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# Carole Boyce Davies and Claudia Jones: radical Black female subjectivity, mutual comradeship, and alternative epistemology

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the shared radical Black female subjectivity and practice of mutual comradeship that bind Carole Boyce Davies and Claudia Jones. It argues that their interrelation provides Boyce Davies with unique insight into Jones's manifold intellectual, theoretical, and political contributions and has allowed Jones to animate and shape Boyce Davies's approach to preserving and interpreting her legacy. The conclusion considers the ways that Jones and Boyce Davies offer an alternative epistemology that is instructive for scholars who seek to learn from and continue their ethical and political approach to scholar-activism.

## KEYWORDS

Claudia Jones; Carole Boyce Davies; mutual comradeship; radical Black female subjectivity; diaspora

## Introduction

"I read Claudia Jones as a black feminist critic of Afro-Caribbean origin," writes Carole Boyce Davies in *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (2007: xiii). This sentence can be interpreted in two ways: as Boyce Davies articulating her position as a black feminist critic of Afro-Caribbean origin who is reading Claudia Jones, or as Boyce Davies situating Claudia Jones as a black feminist critic of Afro-Caribbean origin. This double meaning, which highlights the unique relationship between Boyce Davies and Jones, is important in several ways. First, it reveals both women as "radical Black female subjects" (4). Second, it situates their shared "Caribbean diaspora belonging" (xiv), common West Indian origin, and overlapping political positions. Finally, this dual interpretation illuminates the ways that Boyce Davies, as a Black feminist critic, is committed to preserving and interpreting Jones's life and legacy at the same time that Jones, as a Black feminist critic, offers up to Boyce Davies a life and legacy worthy of preservation and interpretation. As Boyce Davies endeavored to gather, assemble, and share fragments of Claudia Jones, she journeyed to feminist, diasporic, decolonial, and transnational spaces and traversed imperial and postcolonial routes that included London, England, St. Augustine, Trinidad, Ottawa, Canada, Paris, France, and several US cities. In this

way, Jones and Boyce Davies can be understood as ideological, political, and migratory fellow travelers.

This article examines the shared radical Black female subjectivity and practice of mutual comradeship that bind Carole Boyce Davies and Claudia Jones. It argues that their interrelation provides Boyce Davies with unique insight into Jones's manifold intellectual, theoretical, and political contributions. This bond, in turn, has allowed Jones to animate and shape Boyce Davies's preservation and interpretation of her fellow Trinidadian's legacy. The conclusion considers the ways that Jones and Boyce Davies offer an alternative epistemology instructive for scholars who seek to learn from and continue their ethical and political approach to scholar-activism. This article highlights the unique and wide-ranging contributions Boyce Davies has made to scholarly production not only through her academic writing, but also through archival construction; the excavation of Jones's life and legacy as part of a broader commitment to vivifying the role of Caribbean women in the struggle for Black liberation; and her praxis of engaged scholarship that allows for the dissemination of knowledge beyond college and university campuses. In academia, scholars' relevance tends to be gauged through quantitative measures like number of citations; while Boyce Davies undoubtedly meets this metric, her body of work conveys the latter's inadequacy in illuminating her tremendous impact on knowledge production across several fields, political education in numerous organizations, and a new generation of scholar-activists.

### The re-introduction of Claudia Jones

Carole Boyce Davies has been instrumental in restoring Claudia Jones to her rightful place in the Black Radical Tradition, in histories of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) and international Communism, and in US Black and transnational feminist thought. *Left of Karl Marx* is the first book-length study of Claudia Jones and *Claudia Jones: Beyond Containment* (2011) is the first, and only, collection of Jones's theoretical writings. Prior to Boyce Davies's contributions, scholarship on Jones in the past four decades was generally limited to chapters in larger works, a few dissertations, encyclopedia entries, and unpublished essays. There are two notable exceptions. The first is Buzz Johnson's *"I Think of My Mother": Notes on the Life and Times of Claudia Jones* (1985), described by the author as "an assembly of some of the information and ideas which are being put together for a fuller piece of work" meant to provide some insight into Jones's life and work (ix). Unfortunately, this larger work will not come to fruition given Johnson's passing in 2021. Another volume, *Claudia Jones: A Life in Exile* (1999), compiled by Marika Sherwood with the help of Donald Hinds and Colin Prescod, includes chapters on Jones's life in the United States and in London along with essays and contributions from the 1996 Claudia Jones Symposium.

Between 1980 and the publication of *Left of Karl Marx* in 2007, Angela Davis offered one of the earliest analyses of Claudia Jones in her "Communist Women" chapter of *Women, Race, and Class* (1981). Davis primarily examined what has become one of Jones's most popular works, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!" (1949) Davis analyzed it as a challenge to male supremacy;

a manifestation of Jones's belief that "socialism held the only promise of liberation for Black women," and as such, an urgent call to her comrades to abandon their racist and sexist attitudes; and as a reminder to white women about their specific responsibility to their Black counterparts (261-263). Davis also briefly mentions Jones's time in Alderson Federal Prison Camp for Women and her deportation. Twenty years later, Kate Weigand offered a similar, but much more comprehensive, exegesis of Jones and "An End to the Neglect" in *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation*. (2001) In the chapter "Claudia Jones and the Synthesis of Gender, Race, and Class," Weigand presents Jones as the most sophisticated theorist of Black women's oppression. Jones, she argues, improved upon the Party's superficial engagements with the "triple burden" or "triple oppression" of this group (99) and surpassed Betty Millard's insightful but insufficient understanding of women's subjugation in "Woman against Myth" (101) by bringing Black women's "experiences and perspectives to the center of the Communists' writings and activities on the woman question" and to help reveal that "women could share gender oppression and still be very different from one another" (101). More importantly, Weigand emphasized that Jones moved Black women beyond narratives of victimhood and positioned them as empowered, progressive, active, and desirable, both politically and personally. Jones did so by underscoring that Black women were often the leaders of their families, at the forefront of mass mobilization for civil rights, and active in union organizing efforts (103-105). Insofar as Weigand is reading Jones into a larger history of Communist women, she discusses critiques of and responses to "An End to the Neglect," claiming both that Jones overstated the CPUSA's neglect of Negro women and that the Party worked emphatically to take Black women's issues seriously after Jones's critique. She conceded that articles in publications like *Daily Worker* "usually recapitulated Claudia Jones's points rather than making new contributions to the Party's understanding of black women's status" (108). In their focus on her best-known article, both Davis and Weigand helped to excavate Jones's theoretical and organizational contributions.

In this same time period, three dissertations focused wholly or substantially on Claudia Jones. Two of these appeared in 1996. "Nuances of Un-American Literature(s): In Search of Claudia Jones; a Literary Retrospective on the Life, Times and Works of an Activist Writer" examined Jones's writings, especially her journalism and political essays, written between 1940-1955—her time in the CPUSA—to shed light on how particular writings are excluded from mainstream canons and to analyze the relationship between political activism and writing. "Red Feminism: American Communism and the Women's Rights Tradition, 1919-1956" centered on the CPUSA's women's rights activism in the first four decades of its existence. Jones is discussed as one of the pioneers of "red feminism," understood as "a distinct yet identifiable American form of women's rights activism" (ii-iii), who asserted the central role of Black women in the realization of women's liberation. Seven years later, "Long Journeys: Four Black Women and the Communist Party, USA, 1930-1956" (2003) analyzed Jones's life and thought alongside that of Audley Moore, Louise Thompson Patterson, and Esther Cooper Jackson. The dissertation illuminated how the Communist movement in the United States enabled modes of journalism, grassroots organizing, and social movement building that centered the experiences, conditions,

and realities of Black women. Jones figured prominently in chapters eight and ten. Interestingly, all of these dissertations primarily interpret Jones as a (Black) feminist and/or women's rights activist who centered Black women in her analysis and organizing.

The two notable encyclopedia entries were written by eminent historian Robin D.G. Kelley and by John McClendon III, a renowned Black Marxist philosopher. Kelley's 1990 entry in *Encyclopedia of the American Left* primarily synthesized Jones's politics and activism, namely her support for the National Negro Congress, her vehement critique of Earl Browder's decision to move away from the CPUSA's support for self-determination in the Black Belt of the United States, and her sustained advocacy of women's rights and rejection of male chauvinism. The piece also mentioned her conviction under the Smith Act, her incarceration, and her deportation (394-395). McClendon's 1996 entry on Jones is published in Book II of the three-volume *Notable Black American Women*. His more detailed entry categorized Jones as a political activist, Black nationalist, and feminist journalist who was a "communist her whole life" and was "in the vanguard in the twentieth-century struggle for African American liberation, socialism, women's rights, world peace, and West Indian colonial independence" (343). McClendon further discussed Jones's robust antifascism; her belief in democratic centralism; her staunch support for Black self-determination; and her theory of triple oppression and particular advocacy for Black domestic workers. He also elucidated her subjection to anticommunist repression alongside Black radical women and men like Eslanda Goode Robeson and Henry Winston and organizations like the Council on African Affairs; her activism during her imprisonment; and her efforts on behalf of the liberation of Caribbean peoples, despite her failing health, after she was deported to London in 1955 (343-346). These encyclopedia entries were succinct but informative efforts to expand knowledge about Jones.

In 1989, Donna Langston published "The Legacy of Claudia Jones" in *Nature, Society, and Thought*. This piece was a slight revision of her unpublished paper, "Claudia Jones: Valiant Fighter Against Racism and Imperialism," that, while undated, was probably written around 1985. Based largely on Jones's own writings, especially several published articles in *West Indian Gazette*; primary sources like the CPUSA pamphlet *13 Communists Speak to the Court* (1953); and secondary sources like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's *The Alderson Story: My Life as a Political Prisoner* (1963) and Mark Naison's *Communists in Harlem During the Great Depression* (1983), Langston's unpublished essay analyzes Jones's "Black working class female perspective." "To understand Claudia's legacy," she contends, "is to understand the history of fascism, sexism, classism, and racism in our country" (3). Though the paper does not present Jones's theoretical interventions in these areas, it does offer an overview of her life and importance in Harlem; a description of the "anti-Black and anti-communist hysteria" (7) that led to the arrest of Jones and others like W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James; a thorough description of Jones's trial, incarceration, and deportation; and mention of her internationalist peace activism. Moreover, Claudia Jones: Valiant Fighter" provides significant information about Jones's work in Great Britain after her deportation, especially her contributions through the *West Indian Gazette*, her organizing efforts against the racist 1962 Commonwealth Immigration

Act, and her cultural work that ultimately led to the establishment of carnival. Though Langston does not explicitly label Jones a Black feminist or use the language of intersectionality, these clearly shaped her description of how the three Communist women incarcerated at Alderson Women's Prison (Jones, Betty Gannett, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn) established and cultivated bonds with the other female prisoners, offered support, organized celebrations, and assisted with legal matters (14-15). She also asserts that "Claudia presented important connections between gender race, class, and imperialism... [and] encountered discrimination based on gender, race, class, and political identity" (26), and that Jones's legacy offers a model for contemporary "interconnected political struggles" (27).

Lydia Lindsey, a historian at North Carolina Central University, was working on a political-intellectual biography of Claudia Jones at the time Boyce Davies began her research. Lindsey was generous, helpful, and supportive, even sharing her unpublished manuscript, written ca. 1999, "Claudia Jones: A Black Political Theoretician and Social Activist in the United States and England, 1915-1964," which is cited throughout *Left of Karl Marx*. Lindsey's article, "Black Lives Matter: Grace P. Campbell and Claudia Jones—An Analysis of the Negro Question, Self-Determination, and the Black Belt Thesis" (2019), published some twenty years after she wrote the unpublished piece, offers a unique intergenerational interpretation of Jones's life by putting her in conversation with another important Black radical woman, Grace P. Campbell, as well as Angela Davis and the queer Black women who spearheaded the Black Lives Matter movement. Aspects of this article undoubtedly appeared in Lindsey's unpublished manuscript, not least the careful excavation of Jones's "youth work," including her encounters with Dorothy Height and Ella Baker (119-120); Jones's challenge to "Browderism" and her leadership on the question of Black self-determination after World War II (120-122); and her contribution to theorizing "triple oppression," which Lindsey attributes to the influence of radical Black women who were members of the National Negro Congress, like Helen Holman, Louise Thompson Patterson, and Audley Moore (124). Lindsey's and Boyce Davies's collaboration, intellectual exchanges, and mutually supportive relationship animated the latter's groundbreaking exegesis of Jones's life, work, and political paramouncy.

Thus, while critical work had been done on Claudia Jones prior to the publication of *Left of Karl Marx*, Boyce Davies's framing of, approach to, and detail about her subject are both exceptional and distinctive. For example, John McClendon mentioned that Jones is "quite appropriately [buried] in Highgate Cemetery next to the grave of Karl Marx." (343) Diane Langston offered a more detailed description, noting Jones was "buried next to Karl Marx in Highgate Cemetery, North London" and that twenty years later, the Afro-Caribbean Organization "erected a headstone which finally recognized Claudia's proper place in history" with its epitaph reading "Valiant Fighter against racism and imperialism who dedicated her life to the progress of socialism and the liberation of her own Black people" (26). It was Boyce Davies, however, who ascribed historical, ideological, and existential value to Jones's resting place to Marx's left. "Jones's gravesite in Highgate Cemetery... is a simple flat stone," Boyce Davies intimates, "minus all the power and might of Marx, and easily overlooked by all visitors not knowing that there is a black woman 'left of Marx'" (*Left of Karl Marx* xiv). Boyce Davies further explains that it was, in fact,

Jones's wish to be buried in this relation to Marx (245, note 42). This revelation of Jones's *left* positioning, explication of its ideological significance, and vivification of Jones's desire for such placement emanated from a special affinity between these two Black progressive Trinidadian women. Such affinity animates *Left of Karl Marx*, which "owes everything to the spiritual guidance of Claudia Jones herself with signs too many to identify" because "every step of the way she made her presence felt in remarkable ways" (vii).

### Radical Black female subjectivity

In *Left of Karl Marx*, Boyce Davies made an invaluable conceptual contribution in coining "radical Black female subjectivity." The radical black subject, she argues, "constitutes itself as resisting the particular dominating disciplines, systems, and logic of a given context." This subject, male or female, "challenges the normalizing of state oppression, constructs alternative discourse, and articulates these both theoretically and in practice." Moreover, the radical Black subject resists the domination of systems, states, institutions, and organizations that work to maintain oppression, exclusion, exploitation, and docility (5). Boyce Davies's own radical Black subjectivity is palpable in many of her writings. In "Sisters Outside: Tracing the Caribbean/Black Radical Intellectual Tradition," (2009) for example, she interrogates, and ventures to rectify, the outsider position radical Black women occupy in scholarship about Black and Caribbean intellectual and political traditions. Taking up Kevin Gaines's and Patricia J. Saunders's readings of *Left of Karl Marx*, and drawing on Erik McDuffie's then-recent work on Black women's radicalism, Boyce Davies offers a thick understanding of Claudia Jones's political and intellectual importance in relationship to a number of other Black women thinkers—from Zora Neale Hurston to the Sojourners for Truth and Justice to Angela Davis—to argue that Jones's "outsiderness" as a woman and as a foreigner allowed her to fundamentally refashion and revolutionize Marxist-Leninist thought. As a radical Black female subject, Boyce Davies moved beyond simply critiquing the work of scholars like Anthony Bogues and Winston James for omitting Black and Caribbean women to do the more important work of "giving space and attention specifically to this erased person, Claudia Jones" (226). In taking Jones seriously as a "Transatlantic activist, a Black radical intellectual from the Caribbean who... revolutionised Marxism-Leninism [by]... address[ing]... issues that Marx and Lenin left unarticulated" (226), Boyce Davies not only corrected Jones's erasure, but also offered a framework for understanding and recovering other outsiders.

The radical Black female subjectivity that animated "Sisters Outside" can be gleaned in Boyce Davies's essay for the blog *Black Perspectives*, "The Persistence of Institutional Sexism in Africana Studies." Here, she upbraids the outsider status Black women occupy in Cornell University's Africana Studies and Research Center and calls out the "institutional sexism" manifested in the long line of Black men who have served as its directors while not one woman has been afforded that opportunity. Boyce Davies's analysis demonstrates that, just as Jones and other radical Black women have been overlooked in scholarship about the Black Radical Tradition, so too have qualified and committed Black women academics experienced "intense

marginalization” in higher education generally, and the Africana Studies and Research Center particularly. Though Boyce Davies argues that an “intersectional analysis is warranted in examining academic institutions like [Cornell],” it is in fact her *radical Black female subjectivity*—that is, her willingness to critique institutional oppression, to openly challenge material and discursive racial-sexual erasure, and to recognize both the personal and systemic forms of multimodal oppression—that join her with Claudia Jones in pushing for structural transformation. Indeed, for Boyce Davies, “Black woman” as an abstract category, Black feminism as liberal politics, and identity reductionism do little to evince radical subjectivity. In her important article, “Con-di-fi-cation: Transnationalism, Diaspora, and the Limits of Domestic Racial or Feminist Discourses,” (2006) Boyce Davies rejects any celebration or admiration of Condoleezza Rice simply because she is a powerful Black woman. She excoriates Rice’s application of discourses of Black liberation to imperialist ends, alignment with corporate internationality, ruthless dismantling of Ethnic Studies and Women’s Studies at Stanford University as part of her austerity efforts to balance the budget, and overall practice of oppressive politics. Boyce Davies’s radical Black female subjectivity can be understood as the antithesis of what she calls “condification,” defined as “the process of intellectuals from oppressed groups, who enter the seats of power and then operate with calmness for the benefit of oppression [and] American imperialism” (13). As such, her subjectivity is a repudiation of bourgeois Black/feminist discourse that calls out various forms of oppression only to gain recognition by, or inclusion into, structures of domination, while dutifully maintaining them. As demonstrated in her co-authored article, “Imperial Geographies and Caribbean Nationalism: At the Border Between “A Dying Colonialism,” and U.S. Hegemony,” Boyce Davies’s vehement rejection of Western and US imperialism makes her a faithful comrade of Claudia Jones and a forceful critic of Condoleezza Rice.

Anti-imperialism is a key aspect of Boyce Davies’s radical Black female subjectivity because it connects the “local struggles of Black people and women against racism and sexist oppression to international struggles against colonialism and imperialism” (60). Likewise, anti-imperialism links two of Jones’s overlooked but essential writings, “American Imperialism and the British West Indies” and “On the Right to Self-Determination for Negroes in the Black Belt.” These essays, Boyce Davies argues, illuminate the domestic and international specifications of American imperialism, thus situating the United States among imperial powers like Britain and the Netherlands; link internal colonialism in the United States to the conditions of other nations, like India and Indonesia, suffering under the yoke of imperialism; and clarify the role of the United States in undermining Black self-determination from the US South to the West Indies. Further, Jones’s radical Black female subjectivity fundamentally shaped her anti-imperialism, and this was evident in “[h]er ability to link race, gender, geography, and labor in the context of the situation of black women internationally...” which “provided a more advanced reading of both the conditions and the possibilities for resistance by black women under imperialism” (67). In other words, Jones, not unlike Boyce Davies, centered women’s labor, political activism, and economic empowerment in the struggle against foreign, capitalist, and patriarchal domination.

Jones’s radical Black female subjectivity is also discernable in the way she described and understood herself (33). Explaining her personal experience of harassment,



incarceration, and deportation, for example, she offered some of the most insightful analysis of how the conjuncture of her politics and her identity rendered her subversive and un-American. In a 1956 interview with George Bowrin, she explained that she was a “victim of McCarthyite hysteria” that targeted those who challenged the “official pro-war, pro-reactionary, pro-fascist line of the white ruling class of that country” (Boyce Davies 16). Jones conveyed that if radicalism was dangerous, then Black radicalism was absolutely anathema since the government tended to believe that Blacks were more susceptible to Communism—and thus prone to subversion—and “this attitude meant that Reds were persecuted and black Reds were virtually flagellated” (Horne 207). Jones understood that she was particularly targeted because she was a “Negro woman Communist of West Indian descent” who struggled to end of Jim Crow, to unite white and Black workers, to empower women, and to push US domestic and foreign policy to the side of durable peace (Boyce Davies, *Claudia Jones* 16). Jones also argued that her application for American citizenship had been rejected because she urged spending for social welfare instead of arms; prosecution of lynchers instead of Communists and anticapitalists; and because she continually noted that it was “financiers and war mongers” who were the “real advocates of force and violence in the U.S.A” (17). Moreover, “The very law under which I was deported, the reactionary Walter-McCarran law,” Jones analyzed, was “widely known for its special racist bias towards West Indians and peoples of Asian descent.” These groups were targeted, she reasoned, because their progressive ideas were the most threatening to the conservative foundations of the US state: “This law which came into being as a result of the whole reactionary drive against progressive ideas in the United States encourages immigration of fascist scum from Europe but restricts West Indian immigration once in their thousands annually to the United States, to 100 persons per year, from all Caribbean islands” (Johnson 129). In the final analysis, Jones recognized her radical Black female subjectivity—her race, gender, and nationality, in addition to her communism, anti-imperialism, anti-racism, anti-sexism, and anti-fascism—as foundational to both her revolutionary politics and her persistent repression.

### **Mutual comradeship**

In *Comrade: An Essay on Political Belonging* (2019), Jodi Dean argues that “comrade” describes a relationship of sameness, equality, and solidarity that cuts through the determinants of capitalist society; that anyone, but not everyone, qualifies as a comrade; that the individual is the antithesis of the comrade; and that fidelity and truth mediates the relationship between comrades (95). For Dean, the comrade is a generic figure, one that rejects the individual specificities constituting patriarchal racial capitalism, thus specifications like “woman comrade” or “Black comrade” undermine this utopian horizon of political belonging. While “mutual comradeship” shares some of the features of Dean’s comrade, it describes a different set of social relations. Mutual comradeship can be understood as radical African descendants’ ethical practice of collaboration, reciprocal care, and learning in community rooted in political work on behalf of the racialized, colonized, and oppressed. It entails dedication of time, energy, and resources to radical causes; mutual support for

radical organizations, institutions, and periodicals; the provision of jobs and income for persons whose politics deemed them undesirable as employees; and protection from and defense against state repression. In this way, mutual comradeship is diametrically opposed to the individualist, exploitative, violent, and dehumanizing values that constitute racialized capitalist-imperialist society (Burden-Stelly 200). Mutual comradeship also entails the lateral and intergenerational practice of legacy maintenance—including archiving, commemoration, public remembrance, and truth-telling—predicated upon the enduring commitment to, advocacy for, and protection of those who, because of their radical praxis, are intentionally erased, obscured, distorted, displaced, silenced, and/or hidden from memory.

Mutual comradeship was a fundamental aspect of Claudia Jones's life and politics. For example, when her dear friend and fellow CPUSA member Ben Davis, the Black communist stalwart and Harlem City Councilman, was incarcerated under the Smith Act, she penned the passionate pamphlet, *Ben Davis Fighter for Freedom* (1954). She emphasized his invaluable struggle on behalf of Black, working class, and oppressed people; condemned the horrors of antiblackness and McCarthyism; and demanded his immediate release from prison. Jones located Davis in a long line of Black freedom fighters, including Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and David Walker, and linked his case to other antiblack "frame ups," including that of the Scottsboro Case, Angelo Herndon the Martinsville Seven, and Rosa Lee Ingram. Relatedly, Jones's pamphlet included numerous statements in support of Davis from Black activists and leaders across the ideological spectrum, including Paul and Eslanda Robeson, W.E.B. Du Bois, J.A. Rogers, and Walter White. Here, she underscored that even those who did not agree with him politically admired his principle, fearlessness, and steadfastness. They also understood that his incarceration represented the efforts of the US government to intimidate Black people, to red-bait their struggles for rights and equality, and to undermine the constitution as a whole. This political expression of collective care is a cornerstone of mutual comradeship. Furthermore, *Ben Davis: Fighter for Freedom* emphasized that Davis belonged to a community of Black militants and Black victims of state violence, thus making his cause a struggle on behalf of Black and oppressed people more broadly. Emphasizing the lasting significance of Ben Davis's wide-ranging activism, unrelenting courage, and enduring care, Jones wrote:

There has not been a single case of injustice that Ben Davis has not raised voice and pen against.

Whether it has been the defense of the honour and dignity of Negro Womanhood, against legal lynching, or whether it has been his fight against the deathly rat-traps and tinder boxes in which some of our people live; whether against police brutality and terror which rides on well-groomed horses in the Harlem ghetto; or against the monopoly ownership of our homes our jobs and the very plots which claim our bodies in death which are Jim Crowed, Ben Davis' fearless and uncompromising voice has assailed the peoples enemies. (141)

In focusing on the merit of Davis's struggle on behalf of the masses instead of his individual achievements, Jones's practice of mutual comradeship reveals their shared community-orientation and socialist ethics.

Insofar as mutual comradeship challenges state repression and rejects individualism, *Ben Davis: Fighter for Freedom* also gave voice to several other Black Communists across the nation who were menaced by the Smith Act, including Jones, Henry Winston, James E. Jackson, and Claude Lightfoot. In writing it, Jones worked to ensure that anticommunist hysteria did not erase or silence these Black radicals and to affirm the instrumental role of Black communists in the struggle for liberation. “The ruling class of our country,” she explained, “well understands the historical significance of the rise of Negro Communist leadership in the United States. It is a leadership whose ideas and perspectives are based upon the scientific principles of Socialism, upon the conviction that full economic, political and social equality for the Negro people can only be won fully allied to the cause of the working class” (Boyce Davies, *Claudia Jones* 146). With this advocacy, Jones reciprocated to her comrades the same tireless dedication and commitment they gave to the struggle for Black and working-class freedom.

The inclusion of *Ben Davis: Fighter for Freedom*—a piece of Jones’s writing that has been largely overshadowed by her more popular works—in *Claudia Jones: Beyond Containment* represents Boyce Davies’s efforts to present a fuller picture of Jones’s politics and activism and to more carefully curate Jones’s legacy. In other words, it conveys the mutual comradeship between these two radical Black female subjects. Alongside writing *Left of Karl Marx* and compiling *Beyond Containment*, the assembling and depositing of the Claudia Jones Memorial Collection at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is perhaps Boyce Davies’s most significant act of mutual comradeship. The latter is underscored by the collaborative nature of this endeavor; Boyce Davies was aided by several London comrades—many of whom were also comrades of Claudia Jones—including Ricky Cambridge, Diane Langford, and Claudia Machanda. Boyce Davies explains:

One day, while engaged in research in London, I met up with a few friends in a Brixton café and there one of them pointed out a man who was Claudia Jones’s last assistant and was a London activist named Ricky Cambridge... when I interviewed him about Claudia, he gave me quite a bit of detail but kept telling me that her papers must be somewhere in Hampstead one of her last residences. A year or so later, Janice Shinebourne, a Guyanese writer friend who resides in London called to tell me that [Diane Langford] had Claudia’s papers... I made contact with Diane Langford and one night, Ricky and I, who had become research partner[s], accompanied me to [Diane’s home in] Hampstead... where we found two boxes. (Boyce Davies and Burden-Stelly 6)

This process of assistance, connection, and relationship building among friends and allies similarly committed to the life and legacy of Claudia Jones is an example of mutual comradeship: friends pointed Carole to Ricky, who then became her research partner; another friend alerted Carole to Diane, who was more than willing to share her materials with Carole and her new interlocuter. Such collaboration, along with the itinerate and diasporic nature of this journey of discovery, is very emblematic of Jones’s own ethical and political practices. Boyce Davies continues:

[We] went through [the papers] as [Diane] contemplated what to do with [them]—wanting to place them in a secure location... Diane was worried about having these

papers in her possession and described having lent them to the [British Broadcast Company] for a documentary, to Marika Sherwood, and to Merle Collins and had loaned some of the material to Donald Hinds, all of who were working on writing something on Claudia Jones. She felt then that the collection needed to be secured. Immediately, I thought of the Schomburg and encouraged Diane that that would be a fitting way of bringing Claudia back to the United States and to the Harlem she loved. She travelled to the Schomburg to make the arrangements and a deposit under my direction. The next year, I bought two large suitcases and packed the 2 boxes of material into them, and travelled with great trepidation with them back to the U.S., and to Northwestern University where I was then working and began the process of documenting what was in the collection, scanning some things, organizing the material in preparation for it to go to the Schomburg Center for Research on Black Culture... (Boyce Davies and Burden-Stelly 7)

Mutual comradeship manifests here in several ways: in Boyce Davies's encouragement of Langford to deposit the papers and in securing the relationship with the Schomburg; in Langford's trust in Boyce Davies to carefully shepherd Jones's papers across the Atlantic; and in Boyce Davies's steadfast commitment to catalogue Jones's legacy. In doing so, the scholar-turned-curator created the conditions for other scholars to be able to learn about and study this germinal organizer and theoretician, and, importantly, returned Jones to her beloved Harlem. As Boyce Davies intimates, "We agreed (Ricky, Diane, her daughter Claudia Manchanda, and I) that the Schomburg was the best location for such an archive because of Claudia's residential and political Harlem connections, her deportation from the U.S., and a kind of political need to return her to the community where she spent most of her life." (7) Moreover, in housing the papers at the Schomburg, where the papers of Black radicals like Vicki Garvin, Paul Robeson, Lorraine Hansberry, W. Alphaeus Hunton, and Doxey Wilkerson are located, Boyce Davies conveyed both a scholarly and ethical commitment to Black history, life, and culture.

### **Conclusion: Carole Boyce Davies, Claudia Jones, and alternative epistemology**

In addition to their radical Black female subjectivity and practice of mutual comradeship, Claudia Jones and Carole Boyce Davies offer an alternative epistemology for understanding, analyzing, studying, and waging struggle in racist, capitalist, patriarchal organizations, institutions, and societies. Philosopher Charles Mills (1988) explains that an "alternative epistemology" emanates from those in subordinated groups who have access to zones beyond the universal and thus offer a critical reinterpretation of the social system. Brought about by both structural oppression and the refusal of pseudo-universal positions that maintain structures of domination, alternative epistemology overcomes the illusory perceptions of hegemonic groups, presents a liberating conceptualization of society, illuminates relations of subjection, and repudiates imposed interpretations of reality.

As much of the earlier work on Claudia Jones emphasized, one of Jones's fundamental theoretical contributions came from her explication of the co-constitutive nature of race, sex, and working-class oppression in "An End to the Neglect of the Negro Woman!" (1949). This intervention was also an epistemological one. She

understood triple oppression—manifested in the concentration of Black women in unskilled, primarily domestic service; the social, political, and economic marginalization of Black women because of their position at the bottom of society; and the undermining of left-radicalism through the exclusion and disregard for Black women—as instrumental to the maintenance of US racial capitalist imperialism. This was not least because Black women, oppressed as women, as Blacks, and as workers, were the group from which the most surplus value was extracted. Jones's alternative epistemology also revealed that race—specifically Blackness—was the primary mode through which their triple oppression was experienced. It was because of their Blackness, she argued, that Black women were overrepresented in the labor market; confined to the lowest-paying jobs and excluded from all but the most menial fields of work; and earned lower wages than all men and white women. This way of knowing the world and challenging hegemonic forms of knowledge that discounted Black women's radical agency allowed Jones to redress the scotomas of the left that failed to mobilize the revolutionary potential of Black women, who, for her, were the most militant and therefore essential to ending capitalist exploitation. Boyce Davies synthesizes the importance of Jones's epistemological intervention in "An End to the Neglect" thus:

I think it is an essay that goes directly to its target population—the black woman—and the ways in which we were/are not being accounted for in a range of processes (personal, social, political). And indeed, accounting for black women has driven the fields of Black Women's Studies, Black Feminism, Critical Race Theory and related courses at universities, syllabi in history, literature, political science, for example as appeared in Hull, Scott and Smith, *But Some of Us Are Brave* (1985) with its amazing title. Additionally, it makes the point that there is a whole other historical trajectory for black women's work and activism. (Davies and Burden-Stelly 9)

While Jones's alternative epistemology created the conditions for later epistemic interventions, it also illuminated the dangerous potential of knowing otherwise. As she explained, "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 the anti-imperialist coalition, is greatly enhanced." (3)

Boyce Davies's alternative epistemology has allowed her to both call out structures of domination in her politics and scholarship, and to call Black radical women like Claudia Jones into the intellectual and political traditions in which they rightfully belong. It has propelled her innovation of many important conceptual frameworks, including "deportable subjects," which has been instrumental to this author's scholarship. In "Deportable Subjects: U.S. Immigration Laws and the Criminalization of Communism" (2001), Boyce Davies argues that historically, deportation and incarceration have been linked technologies of dispossession used to punish, criminalize, and render stateless "alien" militants, especially those of West Indian descent, whose politics render them subversive and dangerous. Her article filled a gap in diaspora literature, which, in its focus on exile and immigration, had largely failed to engage with the subject of deportation (950-951). Her alternative epistemology named and vivified radical diasporic subjects whose Black internationalism, Communism,

precarious citizenship, transgressive politics, and/or un-Americanness rendered them illegible in hegemonic scholarly production. It offered a way of seeing, accounting for and (re)collecting those whose radicalism expelled them to the interstices of exile, erasure, deportability, and the “limbolike existence of unbelonging” (964).

This author’s own work, including the dissertation, *The Modern Capitalist State and the Black Challenge: Culturalism and the Elision of Political Economy* (2016) and, more directly, the articles “Constructing Deportable Subjectivity: Antiforeignness, Antiradicalism, and Antiblackness during the McCarthyist Structure of Feeling” (2017) and “Claudia Jones, the Longue Durée of McCarthyism, and the Threat of U.S. Fascism” (2021), are indebted to the alterative epistemology of Boyce Davies and Jones. Likewise, it is the author’s hope that her radical Black female subjectivity and practice of mutual comradeship honor the tremendous contributions of Carole Boyce Davies in much the same way that her scholar-activism has embodied the legacy of Claudia Jones.

## Notes on contributor

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