

Deporting black radicalism: Claudia Jones' deportation and policing blackness in the cold war

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Abstract: This article looks at the relationship between Claudia Jones, the pioneering black Marxist feminist, and the border regime of the United States. The article makes the case that Jones' denial of citizenship, legal harassment, and later expulsion was not merely a product of the transgression of the restrictive Cold War limitation of freedom of speech but instead concretely related to her Blackness. Jones is placed as a key figure in challenging the economic determinism within party thought, placing emphasis on her as a trailblazer in position racial oppression as a form of racialised social control which transcended a purely-economic basis. This was a form of social control that political and economic elites exploited to control working-class and minority populations and prevent working-class unity. Her involuntary border-crossing experiences are shown to reveal how anticommunism, white supremacy, and gender-based oppression cohered in post-war America, shaping Jones' ideas which would challenge fellow communists on both sides of the Atlantic.

Keywords deportation, anti-colonialism, American Communism, civil rights, Black freedom struggle

On an unseasonably warm day in November 1955, the fire department was called to an apartment for smoke in Manhattan, New York. The resident, Claudia Jones, refused the firemen entrance. Once the police arrived, the firemen forced their way

into the home through a window where they discovered Jones was burning her papers in the stove, the fireplace, and the bathroom. The papers were immediately seized and turned over to Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents who realised that the papers were charred beyond recognition. Jones' attempt to destroy her personal papers might have gone unnoticed had she not been under constant surveillance by the police and FBI. Jones was under a temporary stay of deportation and her latest appeal was denied only five days before the fire. Three days later, ill and out of options, Jones agreed to honour the deportation order and leave the United States, her home for over thirty years.¹

She was barely out of prison a month when the fire department forced its way into her home. Since 1948, federal authorities planned and manoeuvred to eject Jones because of her leadership in the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). Jones, born in Trinidad, emigrated to New York City when she was eight. Her experiences growing up in New York as a black youth led her to anti-racist Marxist politics. When she was twelve, her mother died at the textile plant where she worked. At seventeen, Jones contracted tuberculosis and spent some time at a tuberculosis hospital. When Jones donated blood to a fellow female patient, white patients warned that her blood could turn the woman black. In her teenage years, Jones watched American communists defend the Scottsboro boys, nine black youths arrested for allegedly raping two white women, one of the women later recanted. When the party protested the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, Jones decided that the CPUSA, a mixed-race organisation, would be her political home. After joining the party in 1936, Jones quickly moved into CPUSA leadership and became one of its most important and influential theoretical voices. As a colonial citizen of the British Empire, Jones integrated her anti-colonialism with Marxism and became an important voice in the Party against imperialism. Her attempts to become an American citizen in 1940 were thwarted because of both her race and her party membership. By 1941, even while the US was fighting fascism abroad, the FBI expended resources to monitor Jones and try to determine her national origins. After the war, her leadership role drew scrutiny from federal authorities who were intent

on making communism obsolete. Despite the legal harassment, Jones remained a committed communist and readily admitted her devotion to Marxist-Leninism.²

After the Second World War, federal intelligence and law enforcement officials targeted CPUSA members and organisations using legislative hearings and criminal proceedings to criminalise their political activity. In 1953, Jones and several other CPUSA leaders were found guilty under the Smith Act. The Smith Act, passed in 1940, made it illegal to advocate or belong to an organisation that advocated the violent overthrow of the American government. After her conviction was upheld on 13 October 1953, Jones was remanded to police custody and detained in a segregated federal reformatory for women in West Virginia. She was released on 23 October 1955. Because she was never naturalised, federal authorities pushed for her deportation.³

During the Cold War, the American state strengthened existing legislation and passed new laws that legalised the harassment of both native and foreign-born radicals. In 1952, the McCarran-Walter Act, allowed for the deportation of 'dangerous, disloyal, or subversive' persons. This same act was used to limit the rights of American citizens; both Paul Robeson and WEB DuBois had their passports seized to restrict their movement and limit their political activism abroad. The McCarran-Walter Act was part of the US's containment policy, to contain radicalism at home and expel those that threatened the social order. The black freedom struggle and its advocates, like Jones, were specifically targeted using Cold War legislation.⁴

The legal attack on the CPUSA particularly damaged the black freedom struggle because Cold War legislation linked advocacy of black equality to communism, and communists to treasonous subversion. As Gerald Horne has argued, the movement for black freedom splintered and a 'critical and radical perspective' was marginalised. At the precipice of change, radical voices were rendered 'mute' leading to a civil rights movement that was limited by Cold War legislation and avoided addressing economic justice. Horne argues that important voices that articulated an emancipatory politics with the potential for real liberation, like Shirley Graham DuBois and Paul Robeson, contemporaries and friends of Claudia Jones, were limited. Without discussions on

economic justice, equality remained illusory, and the civil rights movement was silent on American foreign policy.⁵

Claudia Jones recognised that her commitment to black liberation, gender equality, anti-colonialism, and socialism made her a target. The CPUSA challenged the arrests and harassment of its membership by arguing that it violated the constitutional guarantee of free speech. Though Jones agreed with the party on freedom of speech, her ideas on class-based gender and race organisation were often at odds with the party. Her conviction and deportation were no exception. While the CPUSA understood Jones' conviction and deportation as part of a racist state machine that sought to silence dissent, expel radical voices, and eradicate communism, Jones believed that her forced exile was part of the long history of social control over black Americans via the criminalisation of blackness. Jones understood something the party struggled with, that black oppression was not one more economic relationship; it was one means at racialised social control, one that political and economic elites exploited to control working-class and minority populations and prevent working-class unity.

Jones also believed that her outspoken anti-colonialism was a liability during the Cold War as the United States expanded its military influence globally, pursued the containment policy, and used its might to subdue anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa. Jones became an outspoken advocate in the postwar peace movement denouncing the Korean war, American incursion into Vietnam, European wars against African nationalist movements, and global capitalism's increased influence over the American government. She identified American containment as neo-colonialism, rendered more powerful by a bloated military making incursions into newly independent nations and planting its bases on foreign soil. She was not quiet about her opposition to the influence of anti-communism in post-colonial states, and she believed that peace was the only way to secure liberation for all people. Jones became convinced that it was her peace activism and criticism about Cold War policy that led to her legal harassment and eventual deportation.⁶

Jones was integral in pushing the party to see beyond its economic determinism and understand the role that race had in preventing a socialist US. But she further challenged the party to understand that

gender was as integral as race and economics in the class struggle against elites who exploited those divisions. Jones pushed the party to understand black women's triple oppression – race, class, and gender oppression – and she argued that as the most oppressed strata in the United States, black women were the vanguard of the working class. If you could free the most oppressed, then all could be freed. Carole Boyce Davies argues that when Jones was deported, her formulation of radical black feminism was expelled with her, hampering radical and progressive change for decades. Jones' written and spoken work on race and gender equality were used to convict, and eventually deport her. Though it was a violation of her first amendment rights, Jones knew as a foreign born, black woman, she was vulnerable to the state's oppressive policies.⁷

Historians agree that the Cold War was detrimental to the American left, eradicating any hope at creating a progressive coalition that could usher in true equity, nurture a working-class coalition, and temper the turn to the political right for both major parties. It was especially damaging to the civil rights movement. The criminalisation of American radicalism was a direct assault on the black freedom movement; but deportation and revoking black Americans' passports demonstrates that black citizenship anywhere is a 'very fragile and mutable condition'. Boyce Davies argues that deportation, framed 'in terms of criminality', was a tool used to construct 'desirable citizens'. Jones' race and nationality made her 'undesirable', and coupled with her political affiliation, a 'deportable subject'. American intelligence agents exploited this vulnerability. It took six years for the FBI to confirm Jones' birth place, once the bureau realised she was not a citizen, it began to plot her exile.⁸

Michael Hanchard argues that American immigration laws are bound with the history of black radicalism because political monitoring of radicals and migration patterns are embedded in the fear of racial subversion. The United States, along with Britain and France created 'racial and ethno-national regimes' to 'delimit' membership in the body politic and perpetuate inequality. These nations all created 'exclusionary policies' that defined citizenship and who had access. After the Second World War, Britain and France faced unrest in their colonies, while the United States increased its surveillance of civil rights and left-wing activists. The mechanisms of the state coalesced to reformulate policy on

‘immigration, management, repression of protest’ and how to deal with internal populations.⁹

Hanchard argues that right-wing governments may have more ‘robust’ exclusionary policies, but liberal democratic regimes de-emphasise individual rights while emphasising the collective, leading to criteria for citizenship based on national origins. The United States was in transition in the Cold War from a liberal new deal coalition that excluded black Americans from many of its protections and legalised the detention of Japanese Americans to internment camps, to a conservative Cold War consensus intent on excluding foreigners and containing the black population’s demands for civil and racial equality. Meanwhile, the British Empire faced rebellion in its colonies. Claudia Jones would be caught in the midst of these developments. She was effectively stateless as a non-citizen resident in the US barred from gaining status by her politics and her race. Born a British subject in Trinidad, the British government sought to contain her radicalism within the metropole, presumably where she could be monitored more closely and not participate in the agitation of her home country, therefore, unenthusiastically accepting her entrance into England upon her deportation from the US.¹⁰

Jones understood that as a colonial subject, and non-citizen, her claims to citizenship were tenuous at best. Aware that the state could exile her because of her colonial subjectivity and blackness, Jones continued to resist. She was also an outspoken critic of American racist and sexist institutions and Cold War containment policies, removing another threat to the status quo was a political imperative. The CPUSA knew that the Cold War political machine sought to make communism illegal, but it failed to recognise, as Jones did, that American anti-communism was deeply racialised and feared not just a new economic order but the upending of white racial supremacy.

Legal harassment

After years of monitoring, in 1947 the FBI found that Jones’ attempts to secure citizenship failed and began to investigate ‘what action could be taken against her’. J. Edgar Hoover, FBI Director, asked the

Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) to consider deportation proceedings. The INS obtained a warrant for her arrest but relied on the Bureau to compile a case against her for deportation. A 1918 Immigration law allowed for the deportation of radicals and was used to deport anarchist Emma Goldman and Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey. The FBI executed the arrest on 19 January 1948. Jones was bailed out and the party immediately began to organise in her defence. William Z. Foster, CPUSA chairman and Jones' friend and ally, urged people who 'love peace and freedom' to resist the 'arrogant police-state blitz'. By 1948, several high-profile cases led to the regular harassment, and eventual arrests, of the CPUSA leadership. Jones was not the only member detained for deportation, and over the next several years a number of communists would be incarcerated and deported. Foster argued that Attorney General Tom Clark should be removed from office and all charges against Jones be dropped.¹¹

The FBI began to build its case against Jones using her own words to prove grounds for her deportation. In her 'Alien Registration' in 1940, Jones noted that she was a member and employee of the CPUSA and that she had been since 1936. Communist party membership alone was not proof of a conspiracy to violently overthrow the US government. The bureau had to prove her knowledge of the communist conspiracy and compiled its case using details of Jones' movement and her written work dating back to 1936. The FBI monitored her every speech, radio interview, mention in the *Daily Worker*, and all of her written work as well as party functions she attended or hosted. It also looked into the citizenship status of her siblings and kept a record of all her known addresses during her residency in New York.¹²

The bureau's dogged pursuit of left-wing organisations, dating to the FBI's birth during the red scare following the First World War, demonstrates the efforts of the federal government and its intelligence wings to maintain the white racial and gender social order. As Nick Fischer has argued, American anticommunism was deployed 'unceasingly' since 1871 to rally Americans behind *laissez faire* policies and against labour organisation. It was also a way to contain a black and unruly 'underclass'. He argues that historians have wrongly attributed anticommunism to an 'amorphous American people', when it was an 'elite-driven ... top-

down' enterprise. Those organisations and individuals that coordinated communist opposition in the US did so to achieve their own objectives and maintain the social order. Kirsten Delegard demonstrates that American anticommunism is also gendered and focused on the maintenance of the white, heteronormative, nuclear family as a bulwark against communism. Challenges to the familial institution, like calling for women's political or social equality, right to work, and right to bodily sovereignty became subversive. Race-mixing and agitating against segregation were also threats to the heteronormative white family. The CPUSA was the threat that anti-communists imagined it to be; it encouraged interracial relationships, pushed for women's equality and access to birth control and abortion, and organised against racist legislation. Jones was an important leader in the movements to end sexist and racist injustice and even her personal life usurped the racial order, as she married a white man.¹³

Evidence of this concern for maintaining the racial and gender order are clear in Jones' FBI file. Some of the 'offenses' in Jones' file included her opposition to police brutality, her campaigns for job security for black Americans, her leadership of the CPUSA's women's committee, and her calls for black and women's equality. The FBI admitted that her writings 'largely concern' the 'equal rights of women' and equality for black Americans. Much of Jones' written work argued that the CPUSA was the true vanguard of liberty in the United States and that a socialist America was the only guarantee for liberation. But nowhere did Jones advocate violence, and the party policy in the 1950s was to organise social justice organisations, promote peace and limitations on nuclear weapons, and not to effect violent revolution. Jones' real crime was challenging an economic and social order predicated on white racial superiority.¹⁴

The FBI was also concerned about Jones' leadership in the peace movement. Because of the Cold War competition, advocating peace was seen as a threat to American military superiority. Calls for disarmament were interpreted as a way to weaken the US' defences and enable a Soviet attack. The Soviet Union also spearheaded a 'Struggle for Peace' movement to cover its disadvantages in the arms race. When the Soviets successfully tested its first atomic bomb in 1949, it was billed as

a victory in the struggle for peace and a way to check growing American militarism. Association with the peace movement invited accusations of communism. Mainstream civil rights organisations distanced themselves, while the CPUSA remained committed.¹⁵

Jones, and other black Americans in the postwar world were deeply invested in the peace and anti-nuclear weapons movement. The atomic bomb was only ever used against people of colour, and black Americans feared that it would be a tool used to suppress national liberation movements in former colonies, and the black liberation movement at home. For Jones, American military aggression was a means to secure capitalist world power and spread neo-colonialism by forcing former colonies to become American satellite states. Jones also argued that war was a greater threat to women, specifically black women, because it mirrored fascist tendencies to reduce women to their reproductive labour, and further disenfranchise them. War demanded traditional gender ideologies and the suppression of democracy, becoming a threat to women's and black liberation. The Korean War brought these fears to the surface as the US committed itself to hostilities and intervention against people of colour in the midst of a civil war. Jones and the party opposed militarism because they believed war was a tool to secure capitalist domination. For Jones, war also secured white male supremacy by subjugating non-white people at home and abroad.¹⁶

The trial

Jones' vocal calls for gender and racial equality, and the need for peace to achieve that equality in the pages of the party's press provided the bureau with enough evidence to pursue deportation on the grounds that Jones was a subversive. In 1950, INS hearing officer, Joseph J. Mack, found the case for Jones' deportation under the McCarran Internal Security Act of 1950 sound and ordered her deportation. The McCarran Internal Security Act had strengthened existing laws that allowed for the deportation of subversives. An order was issued by the INS requiring Jones to surrender herself at Ellis Island on 19 November 1952. But the order was cancelled. During the first attempt to deport Jones, there were no criminal charges

brought against her. But on 20 June 1951, Jones, along with sixteen other party members and leaders, was arrested and charged under the Smith Act. The bureau believed that it had enough evidence and witnesses to convict Jones before finally ousting her from the country. The same month as her arrest, Congress passed the aforementioned McCarran-Walter Act, enabling the state to deport individuals for their written and spoken work in support of a totalitarian regime or communism.¹⁷

Four of Jones' co-defendants were either too ill to be tried with their comrades or were acquitted. The trial for the remaining thirteen started in March 1952 and lasted nine months. After a failed appeal, the defendants were sentenced. Each defendant gave a statement to the court which the party later published. Jones' statement articulates her belief that anticommunism was billed as an effort to contain a subversive threat when the reality was it served to silence calls for black liberation. Jones began by calling the proceedings a 'fascist drive' to limit free speech and thought in the United States. She argued that the only thing she was guilty of, to which she 'proudly' admitted, was 'holding communist ideas' that the court claimed constituted no crime, because her political beliefs were secured by the constitution. In the Cold War, espousing communism was tantamount to treason, and the Smith Act required prosecutors to link communist convictions to intent to overthrow the US government.¹⁸

To prove that the CPUSA, its members, and its leadership, advocated the violent overthrow of the government, the FBI collected the defendant's written and spoken word to demonstrate their knowledge of the party's conspiracy. But the bureau knew that the writings and speeches would not be enough, especially since leading party thinkers, like Jones, did not openly advocate violence. One of the bureau's favourite tactics was to use professional witnesses, former communists who were willing to testify in court to a communist conspiracy. Many of the ex-communist witnesses testified to prevent their own harassment, some testified for the meagre monetary compensation the bureau provided, and others testified to create a career for themselves in anti-communism. Jones attacked the witnesses in her statement. She argued that these 'informers' offered no evidence that would justify any prosecution. She also deplored the use of black witnesses, who, she argued, were 'forced'

to testify and used to argue that the party treated its black members as props to demonstrate its anti-racist credentials.¹⁹

In her statement, Jones argued that it was her anti-racism, anti-war, and her blackness that was on trial. She asked the judge whether it was worth a one-year sentence in prison to be passionately devoted to the 'full unequivocal equality for my people', which she believed would only happen in alliance with the working class. She wondered if it was worth a year of her life because she believed that the Korean war was an 'unjust war', or that socialism would eliminate exploitation. She argued that merely being a communist was not a violation of the constitution, but it was an indication of being 'morally free' while the court and the prosecutors 'stand naked' before the Bill of Rights and the constitution, in violation of their principles. She paraphrased Karl Marx who predicted that there would be a time when the 'powers that be would no longer live by the very laws they themselves have fashioned'.²⁰

The proceedings were an assault on freedom of speech. But Jones emphasised that what was more troubling was that the entire judicial charade was an example of 'white supremacist ruling class prejudice', evidenced by the lack of black, Puerto Rican, and manual workers in the jury pools. Fellow defendant Pettis Perry argued that part of the travesty of the court was that he, a black American, and Jones were convicted by a 'lily-white jury', except for one black alternate that was later used when a white juror fell ill. Another juror, Pettis pointed out, was a banker and part of the capitalist apparatus that was invested in the 'exploitation of the coloured and colonial peoples of the world'. Jones, echoing Perry, argued that they were tried on their 'opposition to racist ideas' that were integral to 'Wall Street' in their drive toward war and fascism.²¹

The prosecution alleged that because Jones was a foreigner, she brought revolutionary ideas to the United States. But she reminded the court that not only was she just a child when she arrived, but 'it was here on this soil' that she experienced the 'indignity and humiliation of second-class citizenship'. It was seeing the government make a mockery of the claims of a 'free America' while oppressing fifteen million black Americans that made her a radical. It was through her 'Jim Crow experiences' as a young black woman that she learned that her very existence was a crime.²²

Jones articulated a position in her statement to the court that it was blackness in America that was criminalised; therefore, her conviction was consistent with the criminalisation of black people. The 'crime of being a Negro' meant the denial of 'elementary democratic rights' including the right to vote, hold office, be judges, and serve on juries across the country. She argued that if the United States was concerned about order, then it was the 'anti-Semite or a Ku Kluxer' that should be on trial and not those that advocated equality. While the courts associated Jones' foreignness with subversion, she reminded the court that it was American racism that drove her into the CPUSA, and it was American racism that would drive her out of the country. She told the judge that if these truths were uncomfortable, it could not be helped because the 'oppressed never revere their oppressors'.²³

Jones was sentenced to one year and one day in jail and a \$2,000 fine. She was remanded to a segregated women's prison in Alderson, West Virginia. A jailhouse informant told the FBI that Burt Andrews, a British Consulate representative who was at the prison visiting a British subject serving a life sentence for murder, spoke with Jones about a passport clearance that was requested on her behalf. Andrews said that she would be free to return to Trinidad, but that the British government did not 'welcome her return'. She was also given a good 'dressing down' because of her radical activities. Meanwhile, the FBI were carefully watching for her release date and planned to have an INS representative seize her upon her release and detain Jones on Ellis Island to await immediate deportation.²⁴

Deportation

Jones' health was precarious for years and the stress of her trial, detention, and impending exile created further complications. In 1953, while on trial, she experienced heart failure. Only thirty-eight years old, her health would never fully recover. While serving her sentence, Jones had hypertension, and her lawyers and supporters struggled to secure a low-salt diet. By the time of her release in October 1955, the strain of prison, and the bureau's eager attempts to have her deported took a further toll on her

health. On 27 October, Jones checked into the hospital with heart pains as her lawyers continued to try and secure a permanent stay of deportation. They argued that her health made it too dangerous for her to travel and be separated from her family and friends.²⁵

The next day, James Ford, secretary of the National Committee to Defend Negro Leadership of the CPUSA (NCDNL), wrote in the *Daily Worker* about the government's attempts to force Jones out of the country despite her health. Ford described a delegation that pled with the British Consulate office to intercede on Jones' behalf with the INS to try and secure a stay based on the need for her to receive appropriate treatment and to recover from the stresses of trial and imprisonment. Meanwhile, Ford urged *Daily Worker* readers to flood the INS with letters in support of a stay of deportation. He noted that the US and British governments prepared documents and were ready to send her to Trinidad with no time to prepare or secure her health. Ford insisted that organisation on her behalf was desperately urgent.²⁶

The *Daily Worker's* coverage of Jones' deportation revealed the urgency of trying to secure a stay for Jones because of her failing health. It also demonstrates how Jones' understanding of her own persecution and deportation were at odds with the party who was mired in the legal cases of dozens of its leaders and saw Jones' case as one among many caught up in anti-communist hysteria. In a 10 November article, William Foster emphasised the farce represented by the Statue of Liberty. He argued that communist persecution demonstrated the United States was not a beacon of democracy or a haven for immigrants. Foster constructed an idealistic past in which the US was once a refuge for 'fighters of freedom' from many countries but had become ruled by 'reactionary capitalists' with imperialist intentions. While it deports defenders of freedom, the US welcomed 'reactionaries' of all stripes.²⁷

Foster emphasised, like most articles about the deportation proceedings, Jones' poor health. She was in and out of the hospital in the weeks after her release, yet the federal government in all its cruelty, was intent on sending her back to Trinidad immediately. But Foster framed her deportation as an attempt to ostracise a 'gallant Negro woman fighter' who defended American principles, despite her lack of access to the freedom upon which those principles were founded. Foster failed to

recognise that it was not just her foreign-born status, but also her race and colonial subjectivity that made her a threat. Jones lived and worked in the United States for over thirty years becoming an important 'fighting champion' for the disenfranchised and was repaid with deportation. This was a recurring theme in much of the *Daily Worker's* coverage of Jones' case; Jones was described as an important activist for black and working-class America.²⁸

An opportunity to keep her in the country emerged in the trials of Charles Blake Charney and Alex Trachtenberg. Charney and Trachtenberg, both being tried for violating the Smith Act, were represented by Mary Kaufman, who also represented Jones in her case. Kaufman claimed she wanted to subpoena Jones to testify in Charney and Trachtenberg's defence, an eleventh-hour attempt to find a way to hold off the INS for a time. Six days later, a judge extended Jones' stay so a deposition could be taken in the Charney and Trachtenberg cases. But on 10 November, her final motion for a stay was denied.²⁹ Days later, Jones, who had been in the hospital for much of the time after her release from prison, conceded to her deportation. Citing her ill health and inability to continue legal challenges, Jones agreed to go to London. Though the original intention was for her to go to Trinidad, an agreement was made to send her to England to secure proper medical treatment. Jones would later claim that she was sent to England rather than Trinidad so British authorities could keep an eye on her and prevent her from organising in the colonies.³⁰

On 1 December, the CPUSA released a statement on Jones' deportation written by Foster. He called the deportation order 'inconsistent with justice', and America's 'democratic tradition'. Foster challenged her conviction under the Smith Act as a reflection of the Cold War hysteria that disregarded due process and mounted an assault on communists. Again, focusing on the toll that the trial and imprisonment took on Jones, Foster emphasised that the government's harassment of a sick 'middle-life' woman was beyond the pale of human decency. The government was prepared to cast her off to a new country, a place she had never lived, in a poor state of health, and alone. Foster's statement focused on the injustice of the Smith Act trials to which he and other CPUSA leaders were also subjected, but also the cruelty of the McCarran-Walter Act

and deportation. He linked deportation to the 'medieval punishment' of banishment, something he claimed was abandoned by other 'civilized countries'. But under the McCarran-Walter Act, the party lost several of their comrades to deportation. Foster argued that as a 'negro woman', Jones was treated harshly under 'racist legislation' that flew in the face of American democratic traditions. He argued that Jones and her family left Trinidad to escape British colonial oppression, only to face racial injustice in the United States.³¹

For Foster, Jones' deportation was more than just a political injustice, it was an injustice for all Americans. Jones spent her entire adult life devoted to fighting for social justice for all people; that was her only real crime and for that she was being expelled. Foster emphasised that Jones was an advocate for women and black people and that she focused most of her energies on pushing to eliminate 'lynch murder and lynch justice', something the federal government regularly failed to do. Jones attacked 'terrorist gangs' like the White Citizens Councils and the National Association for the Advancement of White people. Foster argued that the state's rights arguments used by southern states to uphold Jim Crow were meant to keep blacks as 'second-class' citizens. Jones' concerted efforts to eradicate white supremacist organisations and to undermine legislative racism put her at odds with the federal government, and Foster claimed that her deportation was a 'vindictive reaction' against a 'fighter for a truly free world'. But Foster framed the legal case against Jones in the wider context of Cold War harassment against social justice activists. Foster called Jones a victim of an attack on 'constitutional liberties, civil rights, and dignity' of all Americans, despite their 'colour, creed, or political belief'. Her victimisation did demonstrate that the 'poison of racism' went deep in the United States, but for Foster, the real meaning behind Jones' trial and deportation was because of who she fought for and not because of her race and nationality. He concluded by calling on fellow communists to stand up to the authorities that persecuted 'defenders of Negro rights' and instead persecute those that attacked civil rights.³²

One week after Foster's statement appeared in the *Daily Worker*, Jones, accompanied by her friend Mildred Edelman, boarded the Queen Elizabeth to make her way to London. The British Consulate issued her an emergency travel permit on 29 November 1955 to facilitate the trip.

The FBI wanted to be certain that Jones left, agents followed her to the ship, and on board, and monitored her activities until the ship left its port. That same day the Department of Justice issued a statement to the press indicating that Jones' deportation was part of the effort to no longer accept aliens in the country who become 'part of the communist conspiracy against the free world'. By the end of December, New York FBI agents were recommending that in light of Jones' departure from the country, she should be removed from the bureau's security index. The security index was a plan envisioned by Hoover in which, during a national crisis, individuals in the index could be detained involuntarily. The bureau kept reports on people in the index, which numbered over ten thousand, and updated the reports to indicate the person's status. Throughout the period the bureau monitored Jones' movement, her security index file was regularly updated. The bureau maintained a file on Jones until her death in 1964.³³

William Foster sent a letter to his counterpart in the British Communist Party (CPGB), Harry Pollitt, to introduce Jones. To assist him in the letter, Foster asked Jones to write a brief autobiographical account, an account that has since been used to introduce Jones to wider audiences and give a sense of why she became a devoted communist. It emphasises her experiences in the United States facing off with racial hostility and Jim Crow. The letter couples Jones' understanding of racist and class exploitation and her experience as a woman in male-led organisations. It is an important autobiographical account of her own experience of racism and sexism. In his letter, Foster described Jones as a member of the CPUSA National Committee, vilified under the McCarran-Walter Act, and 'quite ill' from 'heart, circulatory, and lung' issues. He provided a brief biographical outline that included her devotion to the fight against 'the monstrous Jim Crow system' and her attempt to apply for American citizenship, which was denied, Foster claimed, because of her involvement in the party. Since Jones joined the party, she 'has led a life of real activity in the struggle' and she worked as a journalist covering students, women, and the 'fight for peace'. But Jones was well known among the 'bitterly exploited and harassed' black people.³⁴

After joining the National Committee in 1945, Foster told Pollitt that Jones was at the 'forefront of the Party' especially during the period of

legal harassment aimed at the party's leadership and herself. Jones was a 'devoted and faithful worker and fighter', and 'highly valued' and loved by her co-workers in the party. Foster wrote that Jones was one of the over 150 other communists seized and 'framed' during the recent purges against the party, and she was indicted by a 'body of renegades and professional perjurers'. He was deeply concerned about Jones' ill-health and emphasised that like other communists under deportation orders, she was torn from her family and friends from a country she spent most of her life in. He asked that Pollitt 'assist her' in any way that he could, as the CPGB had done for other deported comrades, in solidarity with their American comrades.³⁵

The CPGB *Daily Worker* reported on 14 December 1955 that Jones' ship was welcomed by her fellow deportee John Williamson and his wife May, along with a contingent of women who brought her flowers. In contrast to the FBI's jailhouse informant, the article suggests that the British Consulate worked with Jones to make her deportation easier. The article notes that it was only through the intervention of the British Consul that she was not deported immediately upon her release from prison, and that the same Consul helped to secure her salt-free diet while she was incarcerated. Though Jones previously noted that the British did not welcome her return, once on British soil, she appeared grateful to be free from American harassment. The *Daily Worker* quoted her as saying that the Consul representative 'amused her' by asking if she was happy in prison. When asked what she would do, Jones said that she was a 'champion weaver', and a journalist, but needed to take some time to rest. The CPUSA reprinted the article over a week later with the headline 'Britons Welcome Claudia Jones'. The American chapter of her life appeared to be at an end, though she would remain in contact with several of her American comrades.³⁶

Jones in England

A month after her arrival, a CPGB article introduced Jones to the British party. The article used the same autobiographical letter Jones wrote for Foster. The article described her life in poverty in the United States, her

mother's early death, life in the slums which led to her time in a tuberculosis hospital, and Jones' jobs in laundries, factories, and as a shop assistant. Jones had real working-class credentials, compounded by her experience with racism, the article emphasised that Jones' time in the CPUSA reflected her intention to improve the lives of all. Once again emphasising her poor health, the article concluded that the CPGB and its comrades 'will be proud' that Jones is now among them and wish her a full recovery for her health.³⁷

Her health would remain a barrier to an easy settlement in London. In a letter to her friend Howard Johnson in April 1956, Jones noted that her transition in England was much more difficult because of her ill-health. She spent her first two months in the hospital, and afterwards had to go twice a week to the clinic to adjust her medication. She also found it difficult to secure work and a place of her own. It was, she argued, 'impossible to be both uprooted and ill'. Jones' suspicions that the British sought to contain her within the metropole to keep an eye on her activities were confirmed by the fact that the British Government would not approve her passport. She wished to move to a warmer climate in the hopes that it would help her recover her health. She also located a hospital in Trinidad that could treat her condition as well as any in England. But the government would not approve her travel, and therefore she was restricted, for the time being, to England.³⁸

In 1956, Jones did an interview with Trinidadian labour activist and member of the Oilfield Worker's Trade Union George Bowrin. In it she told Bowrin that she was deported because she was being penalised by the 'white ruling class' in the United States who held 'pro-war, pro-reactionary' and pro-fascist ideals. A primary reason, however, was that as a black woman of 'West Indian descent' she was a 'thorn in the side' of the white ruling class because of her relentless opposition to Jim Crow, her desire to achieve working-class unity, and she sought equality for women. She was deported because she believed war was a capitalist tool to suppress American workers and people of colour and she opposed the lynchers and 'big financiers' in 'democratic' America, who were the real 'advocates of force and violence'. Jones believed that she was not just prosecuted for her communism, her principled anti-racism, as a black, foreign-born woman, necessitated and facilitated her removal.³⁹

Bowrin asked if being West Indian held 'special significance' in her deportation and Jones answered that it 'definitely' did. She cited the McCarran-Walter Act, which she argued had a 'special racist bias' towards West Indians and Asians because it restricted the number of immigrants allowed into the United States. Jones explained to Bowrin that her experience as a black woman and immigrant is what led her to the communist party. No matter which class, no black person could escape the 'scourge of Jim Crow', in the US and Jones sought out an organisation that would address the needs of the working people and black people. In the party she learned that race and class conditions were 'man-made' and she intended to destroy them as a communist.⁴⁰

Carole Boyce Davies argues that Jones' conception of her deportation facilitated a new political identity for her in England. While the party focused on Jones' race in relation to larger racist structures embedded in the oppressive state machinery that enacted the anti-communist purges; Jones believed her deportation was a part of the criminalisation of blackness in the United States and the Empires. Davies argues that upon her arrival in London, Jones focused more of her political energies on pan-Africanism in coalition with 'Marxist-Leninist ... world revolution'. She also referred to her deportation as an exile. For Davies, this indicates her identification as a black American. This shift in her political focus is clear in the interview with Bowrin. Bowrin focuses much of the interview on her experience with the West Indian community in the United States and the role of women in the West Indies. Jones' passport denial might have been because her attention was beginning to be fixed on the British colonies.⁴¹

Jones told Bowrin that she was heartened by the growing involvement of women in the West Indies in the liberation movement, as well as the peace movement. She argued that women were an 'indispensable ally' in the fight for freedom in the colonies. She stated that these women were 'triplely oppressed' – as women, as mothers, and as colonial subjects. This configuration is noticeably different from the triple oppression Jones described often in her writing about black women in the Western nations – oppressed because of race, class, and gender – Jones argued that colonial subjectivity was a category in itself and led to these women being 'subjected to indignities and ... suffering' because of the suffering

of their countries. Jones' outspoken anti-colonialism would move to the forefront of her politics in London and would be a focus for the remainder of her life.⁴²

This new focus put her at odds with the CPGB. The party may have welcomed her to the country, but she would have a contentious relationship with it and was never offered a leadership position, nor did she ever write anything more than one book review for the party's *Daily Worker*. The CPGB never used her talents in the same way the CPUSA did. Marika Sherwood argues that this is because the CPGB failed to embrace a theoretical or practical anti-racism or anti-colonialism until 1954, the year before Jones' arrival. Even then, it was after pressure from Caribbean immigrants in the party and Harry Pollitt issued confusing and inconsistent statements on anti-colonialism. In 1955, the CPGB released a charter outlining its position on 'coloured workers' in Britain that condemned racism and discrimination and called for legal action, but subsequent party pamphlets failed to spell out what action needed to be taken. The party was also accused of not taking black member's complaints and concerns seriously. The CPUSA had many of its own problems with racism and its white members ignoring their own prejudices, as Jones regularly pointed out, but it had several outspoken black leaders and theoreticians that pushed the party to confront race. The CPUSA was also adamant in its campaigns to push racial equality as the only means to achieve class solidarity and substantive change.⁴³

Jones arrived with leadership experience on race and gender as the CPGB struggled within its ranks on these issues. Sherwood credits Jones with a memo that challenged the party's leadership on its support and knowledge on the Caribbean immigrants in its ranks and the discrimination they faced in the workplace and English culture. Jones' pre-deportation writings were full of accusations that the CPUSA leadership and rank-and-file failed to recognise their own racism. It was not out of character for her to call out white supremacist tendencies among communists, but it was not welcomed by her British comrades. Jones' role in the party would remain marginal, so her focus shifted to London's West Indian community. She was a founder and editor of the *West Indian Gazette*, and she founded Notting Hill's Carnival, an annual celebration for London's black community. Despite her tensions

with the CPGB, Jones remained a committed communist until her premature death on Christmas Eve in 1964, nine years after her arrival in London. She died at forty-eight years old from a massive heart attack alone in her London apartment. Today, Jones is buried next to Karl Marx in Highgate cemetery in London.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Claudia Jones understood that Cold War legislation was used to discredit and destroy the CPUSA and stigmatise left-wing politics. For decades after and arguably to the present, American leftists struggled with legal harassment fortified during the Cold War and the move to the right of both mainstream political parties. But Jones knew that her deportation was not simply about the fear of communism, or an assault on her freedom of speech. She knew that what made her and her fellow communists dangerous was their challenge to the white racial order. And what made her most vulnerable to political and legal harassment was her status as a foreign-born, black woman. Anti-communist hysteria was embedded in the United States' long history of containment, the containment of its poor and black underclass and the maintenance of wealth and racial structures that ensured white supremacy. This experience led Jones to focus her political energies on organising against colonialism and to push for a racially egalitarian socialism until the end of her life.

Claudia Jones' deportation is just one chapter in the United States' long history of defining citizenship as white and creating a legal structure that upholds white supremacy while simultaneously criminalising people of colour. Deportation is a favoured tool of racist and nativist legislatures and politicians to construct an idealised (i.e. white) citizenry; and while deportation has been used against white radicals, what Claudia Jones knew well was that her blackness worked in tandem with her politics. Even the FBI recognised that her only real crimes were advocating the emancipation of black Americans and women. The muting and deportation of black radicals in the Cold War stymied any real confrontation with America's racist past and forced contemporary Americans to realise that the emphasis on white citizenship has survived

long past the civil rights struggles. Today, deportation and detention has become a favoured tactic of white nationalists, led by Donald Trump. With white supremacists in the highest echelons of government, legal structures have coalesced to impugn people of colour, both immigrants and citizens, and define them as outside the rights of citizenship and basic humane treatment. The lesson we can take from Claudia Jones is that her case was not an anomaly but a central aspect of American history and representative of the regular attempts of white supremacists to define and delimit citizenship.

Notes

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2. Tamiment Library, New York University, Claudia Jones Vertical File, 'Claudia Jones to William Foster', 6 December 1955; Carole Boyce Davies, 'Deportable Subjects: U.S. immigration laws and the criminalizing of communism', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100, 4, Fall 2001, pp980-985.
3. 'Woman Communist Leader is Arrested for Deportation', *New York Times*, 21 January 1948, p1; Davies, 'Deportable Subjects', pp980-985.
4. Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1997, pp141-155; Maddalena Marinari, 'Divided and Conquered: Immigration reform advocates and the passage of the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 35, 3, Spring 2016, pp9-10; Carol Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2008, pp148-150.
5. Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham DuBois*, New York, New York University Press, 2000, pp111-112, see also Gerald Horne, *Paul Robeson: The Artist as Revolutionary*, London, Pluto Press, 2016.

6. Claudia Jones, 'International Women's Day and the Struggle for Peace', *Political Affairs*, 1950, p32.
7. Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2008, p2.
8. Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, pp 412-141, Michael Kimmage, *The Conservative Turn: Lionel Trilling, Whittaker Chambers, and the lessons of anti-communism*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, pp2-5, and Davies, 'Deportable Subjects', pp980-985.
9. Michael G. Hanchard, *The Spectre of Race: How discrimination haunts Western democracy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2018, pp112-113.
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11. FBICJF, Criminal Division to Director, FBI, 7 May 1947; Director, FBI to Commissioner, Immigration and Naturalization Services, 25 September 1947; DM Ladd to Director, FBI, 31 October 1947; FBI Memo, Communications Section, 20 January 1948; 'Woman Communist Leader is Arrested for Deportation', *New York Times*, 21 January 1948, p1; Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, p58.
12. 'Ouster ordered of Claudia Jones', *New York Times*, 22 December 1950, p13.
13. Nick Fischer, *Spider Web: The birth of American anticommunism*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2016, pxv; Kirsten Marie Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolshevik: The origins of female conservatism in the United States*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, p8.
14. FBICJF, 'SAC, New York to FBI, Director, RE: Claudia Vera Scholnick', September 1951.
15. Timothy Johnston, 'Peace or Pacifism: The Soviet struggle for peace, 1948-1954', *Seer*, 86, 2, 2008, pp260-261.
16. See Claudia Jones, 'International Women's Day and the Struggle for Peace', *Political Affairs*, 1950; Claudia Jones, 'The Struggle for Peace in the United States', *Political Affairs*, February 1952; Claudia Jones' 'Half the World' Column, in the *Daily Worker*.
17. FBICJF, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 'Air Tel', 10 November 1952; 'Ouster ordered of Claudia Jones', *New York Times*, 22 December 1950, p13; Maddalena, 'Divided and Conquered', pp12-13.
18. Claudia Jones, *13 Communists Speak to the Court*, New York, New Century Publishers, 1953, p19; Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes*, p120.

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24. FBICJF, 'Administrative Page: Informant', 3 November 1955.
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31. William Foster, 'CP Hits Deportation of Claudia Jones', *Daily Worker*, 1 December 1955, p2.
32. Ibid.
33. FBICJF, Department of Justice, 'For Immediate Release', 9 December 1955; Federal Bureau of Investigations, Custodial Detention Security Index, FBI, 'Recommendations for Preparation of Security Index Cards'.
34. Schomberg Library, Claudia Jones Memorial Collection, 'William Foster, National Chairman, Communist Party, USA to Harry Pollitt, General Secretary, Communist Party of Great Britain', 9 December 1955; Tamiment Library, New York University, Claudia Jones Vertical File, 'Claudia Jones to William Foster', 6 December 1955.
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36. 'Britons Welcome Claudia Jones', *Daily Worker*, 23 December 1955,

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37. Schomberg Library, Claudia Jones Memorial Collection, 'Welcome Claudia! A Brave Woman is Deported', January 1956.
38. Schomberg Library, Claudia Jones Memorial Collection, 'Claudia Jones to Howard "Stretch" Johnson', 21 April 1956,
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40. Davies, *Claudia Jones: Beyond containment*, pp17-18.
41. Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, pp140-144; Carole Boyce Davies, *Claudia Jones: Beyond containment*, Oxfordshire, Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2011, pp16-17.
42. Davies, *Claudia Jones: Beyond containment*, pp18-19.
43. Sherwood, *Claudia Jones: A Life in Exile*, pp62-73.
44. Sherwood, *Claudia Jones: A Life in Exile*, pp73-75, pp163-175.