

CLAUDIA JONES: A LEGACY CONTESTED

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CHILDHOOD

- born Claudia Vera Cumberbatch in Trinidad
- emigrated to New York in the wake of the cocoa price crash
- poor living conditions in the US caused her to contract tuberculosis

(Davies, 2008)

PRE-POLITICAL CAREER

- she was a good scholar, but as a black, immigrant woman in the '30s, her career options were limited
- worked at a laundry
- worked in retail
- after a few years she started writing for “a Negro Nationalist newspaper” (Davies, 2008, ch. 2)

COMMUNISM

- the Scottsboro Boys were Black teenagers accused of raping two white women on a train
- Claudia was looking for organizations that were supporting them, and found the Young Communist League USA
- within a year, she was on the editorial staff of the *Daily Worker* and the *Weekly Review*
- became an elected official of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), writing, organizing and speaking at events
- relatively soon after joining up with Communists, she took on the name Jones as “self-protective disinformation” (Taylor, 2008)

(Davis, 2015)

US WRITINGS

- Jones wrote and edited Communist publications in the late '30s and throughout the '40s
- her most famous works appeared in *Political Affairs*, including “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!” (Jones, 1949)
- these works focus on the particular situation of Black women, which was often overlooked or misunderstood by contemporary Communists

(Davies, 2008)

DEPORTATION

- the Smith and McCarran Acts made Communist activity illegal
- Jones was arrested as early as 1948 (before the passage of the McCarran act), and threatened with deportation
- Trinidad refused her entry, making the deportation process complicated
- eventually she was offered deportation to the UK (where she had no ties) on “humanitarian” grounds, on the condition that she not protest her deportation

(Davies, 2008)

- the British African-Caribbean community was growing rapidly at the time
- Jones worked actively against racist immigration laws and practices in housing and employment
- she founded an anti-imperialist, anti-racist paper, *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian News*
- the newspaper ran for six years until her death

(Davies, 2008)

COMMUNISM IN THE UK

- the history of Jones' involvement with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) is not entirely clear
- she was not offered employment within the party as she had in the CPUSA
- Jones' relation to the party is contested

(“Claudia Jones, communist”, 2010)

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

- there are two camps of biographers
- all book-length biographies that I can find of Jones are written by non-Communists
- Communists seem to claim that non-Communists misrepresent Jones' work and her ideologies
- this is complicated by the fact that her notebook disappeared following her death

(“Claudia Jones, communist”, 2010)

BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT

- from what I can tell
- all book-length biographies that I can find of Jones are written by non-Communists
- Communists seem to claim that non-Communists misrepresent Jones' work and her ideologies
- they claim that Jones is a Communist through-and-through
- others claim that her work comprises an ideology distinct from that of Marx
- this is complicated by the fact that her notebook disappeared following her death

(“Claudia Jones, communist”, 2010)

WHO'S RIGHT?

- Marx did not talk about Black women
- Jones did
- that focus is important
- Jones' is distinct in that her work represents Black Feminist Thought (in a way that Marx's could not) with the express purpose of liberating Black women

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