and power, and was willing to make sure that others like her realized it as well:

“For the progressive women’s movement, the Negro woman, who combines in her status the worker, the Negro and the woman, is the vital link to this heightened political consciousness. To the extent, further, that the cause of the Negro woman worker is promoted, she will be

⁸³ Maria Miller Stewart, “Religion and the Pure Principle of Morality, the Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build.” in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, Edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. (New York: New, 1995), 29.

Conclusion

enabled take her rightful place in the Negro-proletarian leadership of the national liberation movement and, by her active participation contribute to the entire American working class, whose historic mission is the achievement of a Socialist America — the final and full guarantee of woman's emancipation”⁸⁴

Claudia Jones was able to build on the likes of Marcus Garvey, Monique Wittig, and Karl Marx to show the importance of galvanizing the PBW, the vanguard of change. Marcus Garvey's ideals of racial pride and self-reliance are highlighted in Claudia Jones' advocacy and her establishment of the *West Indian Gazette* to give voice to her people. Claudia's point of departure with Garvey was on the stance of capitalism because she believed that racism and sexism branched off from capitalism. Her liberation could only come about through addressing the root of her oppressions, capitalism.

Monique Wittig's argument on what it means to be Woman showed the erasure of Black Women that Claudia Jones had to fight against. Wittig established that to be (White) Woman is to be in relation to Man. Claudia Jones pushed that framework by highlighting that to be a Black Woman is to be in relation to (White) Woman who is in relation to Man. Jones recaptured the narrative of the PBW that is always erased within the context of gender.

Karl Marx's ideology on class highlighted the alienation that a Worker experiences, furthered by Claudia Jones to include the narrative of the super-exploitation of the PBW. Marx never specified who exactly is the proletariat, allowing for the PBW to be it. Claudia Jones chose to advocate for the PBW because she saw the economic impact on the PBW stemming from her compounded reality of being Poor, Black, and Woman.

⁸⁴ Claudia Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, Edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. (New York: New, 1995), 120.

Conclusion

Claudia Jones pushed the ideologies of Marcus Garvey, Monique Wittig, and Karl Marx to include the one who is always excluded, the PBW. The perpetuation of the silencing of the PBW would mean that liberation for all would never materialize. Centering the PBW meant centering the issues of racism, sexism, capitalism, and imperialism, all issues that affect white women, black men, and workers. Claudia Jones chose to fight against these issues all at the same time because she could not afford to fight for just one issue. Claudia Jones chose to escape from the Master's House, because that House had nothing to offer her. She saw that the liberation of the PBW would have to come through alternative means. Claudia Jones chose to lay the foundation for a new house, the House of Liberation and Equality.

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