Claudia Jones and Black Power: A Close Reading of The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News

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When Claudia Jones was deported to Britain in 1955, the U.S. Government likely expected that the Communist threat she presented was finally neutralized. Yet, from the shores of Britain, Jones continued her radical activism. The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News (WIG), created by Jones in 1958, became an effective bullhorn to foster unity and solidarity amongst Black migrants in Britain towards many causes - at home and abroad. She called upon her previously established transnational connections to bring news of international developments to her British audience. The *WIG*'s coverage of the U.S. Civil Rights and Black Power Movements throughout the 1960s was also significant. Linking the US and the UK to global changes, Jones kept a finger on the pulse of radical movements across the world and amplified them to her audience in editorials about uprisings in the Congo in 1960, revivals of Garveyism in Jamaica, and revolution in Cuba, for example. Drawing closely from the *WIG*, this article will analyze some of the continuities that rippled throughout the activism of Claudia Jones into the period of the Black Power Movement, as well as the overlapping activists, their strategies, and the important discussions the *WIG* was able to platform during its run. It will highlight that the many crossovers observed through the pages of the *WIG* evidence how a generation of activists were influenced by the knowledge transmitted through the life and work of Claudia Jones.

Keywords: black power; West Indian Gazette, Claudia Jones, internationalism, radicalism, Britain

Introduction

The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News (*WIG*), founded by Claudia Jones, was a newspaper which has been cemented as a major contribution to the timeline of Black British history. In January 2023, it was announced that Jones would receive recognition in Britain via a blue plaque from English Heritage.[1] By endowing her with a plaque that is

[1] Harriet Sherwood, "Notting Hill carnival's 'founding spirit' to be honoured with blue plaque", *The Guardian*, Jan 26, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2023/jan/26/claudia-

cautiously describing her as an "anti-racist", "civil rights" activist, her role as a Black radical and Communist will again be softened – just as it was in the Royal Mail's 2008 stamp collection honoring 'Women of Distinction' which used similarly liberal terminology.[2] However, she should be remembered as an emphatically radical woman. Following Jones's exile from the United States as a consequence of Government campaigns to purge Communists from the political sphere, she arrived in the United Kingdom, in 1955, eager to find a new platform to continue her work. Rigorously trained in organizing and public writing throughout her years with the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA), she immediately sought out a path towards radical activism in Britain. It is vital to note from the outset that Jones emerged as part of a cohort of radical Black activists. Women like Charlotta Bass, Vicki Garvin, Eslanda Robeson and many others exemplified the methodology that Carole Boyce Davies has termed 'journalism as praxis'.[3] Jones and her contemporaries continued the tradition of activists who had come before, like Ida B Wells, who was a force to be reckoned with a generation prior. Crucially, Anthony Bogues has stated that Wells was a trailblazer who merged "activity and theoretical reflection" into praxis.[4] Similarly, Jones merged her writings on anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles in the *WIG* with her intention to rally practically and with purpose, creating her own platform through which she brought attention to the struggles of the era.

Running from 1958 to 1965, its pages shone a light on both national and international developments, with a particular focus on African, Caribbean, and Asian communities. It

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jones-founding-spirit-notting-hill-carnival-blue-plaque-london-home-english-heritage [Accessed March 29 2023]

[2] *Women of Distinction Commemorative Collection*, Royal Mail, Vol.45 No.11, October 14, 2008, https://www.collectgbstamps.co.uk/explore/issues/?issue=1382 [Accessed March 29 2023]

[3] [3] Carole Boyce Davies, *The Role of Black Journalism in the Struggle for Freedom*, talk hosted by the Claudia Jones School for Political Education, February 17 2022 https://www.youtube.com/live/OU6oY70G8Is?feature=share [Accessed March 25 2023]

[4] Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York, Routledge, 2003), 48.

functioned as a tool to bring news of activism and issues to the people in Britain, while stimulating activism itself. The life of Claudia Jones is often intertwined with histories of Black Communist activists of the early and mid-20th Century, however very little has been said about her potential impact on the radicals of the Black Power Movement - which emerged only a few years after her untimely death. One of Black Power's most iconic activists, Stokely Carmichael, wrote in 1967 that Black Power was a call for unity amongst Black people, "Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks. By this we mean that group solidarity is necessary."[5] Additionally, Carmichael stated that Black Power was a movement pushing "for Black people to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations."[6] With this definition in mind this article will show how events like the Caribbean Carnival, Jones's activism around housing and legislation, and her coverage of radical international shifts, preempted some of Black Power's principles of building solidarity, nurturing a love of one's people and history, and encouraging further activism through grassroots organizing. Articles in the *WIG* frequently discussed Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, the condition of Black Communists in the USA, and Cuba's development as a newly constituted socialist nation – all to help build ideological bridges that would foster transnational solidarity. Additionally, the *WIG* elevated an array of activists in Britain who offered a birds-eye view of regional racial matters, like ongoing articles from Henry Gunter - a Black British Communist reporting on Birmingham, UK. It was an avenue to escalate the concerns of the local, national and transnational communities that intersected in its pages. In this sense, the *WIG* undoubtedly became what James Smethurst called an 'institution', which rallied for progressive activism amongst people of the British metropole, and beyond.[7] Subsequently, it influenced, and was influenced by, the events unfolding across the world in the turbulent 1960s. Thus, it should be considered more seriously as a connective tissue in the early years of Black Power history.

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[5] Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation In America* (Aylesbury: Penguin Books, 1969), 58.

[6] *Ibid*, 58.

[7] James Smethurst, "Claudia Jones, the West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian-Caribbean News and the Rise of a New Black Radicalism in the UK and US", *Science & Society*, Vol. 87, No.2, (April 2023), 261-284. https://doi.org/10.1521/siso.2023.87.2.261

Of note, in this formulation, is the missed connection between Jones and Malcolm X in December of 1964. Since Malcolm X had already met with some of Jones's contemporaries, for example Shirley Graham Du Bois and Vicki Garvin, one wonders what conversation might have taken place between the two – and how her wisdom might have shaped the trajectory of the Black Power Movement. Consequently, this article will utilize what Minkah Makalani has termed a 'genealogical approach' and explore the elements of Black Power politics that can be seen throughout the many articles in the *WIG*.[8] It will highlight how Jones, herself, and the newspaper was a significant contributor to the permeating ideas of Black Power. Many contributors to the *WIG* crossed paths with both Jones and other major Black activists of the later movement, and through the *WIG* it can be seen how it was an important forum for activists who were each witnessing the emergence of a new phase of political protest in their own geographic arenas. Ultimately, this article argues that the *WIG* was an effervescent space that showcased many of the discussions, concerns and actions that were needed to usher in the Black Power era.

Establishing the *West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*

When Claudia Jones arrived in Britain in 1955, the landscape of British politics was paradoxically similar and yet different when it came to the experiences of Black people in Britain, versus the United States. Although Britain did not have legally codified segregation akin to Jim Crow in the US, the conditions and concerns of Black people were comparable. Discrimination was rife in almost all aspects of Black life in Britain. Whereas British officials were happy to paternalistically label Black people in the colonies as 'British Subjects', when those subjects made their way to the British mainland their presence was not positively welcomed. African and Caribbean migrants who came to the country seeking further education, housing, employment, or simply a new life faced hostile practices. Indeed, even those who were explicitly invited by the Government through work programs could not

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8 Minkah Makalani. "An Apparatus for Negro Women: Black Women's Organizing, Communism, and the Institutional Spaces of Radical Pan-African Thought." *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 4, no. 2 (2016): 254. https://doi.org/10.5406/womgenfamcol.4.2.0250

escape the rampant racism. Activist Chris Mullard remarked in *Black Britain* (1973) that the British Government actively stoked the fires of racism through speeches demanding migration controls: "overnight, blacks were suddenly held responsible for the unemployment figures, housing shortage, lack of adequate social services, schools and hospital beds."[9]

Many Black activist groups had already been established prior to Claudia Jones's arrival in 1955, like the Caribbean Labor Congress (CLC). Their newspaper *Caribbean News* was in many ways a precursor to the founding of the *WIG*.[10] Notable contributors to the CLC included Jones's cousin Trevor Carter, Billy Strachan, Winston Pinder, and others – and many overlapped with Jones as both Black Communist activists and Caribbean migrants in Britain. Only a year prior to Jones's arrival, Communist Henry Gunter published literature detailing the effects of the color bar in Birmingham, England. In one of the first joint efforts between Black Communists and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), *A Man's A Man: A Study of Colour Bar in Birmingham and an Answer (1954),* Gunter detailed the range of discrimination many Black migrants faced.[11] In 1948, the so-called 'Windrush generation' came over to Britain in search of a better life, yet for many immigrants they were faced with a country wholly unprepared to welcome them. So much so, that sociologist Sheila Patterson ominously referred to them as "dark strangers."[12] Many migrants travelled from the Caribbean, and Trevor Carter detailed that when he arrived in Britain in 1954 "the solidarity of the British working class movement was at best ambivalent and at worst meaningless."[13] There were, as a result, very few organizations that migrants could turn to as a means of organizing against their problems. Although the *WIG*, as Kennetta Hammond Perry has argued, followed the tradition of earlier Black British periodicals like George Padmore's

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[9] Chris Mullard, *Black Britain*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1973), 46.

[10] Hakim Adi, *African and Caribbean People in Britain: A History*, (Great Britain: Allen Lane, 2022), 390-393.

[11] Henry Gunter, *A Mans A Man: A Study of the Colour Bar In Britain*, (Communist Party of Great Britain, 1954), Wolfson Center for Archival Research, Library of Birmingham.

[12] Sheila Patterson, *Dark Strangers: A Sociological Study of the Absorption of a Recent West Indian Migrant Group in Brixton, South London* (London: Indiana University Press), 1964.

[13] Trevor Carter, *Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), 44.

International African Opinion, and Harold Moody's *The Keys*. Moody's organization - the League of Colored People - and many others, were defunct or had limited reach by 1955.[14] Yet, Black people in Britain were still a force which could be roused towards anti-colonial and anti-racist causes. Thus, the *WIG* sought harness this energy. Thus, when Claudia Jones stepped off the train at Victoria Station in London, she was welcomed to her new home by Winston Pinder and others from the CPGB who had already begun to elucidate the myriad of problems that needed to be tackled by Black activists. Pinder recalled that one of the first things she said to the delegation was that she was "ready to work."[15] And work she did. She was quickly folded into the milieu of Black Communists who had established themselves in Britain, and they too became entrenched with the *WIG*.

Almost 5 years after her deportation from the United States to Britain, Jones broke new ground as a Black woman Communist activist who founded a major newspaper. Although Marika Sherwood has suggested that Claudia Jones was never fully folded into the milieu of the CPGB and was 'a woman alone', she operated both within and out with the sphere of CPGB organizing.[16] In the past Claudia Jones's talent for CPUSA organizing had been borne out largely through her journalism. With her talent for writing, Jones was able to communicate nuanced political arguments in a tenor that resonated in layman's terms. Some of her most well-known writings to this day remain pieces that she wrote for Communist

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[14] Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London is the Place for Me: Black Britons, Citizenship and the Politics of Race,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 132.

[15] Angela Cobbinah, Winston Pinder in "Remembering Claudia Jones at Highgate Cemetery", *Camden New Journal*, February 25 2022, https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/remembering-claudia-jones-at-highgate-cemetery

[16] Marika Sherwood, *Claudia Jones: A Life in Exile*, (Chadwell Heath: Lawrence and Wishart, 2021), 88, 182. CPGB activist David Horsley has argued in *The Political Life and Times of Claudia Jones* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain – Manifesto Press, 2020), that Jones did in fact contribute to CPGB committees such as the Communist Party's West Indian Committee and International Committee. While these roles were not as significant as the many positions Jones held in the CPUSA, it suggests that she was not shunned entirely by the CPGB and they did attempt to bring her into the fold.

Party outlets which aimed to mobilize activists towards its goals. Therefore, it is not surprising that her strategy of organizing remained rooted in this methodology.

In the 1950s, when the *WIG* was founded, Britain was experiencing major social change. By 1958, Britain was experiencing a heightened period of racial tension. The Notting Hill Riots of 1958 lit the fuse on the powder keg, and for weeks outbreaks of violence were levied at Caribbean, and other Black migrants, in the vicinity. These outbreaks were often preceded by intimidating letters recommending that migrant families leave the area - or else. However, in *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain (2018)*, activists Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe detailed that Black women were not so easily defeated: "Black women could be seen standing firm, machetes and bottles in hand, side by side with the men, defending ourselves in the 'riots' which were entirely of the British people's making."[17] The murder of Antiguan migrant Kelso Cochrane in May of 1959 further radicalized Black people in Britain, and urgent calls for accountability were, in part, spearheaded by Jones and others in the months that followed.[18] In a parallel to the militant Black Panthers' motto of 'survival pending revolution', Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe added that "to us, it was not merely a question of self-defense, but a struggle for survival."[19] Although Claudia herself was a new migrant in Britain, she was uniquely equipped with her history of activism and her training from the United States, to help mobilize this restless demographic towards lasting change. Claudia Jones quickly assembled an array of activists and utilized her existing connections in America.

In July of 1959, Jones was joined by her close friends and comrades – Paul and Eslanda Robeson – to celebrate the launch of her new endeavor, *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News* in London. The significance of bringing Robeson, one of the most famous Black men of the 1950s to Britain, was not lost on most. Donald Hinds, who later

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[17] Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe*, Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, (London: Verso, 2018), 134.

[18] Tionne Parris, Claudia Jones and Black Radicalism in Britain, *History Matters Journal*, Vol. 2, No.3 (Autumn 2022) https://www.historymatters.online/journal [Accessed March 21 2023]

[19] Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, *Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, (London: Verso, 2018), 134.

became one of the *WIG's* editors, stated that his schoolteacher simply "wouldn't believe" Robeson was coming to London "until she saw it."[20] Hinds himself was incredulous on reflection – "Who but Claudia Jones could bring Paul Robeson in a concert to Brixton, in Lambeth Town Hall?"[21] At the inaugural event, Paul Robeson heralded the paper as "courageous, deeply human", and "concerned with a decent life for us all."[22] This amplified the WIG's inception, as it showed the newspaper was wholeheartedly supported by some of the eras most influential American radicals. This set in motion a pattern that would continue through its run. The *WIG* consistently emphasized the importance of international collaboration amongst Black and Asian people. Its November 1959 editorial read "unity can defeat rising racial tensions."[23] Echoing the tactics of the Communist Party USA in the 1930s, which urged unity across racial and class lines to defeat white supremacy, Jones similarly made numerous appeals to the *WIG* readership. This principle was again repeated during the Black Power era, when many organizations such as the Black Panther Party called for solidarity with 'all oppressed peoples of the world.'[24]

The *WIG*'s early issues exemplified its aim to educate readers and, consequently, prompt activism. It was a platform to appeal to the widest possible audience. Its composition foregrounded national and international news, but also included slice of life segments covering hair and beauty, letters from readers, and a sports section at the end of each issue. Interestingly, during the first year of publication, the *WIG* featured a 'Know Your History' segment, with one about the "Story of Conquerabia" and another about the "Morant Bay

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[20] Donald Hinds in Marika Sherwood, *Claudia Jones: A Life in Exile*, (Chadwell Heath: Lawrence and Wishart, 2021), 206.

[21] *Ibid*, 206.

[22] "Meet Paul Robeson", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, September 1959, British Library, London.

[23] "UNITY CAN DEFEAT RISING RACIAL TENSIONS", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, November 1959, British Library, London.

[24] 'Afro-American Solidarity with the oppressed People of the World', Black Panthers Solidarity poster by Emory Douglas; USA, 1969, Yale University 1968@50 collection {Yale University, 2023) https://aap68.yale.edu/black-panther-party-poster-afro-american-solidarity-oppressed-people-world [Accessed March 27 2023]

Rebellion of 1865."[25] This was not repeated further but showed the early influences on the *WIG* as it tried to find its niche. Offering a segment to educate readers on Caribbean history, it followed the example set by other newspapers and periodicals Claudia Jones may have read in the United States - for example Paul Robeson's *Freedom*. *Freedom* ran from 1950 to 1955 and included regular "Stories for Children" sections that explored the story of historical figures like Harriet Tubman.[26] The practice of instilling racial pride through the stories of Black heroes was carried over briefly to the *WIG* through its replication of this format. Furthermore, *Freedom* was in essence a collective endeavor by many radicals of the era who aimed to inform the general reader about national political developments, as well as happenings abroad. Many of whom would also contribute often to the *WIG* – including Eslanda Goode Robeson and Shirley Graham Du Bois. Therefore, it cannot have been merely a coincidence that much like *Freedom*, Claudia Jones quickly sought out contributions from other Black radicals in Britain, and beyond. For the duration of its run, the *WIG* frequently included writings from John LaRose, Sékou Touré, Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, and of course Jones herself. Through these collaborations, the *WIG* embodied a mosaic of contributions from Black intellectuals who would later become icons of international Black Power agitation.

The *WIG,* as well as educating readers, attempted to buttress the waning spirit of Caribbean migrants by again instilling pride in their collective cultural roots. Most had moved from their homelands in hope of a better life, and Britain was proving to be a bitter disappointment. Unfortunately, returning home was not always feasible with limited money, opportunity, or even no life to go back to. For example, in the case of Trevor Carter, he had been imprisoned for his activities as a Trade Union leader in Jamaica - so Britain was seen as an alternative to restart his life while continuing his engagement with Communist politics.[27]

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[25] "BARELY 100 YEARS AGO…WE FOUGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO VOTE IN THE MORANT BAY REBELLION, *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, November 1959, British Library, London.

[26] Paul Robeson and Louis E. Burnham, *Freedom*, (Freedom Associates, 1950-1955), full archive available at NYU Libraries http://dlib.nyu.edu/freedom/ [Accessed March 29, 2023]

[27] Trevor Carter, *Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), 44.

The persistent social hostility to non-white migrants was a jarring reality for many across Britain, and even attempts to assimilate were not always met positively by racists – many of whom would never accept Black migrants no matter what. Therefore, Claudia Jones's indoor Caribbean Carnival was proposed as a haven to instead celebrate Caribbean culture in Britain. The Caribbean Carnival was frequently advertised throughout the WIG's 7-year run. In January 1960, the issue was headlined "Our Beauties Compete for Caribbean Queen Prize", followed by several glamour shots of the contestants.[28] Whereas the phrase 'Black is beautiful' is often attributed to the 1960s in the United States, having emerged as a slogan of the Black Power era, the beauty pageants sponsored by the *WIG* celebrated the aesthetics of Black women as early as 1959. This was one of the many ways in which Jones linked her political work with revelry in the beauty of Black arts, Black people, and Black diasporic cultures. In the same 1960 issue, sections also detailed that the event would be facilitated by a range of Caribbean contributors – including the writers George Lamming and Sylvia Wynter, as well as activists like Pearl Connor, Claudia Jones, and more. Drawing together this impressive panel was part and parcel of the effect Jones hoped Carnival would have on its audience. Not only was it focused on vibrant, cultural celebrations, it gathered together Black migrants in celebration, but offered proximity to prominent and aspirational Caribbean intellectuals of the time.

Later, in 1967, Trinidadian activist Stokely Carmichael of the Black Power Movement in the US would advocate for a stringent program that tackled the intertwined issues affecting African Americans. He wrote, in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (1967) that "vast segments of the black communities are beginning to recognize the need to assert their own definitions, to reclaim their history, their culture; to create their own sense of community and togetherness."[29] Claudia Jones recognized the necessity of Black liberatory politics akin to the late 1960s wave, and she had written about Black self-determination as early as 1946. While many migrants struggled to assimilate in Britain, Jones continued to live out her assertion that 'integration cannot be considered a substitute for the right to self-

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[28] "Our Beauties Compete for Caribbean Queen Prize", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, January 1960, British Library, London.

[29] Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation In America* (Aylesbury: Penguin Books, 1969), 51.

determination.[30] The Caribbean Carnival was an opportunity to carve out space in Britain for Black migrants to hold onto their roots, and thus it served the dual purpose of bolstering political and cultural empowerment in the face of empire.

Local and National Activism in the WIG

Discriminatory housing practices were one of the British color bar's most damaging effects. Housing had been a consistent concern of communist activists in the decades prior in the United States – notably with the Harlem Tenants League in the 1930s. Later, it would be a major concern for future organizers in the Black Panther Party. The fundamental demands of the Panther's 10-point program, often simplified to land, bread, and housing – were also representative of problems for people throughout the African diaspora. Bobby Seale would later quote Huey Newton in *Seize the Time* (1970), who said: "This is what Black people have been voicing all along for over 100 years since the Emancipation Proclamation and even before that."[31] Claudia Jones was part of this historic pattern, and was outspoken in addressing the issue of housing, which contributed to the oppression of racialized and impoverished people in Britain. Britain in the 1960s was referred to, by Black Liberation Front Activist Joan-Anim-Addo, as "the nightmare years."[32] As well as outright violence on the streets, Black migrants could expect to face discrimination when trying to find a home – with an unspoken color bar on most public and private places. The *WIG* reported a myriad of first-hand accounts of housing discrimination through the first half of the 1960s, including special reports from Henry Gunter in Birmingham. In this sense, the *WIG* as an institution held space as an advice bureau and a bullhorn to bring attention to situations of discrimination towards migrants, who often had limited resources to fight against their material conditions alone. A November 1960 issue detailed the complaints of a Mr. Wilson,

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[30] Claudia Jones, 'On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt', 1946, in Boyce Davies, *Claudia Jones: Beyond Containment* (Banbury: Ayebia Clarke Publishing Limited, 2011), p. 66.

[31] Huey Newton in Bobby Seale*, Seize The Time*, (London: Hutchison and Co, 1970), 62.

[32] Joan Anim-Addo in *We Are Our Own Liberators: The Black Liberation Front*, directed by the Young Historians Project (2018; London; Vimeo). Available at ,https://vimeo.com/244272192?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=60489668 [Accessed March 25 2023].

originally from Trinidad, who was renting a flat with severe safety issues. He explained that his home had damp, and defective wiring. He complained that it was handed over in such a state of disarray that he believed even people in Trinidad "would not be asked for such rents, to live in such a place, as backward as Trinidad may be."[33] In the aftermath of the Second World War promises of new housing, which had been decimated in bombing campaigns from the Nazis, had been consistently forgotten by MP's once they secured election. In response to the sheer repetition of such stories, in 1961 Jones wrote an editorial critiquing the Conservative government. She stated: "Regards housing, it is not the immigrant who causes the shortage but the failure of a Tory government to then build them, the infamous Rent Act, and the diverting of funds for people's social needs."[34] With a government that actively scapegoated migrants as the source of major societal problems, acquiring decent housing was even more difficult for Black people in Britain.

In addition to issues surrounding the day-to-day freedoms afforded to, or rather withdrawn from, Black and Asian people in Britain, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 was the most glaring example of xenophobic governmental policy. This policy aimed to heavily curtail the number of racialized migrants entering Britain. It caused outrage not only because of its thinly veiled racism, but also because it sought to withdraw the benefits many Commonwealth citizens were supposed to be entitled to as a consequence of British rule over the various colonies. This therefore intertwined with international discussions about Britain's imperial and colonial influence on Africa and in Asia. The *WIG*'s dominant focus on 'Afro-Asian and Caribbean News' here was invaluable as it amplified the concerns of people residing in Britain, and people living in Africa and the diaspora. In January 1962, the *WIG*'s headline reported on a broad multicultural coalition of communities in Britain who had been galvanized to take to the streets in protest against the Commonwealth Immigrants Act. Detailing the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) March, the frontpage detailed that: "Hundreds of English, West Indian, Africans, Indians, Pakistanis, Irish, Scots, Welsh, Cypriots and others will join a protest march and demonstration against the

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[33] "W.I. RAILWAY MAN IN HOUSING CHALLENGE", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, November 1960, British Library, London.

[34] Claudia Jones, "BUTLER'S COLOUR-BAR BILL MOCKS COMMONWEALTH", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, November 1961, British Library, London.

Commonwealth Immigrants Bill."[35] This foreshadowed the effectiveness of the 1969 Rainbow Coalition led by Black Panther Fred Hampton which advocated for cross-cultural unity against oppression in the United States. Indeed, when stories of multi-racial solidarity in the US reached Britain, it exemplified what could be achieved elsewhere, and the *WIG* gave regular coverage to ongoing developments.

The *WIG* frequently platformed news of the early development of Black Power in the US, and the impact of witnessing the activism of dynamic young people was invigorating. A November 1961 issue featured two segments written by African American activist Julian Mayfield, who gave a staunch defense of two Black Power icons - Robert and Mabel Williams of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). Mere pages later, he also celebrated the bravery of the young US Freedom Riders.[36] The second piece spoke proudly of the Freedom Riders, making comparisons to African Americans in history who had led the fight for the abolition of slavery. Invoking the spirits of John Brown, Denmark Vesey, Frederick Douglass, and Sojourner Truth, the Freedom Riders were deemed the inheritors of their legacies – "defying the racialists" and continuing "their march through the South to end Jim Crow."[37] Much like the Freedom Riders who were arrested and jailed for their protest against racism in America, Claudia Jones willingly risked imprisonment in Britain. In a February 1962 article titled "I Spend A Night in Notting Hill Police Station", Jones detailed her experience when she had an opportunity to protest the arrest of her friend. Police had tracked Jones and her friends when they drove home from a party held by Caribbean migrants in London, and they falsely accused the driver of drunk driving. Although her first instinct was to allow the arrest and seek out a solicitor in the morning, Jones wrote she was "mindful of the reports on *WIG*'s desk of several reports of beating and intimidation by police of ordinary citizens", she decided to chaperone her friend to the station and stay until his release.[38] Considering

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[35] "M.C.F. Protest March", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, January 1962, British Library, London.

[36] Julian Mayfield, "THE MONROE KIDNAPPING", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, November 1961, British Library, London.

[37] Julian Mayfield, "FREEDOM RIDERS", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, November 1961, British Library, London.

[38] Claudia Jones, "I SPEND A NIGHT IN NOTTING HILL POLICE STATION", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, February 1962, British Library, London.

her previous years of incarceration, and the lack of any form of weapon to defend herself if police chose to respond violently, this was a brave move. No doubt motivated by the risks young Black people in the US were taking, Jones put her neck on the line too. This tactic was later escalated to new heights by the Black Panther Party as they patrolled neighborhoods, with guns strapped to their backs, in Oakland, California in the late 1960s. They had educated themselves to be able to respond to police with force, and with a deep knowledge of criminal statutes that negated the arrests. Jones instead thought on her feet and leveraged her reputation as the *WIG* editor. She gave the police inspector a stern lecture, denouncing the behavior of police across Britain– "many of your men hit first and ask questions later."[39] In this instance, it was clear policing in Britain had many of the same violent elements found in the U.S. Luckily, the fear of an unfavorable article in the *WIG*, and Jones's defense, led police to set her friend free that same night. Jones concluded her article reflectively, praising the effects of the *WIG* on the circumstance: "It was the sense of organization and unity that our paper represents and the fact they had no case against us at all that made for the turn of things."[40] In that same situation many others may not have been so lucky, and it was indeed Jones's ability to close ranks at that moment which led to a successful outcome.

The cross-pollination of US and UK protest tactics could also be seen in the Bristol Bus Boycotts of 1963. These boycotts were heavily inspired by the US boycotts in Montgomery, Alabama, and in Bristol they were used to demand that bus companies hire Black and Asian bus drivers. While the surviving *WIG* archives show little mention of this event, a 1989 documentary chronicling the life of Claudia Jones suggested she had some opinions on the trajectory of their demands. In *Claudia Jones: A Woman of Our Times*, Billy Strachan and Trevor Carter recalled that Jones had queried activists, asking them to push for more than simple employment – "what about being made inspectors?" To which, Carter responded that "we had never even foreseen because we thought we'd achieved a hell of a lot just getting the job."[41] In this short interaction, the radicalism of Jones shined through –

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[39] *Ibid.*

[40] *Ibid*.

[41] *Claudia Jones: A Woman Of Our Times,* directed by Ingrid Lewis, (1989; London; BBC Pebble Mill), available at https://youtu.be/VUMTOwrzgzs [Accessed March 29 2023].

as unlike the more liberal demands of British and US protests of the early 1960s – Jones had no patience to 'go slow', and instead advocated for sweeping changes at the first opportunity.

International Solidarities – Africa, America, Asia and Beyond

The most significant intervention during the run of the *West Indian Gazette* was Jones's ability to draw together the national and international problems facing a generation. The *WIG*, from the very first issues, promoted solidarity between the international communities facing similar oppressions. Trevor Carter explained that this was part of a concerted framework amongst Black Communists that was in place even prior to Claudia Jones's arrival in Britain. It was essential to unify with "the various African National Liberation struggles particularly in Kenya", however "even nearer to home and closer to the West Indian heart was the inspiration of the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959."[42] These interests were nurtured through the *WIG* as Jones brought in many guest writers and reporters on developments in the cause for African and Cuban liberation. However, while the *WIG* reported in support on various civil rights developments, Jones did not shy away from criticizing progress that she felt did not go far enough to address the fundamental problems in global struggles. Much like the radicals of the Black Power generation that followed, she was vigorous in her denunciations. For example, the June 1960 *WIG* issue noted that it was great news that Ghanaian officials withdrew their invitation for South African foreign minister Eric Louw to visit Ghana. The article chastised Louw's subsequent press conference, where they argued he had "soft pedalled" issues of race and South African apartheid policy.[43] Writers in the *WIG* were unequivocal about the defeat of white supremacy, imperialism, and colonialism – which they argued could not be won by downplaying the impact of violent apartheid policies. In September of 1960, Claudia Jones penned a lengthy editorial titled "These Are The Facts Behind the Congo Uprising."[44] Jones assuredly celebrated the effort of the Congolese people

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[42] Trevor Carter, *Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), 47.

[43] Claudia Jones, "FREEDOM…AFRICA'S RIGHT", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, June 1960, British Library, London.

[44] Claudia Jones, "THESE ARE THE FACTS BEHIND THE CONGO UPRISING", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, September 1960, Lambeth Archives, London.

and advocated for self-determination in the face of the paternalistic colonial efforts to continue to rule over the Congo. Jones wrote:

> "…in view of this sordid and shocking colonial past, what must one make of the current argument that the Congolese people 'have no right to rule' and are 'unready to rule' etc? [sic] these arguments bring to mind the old adage of the American negro which runs 'If you get off our backs perhaps we'd have a chance to rule ourselves.'[45]

When the war in the Congo ended with the brutal assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the *WIG* reported this news, and published the last letter of Lumumba. A statement from West Indians in Birmingham, England, stated that they emphatically deplored "the slaughter of a man who had his trust in the United Nations so savagely abused."[46] The effects of Lumumba's death vastly exceeded the confines of the Congo, as it caused many Black activists across the world to question the authority and intentions of global organizations like the U.N. Furthermore, Jones's invocation of African American adages was a striking choice – especially as it reverberated in continuity with the words of Martin Luther King in one of his final speeches: "whenever men and women straighten their backs up, they are going somewhere, because a man can't ride your back unless it is bent."[47] In December 1961, the *WIG* included an article titled "Toast To A Freedom Fighter" which celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King and his role at the center of the movement. However, while Jones did organize the 1963 solidarity 'March on Washington' in London, her support of the Congolese, and others, suggested that she also identified more with the self-determination and radical militancy that would be heralded in the US by Malcolm X and his heirs in the Black Power Movement. This seeming contradiction has, however, been expertly unpicked by Smethurst who stated that Jones and many of her contemporaries were traversing the borders of the old Left and the growing New Left in the United States, where the "prioritizing of Black

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[45] *Ibid*.

[46] D.L Fitzpatricio,"BRUM NEWS…We Deplore Lumumba's Murder", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News,* April 1961, British Library, London.

[47] Martin Luther King Jnr: "I've Been to the Mountaintop", delivered 3 April 1968, Memphis, Tennessee.

liberation and civil rights" existed in parallel.[48] Jones adapted, as did many of her peers, to the growing popularity of the Kingian strand that stressed non-violence over the militancy of figures like Robert F. Williams. Jones saw no need to 'pick a side' in the bourgeoning movement. Solidarity came first.

To this end, in September 1961, Claudia Jones also gave her opinion on the revival of more militant Black organizing which contrasted the liberalism of the Civil Rights Movement. In an article on Garveyite Black nationalism in Jamaica, titled "A Garvey Revival?", Jones shared her concerns with its resurrection under Millard Johnson of the People's Political Party. She wrote:

> Why only Jamaicans of African descent? Is this not a brand of racialism – pure and simple? Of all Caribbean peoples, none more than Jamaicans pride themselves as a people but Johnson's program would place black Jamaicans in one category, Chinese Jamaicans, Indian, Syrians, etc, in another – so to speak, at separate tables. What is worse, a political party in the first-place must have a national outlook for the whole nation and not merely for a section of its citizenry.[49]

Despite the later comparisons that would be made between Garvey and Jones as two militant Black activists, this article highlighted that Claudia Jones was in vehement disagreement with such isolating movements. Jones had always operated based on an intertwined class and race analysis, and she surrounded herself with Pan-Africanist women like Eslanda Robeson and Shirley Graham Du Bois. Moreover, her close friendship and working relationship with Amy Ashwood Garvey did not seem to prevent Jones from critiquing Garveyism – which was not compatible with her socialist and internationalist perspective. In line with this, the *WIG* consistently allied itself with both Pan-Africanist and internationalist causes that expanded the connections between nations and nationalities, rather than severed them. For example, articles reporting, or indeed written by, Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta appeared

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[48] James Smethurst, "Claudia Jones, the West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian-Caribbean News and the Rise of a New Black Radicalism in the UK and US", Science & Society, Vol. 87, No.2, (April 2023), 273.

[49] Claudia Jones, "A Garvey Revival?", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, September 1961, British Library, London.

regularly – with one piece presciently headlined "European Common Market a Neo-Colonialist Plot", warning of the rise of anti-communist and anti-revolutionary machinations within Africa.[50] These, much like previous pieces written about the Congo uprisings, gave updates on the revolutions taking place across the African continent. This was significant as Nkrumah, and other African leaders, would be cited as a major inspirations and influences on the international growth of Black Power – not least because of Nkrumah's book *The Spectre of Black Power (1968)*. The Black Panther Party would later encourage his work as required reading for their list of books recommended to new recruits. In addition to this link, Jones's editorials often hailed the Cuban revolution as an instructive example of success – and Cuba too would be a major inspiration to the Panthers.[51]

The internationalism of Jones and the *WIG* also expanded far beyond the African diaspora. In 1964**,** Jones followed a similar trajectory to her peers, Shirley Graham Du Bois and Eslanda Robeson, when she visited China which had recently taken its Great Leap Forward. What is worth noting is that the evolution of Jones's view of China can again be evidenced by the *WIG*. Adding to the shifting tides of Civil Rights activism in 1963, the September issue of the *WIG* underscored the allyship that was found between China's Chairman Mao and African Americans like Robert F. Williams, who was then seeking refuge in China, having escaped from the FBI. It reprinted Mao's statement in support of U.S. Civil Rights under the headline; 'China's Leader, Mao-Tse-Tung's Rousing Call to Aid Negro Struggle'.[52] In platforming the words of Chairman Mao, the *WIG* exposed readers in Britain to the liberatory potential of an alliance with China, and in turn, expanded the meaning of Afro-Asian solidarity even further. Preceding the Third World alliances which were strengthened in the Black Power era, Jones bolstered the significant inroads which had been made by the DuBois's, the Robeson's, and other radical Black activists like Vicki Garvin, in their visits to China. For example, Shirley Graham Du Bois heralded the revolutionary role

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[50] "EUROPEAN COMMON MARKET A NEO-COLONIALIST PLOT: Dr Nkrumah urges African Economic Community", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, October 1962, British Library, London.

[51] Claudia Jones, "The Story of Cuba", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, November 1961, British Library, London.

[52] 'China's Leader, "Mao-Tse-Tung's Rousing Call to Aid Negro Struggle", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, September 1963, British Library, London.

of Chinese women in her own writings on the subject, where she stated "I would like to announce to all the Black sisters in the United States, West Indies, and Africa, that there is a new phenomenon in the world now that could inspire your heart and fill it with hopes."[53] Jones would later echo Shirley Graham Du Bois when she too visited China, and the trip was an opportunity to reify her own previous calls for women's equality. This had been expressed most vividly in her 1950 speech 'Women in the Struggle for Peace and Security', and the trip solidified her commitment to women's issues. Zifeng Liu writes that she spoke with other women, and "emphasized the leadership role of women in advancing the world movement for peace and liberation."[54] This is significant because Jones died in London mere months after her return from China, and one wonders what the British Black Power Movement could have learned from Jones's encouragement of female leadership in political organising, if she had only had more time to share her experience.

Finally, as the Civil Rights Movement continued to gain international attention, many of its leaders accepted invitations to speak to audiences in varying countries about their struggle. As a result, in December 1964, Dr. Martin Luther King passed through London and Claudia Jones briefly met with him. In one of her final writings in the *WIG* titled "Dr Martin Luther King's Warning" Jones discussed their brief encounter. King had given a speech which was widely reported in national news; however Jones critiqued the 'holier than thou' attitudes of Britons' two-faced responses that decried segregation in America but did little to address racism in Britain. King's visit had highlighted, for Jones and others, the enduring and deep-seated problems within British society. She closed the piece with the words of her dear friend, Paul Robeson, and his critique of King's movement – "we can't

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[53] Shirley Graham Du Bois, quoted in Yunxiang Gao, Arise, Africa! Roar, China! Black and Chinese Citizens of the World in the Twentieth Century (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2021), 61.

[54] Zifeng Liu, Decolonization Is Not a Dinner Party: Claudia Jones, China's Nuclear Weapons, and Anti-Imperialist Solidarity, *The Journal of Intersectionality*, Vol.3, No. 1, Claudia Jones: Foremother of World Revolution (Summer 2019), 31. https://doi.org/10.13169/jinte.3.1.0021

say great God almighty we're here at last but we're moving."[55] Sadly, Jones's significant contributions to the mobilization of Black people in Britain, and elsewhere, were later overshadowed by the thrilling radical protests that swept much of the world from 1966 onwards. When Jones passed away suddenly in December of 1964, she not only missed the opportunity to meet with Malcolm X in London, she did not live to see the fruits of her hard work borne out in the new generation of young activists.

The tenor of the *WIG*'s final issues lamented the great blow that the loss of Claudia Jones had dealt. One eulogy by Donald Hinds was headline "People of All Races Pay Homage to Claudia Jones", accompanied by a Soviet style banner showing a myriad of people from across the world.[56] The reaction of her close friend, Shirley Graham Du Bois, was also illuminating. She was simply "overwhelmed with grief."[57] Speaking of the plans they had made, she wrote "I have been looking forward to bringing her to Ghana. And now she is gone!"[58] This underscored how much more Jones and her peers had intended to contribute to the unfolding liberation struggles in Africa and beyond. The scope of Jones's work had been far-reaching for years, and the *WIG* remained a testament to the transnational rumblings that reverberated to and from the metropole of the crumbling British empire. Yet, as so many countries teetered on the brink of a new dawn after so much struggle, her life ended.

In 1965, Malcolm X visited Britain, and his presence ignited an eruption of Black Power organizations in Britain. The *WIG* and other organizations had tilled the fertile

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55 Claudia Jones "CLAUDIA JONES' LAST EDITORIAL: Dr. Luther King's Warning", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, December-January 1965, British Library, London.

56 Donald Hinds, "PEOPLE OF ALL RACES PAY HOMAGE TO CLAUDIA JONES", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, December-January 1965, British Library, London.

57 Shirley Graham Du Bois, "MRS DU BOIS OVERWHELMED WITH GRIEF", *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News*, February 1965, British Library, London.

58 *Ibid*

grounds and made some inroads to tackle civil rights problems in Britain. Therefore, as the Black Power Movement fully erupted in the US, similar groups were emboldened in Britain – including the British Black Panther Party, the Black Unity and Freedom Party, and Black Liberation Front. Many women active in these organizations cited the world-wide publicity of the Angela Davis's trial as part of their awakening, and yet Pan-Africanist and internationalist politics had been established almost a decade prior by Jones and her many comrades in Britain. Soon, Angela Davis became the most well-known Black Communist woman in the world – and the vigor of Black Power Movement in the US eclipsed a whole generation of activists that had come before. As such, the legacy of Jones and other Black women radicals was severed from popular histories of radicalism. Jones's CPGB contemporary, Winston Pinder, sorrowfully detailed that by the 1980s, "Claudia was practically forgotten then and most people didn't even know where she was buried."[59]

Reassessing Jones: Laying the Foundations for Black Power

This piece only presents a snapshot of Claudia Jones's work in Britain, but alongside other historians, the totality of Jones's national and international activism throughout her life continues to be excavated. The impact of the various tactics utilized by Jones and her counterparts is long overdue for re-examination by historians. With Jacqueline Dowd Hall's conception of 'the long movement' in mind, much more could be said about the significance of Black women like Jones, and their contributions to the history of Black radicalism which ran parallel with civil rights activism throughout the 20th Century.[60]

This close reading of the *WIG* and Jones's activism has shown that Jones articulated a range of factors that needed to be tackled to vastly overhaul the conditions of Black people – both in Britain and across the globe. *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News* was conceived, and operated, as a conduit. It translated the struggles of African and Asian

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59 Angela Cobbinah, Winston Pinder quoted in "Help to mark the birthday of legendary communist and civil rights activist Claudia Jones this weekend", *The Morning Star*, February 18 2022, https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/help-mark-birthday-legendary-communist-and-civil-rights-activist-claudia-jones-weekend [Accessed March 29 2023]

60 Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." The Journal of American History 91, no. 4 (2005): 1233–63. https://doi.org/10.2307/3660172. [Accessed March 30 2023]

communities across the globe into something digestible for those who may not have always been so politically engaged. By stressing the principles of unity and solidarity, even though the struggles of each racialized group were slightly different in each locale, the macro-focus was always on illuminating how racism, capitalism and imperialism affected everyone. The contributions of activists from around the world, and especially from African leaders fighting their own wars for independence, showed there were several genealogical entry points at which Black Power politics were developed before the culmination of the more well-known 1960s strand.

The relationship between radical activists of the Caribbean, Britain, America, Asia and Africa were shown to be symbiotic, and arguably are symbolized most strongly in the figure of Claudia Jones. Her Pan-Africanist and internationalist organizing was adapted to meet the concerns of the day, where national concerns like the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, housing, and employment discrimination could be remedied through multi-racial unity. Despite her exile to Britain, and her many health concerns, Jones worked tirelessly and contributed extensively to the landscape of transnational politics in less than a decade. When she died, tributes poured in from across the world heralding her impact. Among them, Raymond Kunene of the ANC of South Africa wrote: "The death of Claudia Jones has deprived liberation fighters all over the world of one of the most dynamic and most militant fighters."[61] One wonders, had she survived another ten, twenty or thirty years, what could have been? What could Claudia Jones have contributed to the Black Power Movement? How would her wisdom, her organizational skills and her experience have impacted the peak of national and international protests in the 1970s? In this continuity of struggle, there is no doubt that Claudia Jones was, and would have continued to be, an invaluable interlocutor in the fight for liberation of oppressed people across the world.

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[61] Raymond Kunene quoted in David Horsley, *The Political Life and Times of Claudia Jones* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain – Manifesto Press, 2020), 49.

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