

Women Crusade for Peace: Claudia Jones and the Cold War Peace Movement

Denise Lynn, Ph.D.

*Associate Professor of History and Director of Gender Studies
University of Southern Indiana*

Abstract: After World War II, peace became a central tenet of the Black freedom struggle. But it was also a liability to be associated with peace because the Soviet Union was a major advocate of the peace movement during the Cold War. Claudia Jones, a communist leader and theoretician, was an outspoken, vocal advocate for peace. She argued that war and nuclear weaponry were capitalist tools to limit freedom struggles, contain non-white populations globally, and undermine women's liberties. She argued for women's leadership in the peace movement and advocated a gendered internationalism. Jones, an immigrant herself, believed that American women should advocate for peace beyond national boundaries to secure their own independence, freedom, and equality. This was a particular imperative for Black and colonized women, who, Jones argued, were the most oppressed strata. In order to free all working people and secure a global alliance, women had to become leaders in the peace movement. She saw peace as a necessary prerequisite to undermining capitalist power and reach the full potential of a socialist state. Her advocacy and leadership in the peace movement came at great personal cost. Jones would be arrested, convicted, and deported for her determined political advocacy, all the while her health declined, leading to her premature death. This article argues that Jones's gendered internationalism and peace were central tenets in her vision of a socialist future.

Keywords: Gender, Race, Peace, Internationalism, Communism

Claudia Jones, Trinidad born American communist, believed that her opposition to the Korean War and criticism of the nuclear arms race is what led to her arrest, prosecution, and deportation. In the post-World War II years, Jones was writing, speaking, and campaigning against Cold War hostilities between the US and the Soviet Union and against nuclear proliferation. In 1950, Jones published an article titled "International Women's Day and the Struggle for Peace" in the Communist Party's theoretical journal *Political Affairs*. It was this article, she believed, that led the FBI to increase its surveillance and motivated federal authorities to pursue deportation. In it she attacked President Truman's order to pursue the deadly hydrogen bomb and "inaugurate a suicidal" atomic weapons race with the Soviet Union. She also noted that the peace movement was "headed" by the Soviet Union, or as she described it, "the land of Socialism," and part of a united front against the United States' aggressive pursuit of nuclear weaponry and confrontation with the USSR.¹

The FBI was indeed interested in her article, but it was one among many articles the agency collected on Jones's peace activism. Additionally, federal authorities were discussing her deportation a full two years before her article was published. She was correct that American intelligence agencies did believe that the postwar peace movement was a threat for the very reason

Jones cited in her article, it was supported and led by the Soviet Union. American communists took up the campaign and framed it as resistance to capitalist slavery and exploitation and a challenge to imperialism. Black communists were specifically concerned because the Cold War competition between the superpowers left newly decolonized states, especially in Africa, vulnerable to outside influence. With the outbreak of war in Korea, Black communists argued that capitalist war-mongering primarily targeted non-white and poor populations.

Claudia Jones was deeply concerned about the racist Cold War aggression in Korea and the threat it and nuclear weapons posed to the global proletariat. But Jones went further and encouraged her male colleagues to see the gender and race threat behind Cold War competition and war. In her written work and public speeches, Jones argued that American postwar policy and its “betrayal of its wartime alliances” mirrored Nazi initiatives to codify women’s role in an aggressively militaristic society and limit women’s opportunities in education, the workforce, and politics. Women were reduced to *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* - a German phrase translated as children, kitchen, church – which Jones called the “fascist triple-K.” She argued that Black women were even more vulnerable as they faced the triple exploitation of their race, gender, and class. For Jones, this meant that women had to be leaders in the peace movement, without peace there could be no liberation, and without women’s leadership, there could not be a unified proletariat. In the postwar years, the United States pursued its aggressive containment policy against communists, while Soviet leaders organized communists globally in a “Struggle for Peace” movement. The Soviet Union was at a disadvantage in the arms race, and the American Communist Party (CPUSA) took up its call to devote its energies to a peace movement. With the Soviet’s successful test of the atomic bomb and the Chinese revolution, the global power balance shifted. Soviet leaders, including Stalin, claimed that the bomb was a “victory in the cause of peace,” because the nation could ensure safety and stability presumably against American militarism. With the outbreak of the Korean War the Soviets began to call for a global ban on nuclear energy and encouraged its own citizens that their labor was all part of the “Struggle for Peace” campaign.²

The Black left was particularly alarmed at the rise of nuclear warfare and its use against people of color at the end of World War II. Vincent Intondi argues that in the postwar years, “anti-nuclear war and peace” were central to the Black Freedom Struggle. Many feared that nuclear power ensured global white supremacy and the perpetuation of colonialism. Cold War competition made these activists wary as decolonizing states were used as pawns.³ W.E.B. Du Bois argued that nuclear warfare was one more way to exert control over colonized people. As Jacqueline Castledine has argued, Jim Crow, European colonization, institutional racism all “grew from the same seed” and represented another form of violence against people of color.⁴

As Cold War tensions increased, and the movement was linked to the Soviets, moderates abandoned the movement and condemned communism. For liberals, associating with communists became too risky and the mainstream civil rights movements severed the link between peace and the Black Freedom struggle. But for many on the Left, the fear of the bomb was powerful enough to continue to push for peace despite the risks. Communists and fellow travelers like

² Lieberman & Lang 2009; Johnston 2008.

³ Intondi 2015.

⁴ Castledine 2000.

W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson attacked American policy and its inherently racist pursuit to contain communism in non-white nations. Du Bois in particular believed that “combatting war” was essential to unite the working classes against their own extinction. Robeson announced at a peace conference in Paris that Black Americans would never take up arms against the Soviet Union and did not have loyalty to a country that never extended the full rights of citizenship to all its citizens. Both men would face harassment, alienation, and legal repercussions because of their involvement in the peace movement.⁵

The Korean War increased fears for peace activists as many believed that the US would “once again” use the bomb against people of color. A fear that was not unfounded as American military officials explored the use of the bomb and President Truman “acknowledged the possibility” at a press conference. Some Congressmen across partisan lines made their support known as well. Criticism of the war and the nuclear bomb became a liability for activists and was automatically linked to communism.⁶ Robbie Lieberman argues this moment created a “dividing line” in the Black Freedom Struggle. There were those, like Claudia Jones, who would remain committed to peace issues and “challenge red-baiting” and others who were silent on American foreign policy but committed to equality.⁷

Claudia Jones disseminated a gendered internationalism that framed women as war and nuclear power’s greatest victims and more importantly its greatest threats. Jones wrote for the Party presses to push women’s involvement in the peace movement. She feared that the alternative was women further marginalized to the domestic sphere forced to use their reproductive labor to supplement the state’s never-ending demand for cannon fodder. She believed that if women could unify behind peace and resist efforts to send the products of their reproductive labor to war, then women could end war and usher in the emancipation of all – women, people of color, the colonized, and workers – those who were subject to state power and who became cogs in the war machine. She also influenced other communists, particularly W. E. B. Du Bois, to recognize that peace work and “women’s lives” were essential to “building a proletarian internationalism.”⁸ For Jones, there could be no liberation without first achieving peace. Capitalist forces sought war and used worker’s bodies to fight for their own economic gain. As the Cold War set the United States up as a permanent global military force, Jones feared that endless war meant sacrificing social and political gains and the chance to ever secure equity.

Bill Mullen argues that Jones pushed the Party to understand that Black women’s work was “essential” to unify the working class, an idea she articulated clearly in her often cited and well-known article “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!” But she defined the framework for her “new world revolution typology” in her article “International Women’s Day and the Struggle for Peace.” It was in this work that Jones argued that both Black and white women had to be “coequals” to men in building both “proletarian internationalism and national self-determination.” For Mullen, Jones’s central argument was that International Women’s Day would help launch global revolution.⁹

⁵ Mullen 2015; Intondi 2015.

⁶ Intondi 2015.

⁷ Lieberman 2009.

⁸ Mullen 2015.

⁹ Ibid.

But for Jones, women were not simply meant to be “coequals” with men, women were to both lead and organize the international peace movement because the stakes were far higher for them. Writing on the eve of the Korean War, Jones argued in the article that women were already leading the peace movement, had been leading the peace movement, and were met once again by intransigence and hawkish policies of male-dominated military and government institutions. It was these same institutions, in league with religious hierarchies, and “monopolist rulers” that tried to limit women’s peace activity. Jones argued that women in the United States needed to work in league with women internationally against “repressive and death-dealing measures” faced by women in fascist states to truly stem the tide of war.¹⁰

Jones pushed for a gendered internationalism by linking American women to the global resistance to war in other nations, including the French war against the “heroic Viet-Nameese,” and the civil disobedience efforts in Africa against colonialism. Like women in these other countries, “American monopoly capitalism” could only offer American women a program of “war and fascism.” War psychology, as Jones described it, insisted on the fascist triple-K. Citing the Nazi “theorist” Oswald Spengler, she argued that capitalists believed that it was only in wartime that gender relationships reverted back to their “natural state” of man as masculine hero, and woman as “glorious and inspiring.” She warned that the true aim was to prevent women from participating in progressive social organization.¹¹

For Jones, this was “especially” true for Black women, working-class women, and working people as a whole. While many saw these attacks as purely economic, Jones believed, and this is where she departed from Marxist theory and CPUSA commitments to that theory, that it was in fact a direct attack on women’s “social participation” in the peace movement and other progressive movements to improve her economic and social condition. Women’s oppression was not simply economic, nor was it about repression within the bourgeois household, it was rooted in attempts to prevent her from making demands for her social liberation. Though Jones does not dismiss the role that economics played in the oppression of women and the Black community, and in fact she devoted a great deal of space to a discussion on the issue in her article, she pointed out, that if gender and race oppression were purely economic, the progressive movement would not have its own struggles with discrimination.¹²

Commitment to the belief in women’s “biological inferiority” had roots in the “ruling class,” but remained strong among working-class men. Jones argued that “male supremacist” ideas pervaded both progressive organizations and the CPUSA. One of the “chief manifestations of male supremacy” was the inability to recognize the “social disabilities” of women in capitalist societies. Black women, who she argued were “triply oppressed” were a gauge in any society. The treatment of Black women in any given society could help others understand the “inferior status of women in all classes of society.” To understand the most oppressed person’s experience was to understand all oppression and that could become the platform from which to organize and resist. Instead, the Party continued to focus its energies on shop floor organizing and disseminated masculine imagery of the working-class.¹³

¹⁰ Jones 1950.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Jones pushed progressive and communist men to be the “vanguard fighters” against male supremacy, but instead what most often happened was “glib talk” about women as “allies” and a resistance to women’s “full participation” in social movements. Women faced repression from capitalist interests and their own male allies, and therefore had to become the forefront of any movement for social change. But Jones also made it clear that bourgeois feminism was also a problem; she argued that bourgeois feminists believed that male supremacy stemmed from men rather than capitalism. Though Jones amended and pushed Marxist interpretations, she remained committed to Marxist beliefs. She did, however, advocate that it should be women who taught men the Marxist-Leninist position on women lest they be misled. She also counseled the Party to embrace the leadership of Black women and their “militancy and tenacity.”¹⁴

Jones was convinced that women could be the real leaders of the peace movement and help facilitate unity behind peace. International Women’s Day, Jones argued, was meant to celebrate the leadership and participation of women in the global class, gender, and anti-racist struggles, and a recognition of women’s needs within those struggles, needs that Jones argued, had to be part of all struggles. But reformers diluted the celebration and reduced it to a mere “paper resolution,” until Lenin and Stalin resurrected it and argued that women were not merely a “reserve” in the proletarian “army.” Because women were the “most oppressed of all oppressed,” the Bolsheviks made it clear that women were “full-fledged” members of the proletarian resistance. Jones argued that this new commitment to women was proven in the Soviet Union where socialism ushered in women’s emancipation. In bourgeois democracies, this was impossible because equal rights were merely “programmatic demands,”; in a socialist state, “class divisions and human exploitation” were abolished. Even more important is that under socialism, equality did not require the exact same treatment, contained within it was an understanding of women’s “special function” and needs, thus equity reigned and not “petty-bourgeois equalitarian notions.”¹⁵

In this and future articles Jones would counsel the Party again and again to “activate” women cadre and to address the “special needs of oppressed womanhood.” She wanted to raise socialist consciousness among women against the tyranny of bipartisan “monopoly capitalism,” to finally convince progressive women that the only and final guarantee of “peace, bread, and freedom and the full emancipation of women” was to create a socialist America.¹⁶ But first Jones wanted to organize women in the Party to recognize their responsibilities in the peace movement. Carole Boyce Davies argues that Jones’s anti-imperialist feminism was “international in nature” rooted in Jones’s own “migratory subjectivity,” as a Caribbean immigrant in the United States. For Davies, this is how Jones understood the world, in a global context. Thus, in the paradigm of the Soviet peace movement, American women were part of a larger movement against American military aggression, and all that it entailed. Jones took issue with the limitations imposed on the rights of women and people of color as the United States proclaimed the spread of democracy and freedom.¹⁷

Media studies scholar Christina Mislán argues that Jones’s writing on the peace

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Davies 2003.

movement positioned traditional gendered ideologies about the nation as the “mother,” yet she also constructed women as creators of a “national and transnational” peace movement. Mislán explored Jones’s biweekly column in the *Daily Worker* titled “Half the World,” which Jones used to rally female cadre to the peace effort. Jones’s column integrated the intimate into the international and urged women to understand their identities as literal and figurative mothers of the nation, and thus arbiters of peace. Mislán argues that feminist theory linked the violence of war to gendered violence and notes that during wartime the home was never a safe place. For Jones and communist women, this gendered violence made war not the purview of men, but an assault on women and the home.¹⁸

According to Mislán, Jones was simultaneously gendering women as natural advocates for peace, propagating essentialist positions; while also challenging traditional gender norms. Jones argued in her columns that women’s so-called inferiority was a byproduct of capitalist exploitation. Capitalist interests saw women’s peace activism as a threat to its very existence and therefore were compelled to suppress women’s role in politics. Perhaps more importantly, Mislán argues that Jones’s stance placed “women’s aspirations” as a challenge to the “nation’s interests.” For Jones, war was masculine terrain, but the nation symbolized the home and women’s responsibility. She was making the personal and the intimate both political and integral to the health and welfare of the nation.¹⁹

The communist articulation of the home as women’s domain has often been misinterpreted as reifying maternalist aspirations and expectations for women. But communist women believed the home was the location for revolutionary change. Jones and other communist women felt that the seeds for socialist revolution were planted in personal relationships and the home was the primary location where revolutionary change could and must happen. Women’s assumed authority in the home and over children had the potential for revolutionary liberation; if you could destroy traditional bourgeois gendered constructions in personal relationships, it would have revolutionary potential to change the world. Jones challenged communist men to understand their own gendered bourgeois notions of home as an apolitical location where women’s labor had no value. In particular, historically women’s reproductive labor was controlled, and women’s access to her own corporeal self was limited. Reproductive sovereignty included not just access to birth control, abortion, and medical care, but the ability to resist the state’s demands to produce soldiers for endless war. Male resistance to questioning personal gender relationships prevented unity of the working class and kept the revolution at bay.

The inability of even Left-progressive men to question personal investments in gender applied to race as well and served to perpetuate the capitalist method of divide and conquer. The failure of progressives to recognize their own racism and investment in white chauvinism foiled the very unity Jones argued was necessary to resist Cold War repression and the dominance of global white supremacy. Because the capitalist war economy needed both laborers and soldiers, privileging one group over others guaranteed a program for capitalist global domination. Jones warned Party cadre that if even Left-progressives could not transcend these conflicts, peace would never be achieved. Events soon made working class unity imperative.

In March 1950, President Truman committed the US to constructing a hydrogen bomb.

¹⁸ Mislán 2017.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The Permanent Committee of the Partisans of Peace, a communist led peace organization, met in Stockholm, Sweden and wrote a resolution that opposed atomic weaponry. It was colloquially called the “Ban the Bomb” pledge. The pledge stated simply that its signers “demand the outlawing of atomic bombs” and “strict international control” to enforce the law. They also wanted to classify the use of the bomb as a “crime against humanity” and those individuals of any government who order its use should be tried as a war criminal.²⁰ With hostilities in Korea on the horizon, fears about the use of the bomb, and its use against people of color intensified. That same month, the American Communist Party urged women to honor International Women’s Day as a month-long event. Jones reported on women’s nationwide grassroots activism in support of the “Ban the Bomb” petition as well as other events that demonstrated women’s eager desire to push for peace. American women were busy collecting signatures and organizing events with their churches and communities to protest against American nuclear policy.²¹ An organization called the Minute Women for Peace was created out of the women’s efforts and was linked to the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF), a communist organization based in France. The WIDF called for women’s participation in the global movement to resist Cold War oppression against colonized peoples and the oppressed of all nations. The WIDF and the petition against nuclear arms epitomized Jones’s hopes for a gendered internationalism against Cold War aggression.²²

The pledge traveled globally and incited action by women in several countries, particularly those allied with the United States. Jones wrote about a campaign in France against their own government’s support for containment, and its war against the Vietnamese. In Tours, workers blocked trains bringing tanks to Southern France, women laid across the tracks to prevent the trains from moving. Jones compared the French women’s actions to those of African women who put their bodies between colonial militaries and their own men who were being conscripted into war. In England, women pushing baby carriages marched in silent protest on International Women’s Day against the atomic bomb. They carried banners that said, “Ban the Bomb” and “Deliver us From Evil.” Jones noted that women in East Germany, Italy, and China were organizing to collect signatures for the “Ban the Bomb” pledge.²³

Jones linked the “Ban the Bomb” pledge and resistance to atomic weaponry to resistance against capitalism and colonialism. She wrote that “war-mongering agents of imperialism” framed war as an inevitable conflict to preserve capitalism. The goal, therefore, was to raise the consciousness of American women and “free them” from the influence of “agents of imperialism.” To do this, Jones wanted to integrate all women into the international women’s peace movement and awaken them to the gendered internationalism she hoped to foster. By drawing women into the movement for peace and democracy, Jones also sought to recruit women to socialism. She argued that the only route for equality would be the eradication of capitalism, because capitalists sought war as a matter of course, to secure their power and enrich the few at the expense of the liberation of all.²⁴

²⁰ Intondi 2015.

²¹ Jones 1950.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Just as women were beginning to realize their power to organize for peace, the pledge was being attacked as subversive. By 1950, Jones was already resisting a deportation order resulting from her own political organization. She and other communist leaders tried to resist attempts to silence and splinter the movement. Jones believed that women's power and organization terrified capitalists, evidenced by their reaction to women's organization. She noted that the "would-be destroyers of civilization," or capitalists, put a great deal of energy into silencing women's progressive organization. She argued that the suppression of Communists, and communist-linked organizations like the Congress of American Women (CAW), was evidence of the state's fear of women's power. The CAW, created in 1946, and linked to the WIDF, worked to organize women in social justice campaigns that included racial and gender equality, and for integrating the concerns of mothers into public policy. This included communal kitchens and state-funded childcare. But the CAW faced suppression by the federal government and in 1948 was ordered to register as a subversive organization. By 1950, the CAW leadership decided to dissolve the organization rather than submit to government demands, becoming one of many Cold War casualties.²⁵

While the federal government focused on destroying women's progressive and radical organization, it simultaneously gave women what Jones described as the "perspective of death." War overseas and war against progressive and peace organization were all part of the government's attacks on Black Americans, and in particular Black women. Black women, she argued, continued to resist and fight against "lynch terror, degradation, and national oppression," while the number of "lynch widows" grew. For Jones, Jim Crow terror was embedded in Cold War oppression – the suppression of the Black Freedom "national" struggle was akin to attacks on national movement's abroad, and women were the ones bearing the greatest burden. Though men faced violence, Black women in particular suffered from "dwindling family income" and discrimination in employment, social security benefits, and in medical care. This led to "devastating social conditions" in the Black community. Meanwhile, capitalist interests used race to perpetually divide the working class against itself. Jones argued that wages and opportunity for all women suffered, and Black women's wages were particularly poor. This was not unintentional, as capitalists saw the potential for unity behind causes like peace as a challenge to their power and control.²⁶

Jones argued that the struggle for peace had to challenge the capitalist resistance to progressives demands for gender and race equality. International Women's Day, she wrote, should be observed as an opportunity for women to unite behind issues that concerned them, including "maternity and child protection," equal pay, school funding, job training and opportunity, and the extension of social security benefits to all workers, in particular domestic workers, a field dominated by Black women that continued to go without coverage. Jones called for a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission, a board set up during World War II to guarantee fair practices in war industries, and a platform for the postwar civil rights movement. Additionally, rent controls and housing reform were needed to lift the working poor and Black families out of poverty.²⁷ This all had to be integrated into the peace movement, in order to secure the rights of

²⁵ Castledine 2012.

²⁶ Jones 1950.

²⁷ Ibid.

women to engage in political activity for peaceful coexistence.

But only a few short months after Jones pushed for American women to honor International Women’s Day as a day of unity for peace and freedom, the United States waged war in Korea against socialist forces and people of color. With the start of war in June 1950, the need for a global women’s peace movement became an immediate imperative. The day after the war officially began, Jones reported on a women’s peace conference held in New York City in support of the Stockholm Peace Appeal. Jones noted that the “humid weather” did not prevent the women conference attendees from coming together to support the Stockholm Appeal. Many progressive and radical organizations, including the Communist Party were in attendance to voice their support for the pledge drive. But as some women noted, the Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s claims that signing the pledge was akin to subversion made participation in the drive dangerous.²⁸ Indeed, American intelligence officials kept a close eye on those who engaged in the Ban the Bomb pledge drives and used it as a weapon in its attacks on the alleged communist threat. For Jones, the conference represented her desire to see American women take leadership in the peace campaign.

Jones’s writing on the Korean war took direct aim at what she described as the “white chauvinist” bipartisan policies of the Truman administration against people of color across the world. She praised the resistance of Korean people against America’s imperialist war. She argued that America’s containment policy in Asia was simply an extension of “Wall Street’s” attempts to control people of color for their own profit. Thus, Americans were surprised when Koreans put up a resistance and took “pot shots” against American planes.²⁹ While other Black leaders were abandoning the call for peace as a measure of self-preservation during the Cold War, Jones insisted that Black Americans should identify with Koreans trying to preserve their homes from American imperialist ambitions. She argued that Truman’s “sabre-rattling” against the threat of communism in Korea, was simply masking US efforts to suppress national liberation movements across the world. She insisted that this was an especially worrisome development for Black Americans and in particular Black women because the Truman program was dooming the United States to “endless war” against liberation struggles abroad and the Black liberation struggle at home. In addition, the “war economy” led to increased suffering of all workers, and this she believed was increasing the “peace sentiment” among Black Americans and women.³⁰

Jones’s concern about divisions in the working class remained a problem. As she did in her 1950 article on International Women’s Day, Jones warned her readers again in a 1952 article on the peace movement that white chauvinism kept the working-classes from forming an effective peace resistance. She argued that it was in the interest of all workers to engage in the peace movement, and thus they had to unite against monopolist capitalist interests. The racist hang-ups, or as Jones called it “Right opportunist danger,” that continued to plague the Communist Party prevented a real united front that could face off with the global capitalist threat. For Jones, there could be no peace without a coalition of working and Black people, and that coalition could not be formed until “Left-progressives” recognized their responsibility in the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Jones, 1952.

fight against white chauvinism.³¹

But peace had a special meaning for Black Americans who she linked directly to the liberation struggles for colonial people. Jones believed that peace alone could secure the liberation of people of color globally. American imperialists understood this better than those in mainstream civil rights organizations who abandoned peace and folded under Cold War pressures. Jones argued that the federal government's attacks on Black activists like DuBois, Robeson, Benjamin Davis, and herself proved that the peace movement had the potential to topple global capitalist power and ensure self-determination and sovereignty for colonial people and Black Americans. She insisted that there was a growing awareness among civil rights leaders that peace was essential to secure equality; therefore, the struggle for peace had to be a central part of the Black Freedom Struggle, including a demand that Left-progressives confront the "white chauvinist poison" that prevented integrating Black liberation demands into the Party's peace program. Jones took the Party and its cadre to task for ignoring what she believed was so evident, the Cold War imperialist aggression was dangerous to working people, but particularly to non-white people globally. She took it further by stating that much of the work to eradicate white chauvinism within the Party and the peace movement was the responsibility of white people.³² White people had to confront the issue and in the process free up their Black comrades to take leadership positions in the struggle.

Jones insisted that there had to be a broader understanding of the necessity in integrating the Black freedom struggle with the peace movement and convincing "allies" in the peace movement that it was a priority. Peace required supporting anti-colonial movements globally and the rejection of "racist war-mongering," along the lines of American policy in places like Korea.³³ Jones urged Communist activists to understand the link between attacks on those in the Black freedom struggle as part of the larger government attack on the peace movement and the Communist Party. Cold War aggression abroad was mirrored in the federal government's direct assault on peace and civil rights activists. For Jones, the American aggression in Korea was tied to the United States' long history of racist oppression. She regularly counseled the Party and its membership to push for proletarian unity across race and gender lines; during the Cold War, Jones pushed for that unity to move across national lines too.

It may have been her frustration with the lack of unity in the Left-progressive movement that led Jones to push women's leadership in the peace movement. But she also recognized that it was women who were most often the backbone of any political organization. She argued that black women in the Sojourners for Truth and Justice were essential to the peace movement because the organization addressed the dangers war posed to Black children and families.³⁴ The organization was also a testament for the need to foster Black women's leadership. In a February 1952 article on the organization, Jones linked the group to Black women's organization for the safety and security of the Black family in the face of segregation and racist violence. But the Sojourners also took on the mobilization of Black men to fight a "vitriolic" war of "extermination" against the "colored people" of Korea. The Sojourners asked the essential

³¹ Jones 1952.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

question, what stake did Black Americans have in a war against the “colored peoples of Asia” when they could not enjoy freedom at home.³⁵

Jones focused much of her concern on how the “war economy” particularly affected Black Americans. This was an essential platform of the Sojourners who supported union organization and pressure to support hiring and equal pay for Black families. Unemployment and higher taxes affected Black families acutely, but exclusion from higher-paying jobs made it more difficult. Jones cited the Sojourners support of a union strike by the Packinghouse Worker’s Union that secured jobs for Black women who were previously barred from employment. Union and peace organizing also had to be coupled with a global devotion to improve the lives of all working and colonized people. Jones argued that Black women in the Sojourners, and others, had to identify with the global movement for peace and worker’s unity in order to secure Black women’s full “political and economic equality.”³⁶

Jones devoted much of her weekly column “Half the World” to writing about women in the peace movement. The same month the Korean War started, Jones described a peace meeting she attended in Harlem. One woman in particular stood up in the meeting to agree with Jones’s call for women to organize for peace. She argued that her fellow cadre needed to see how important it was for women to seek peace as war raged abroad in America’s names. As Jones noted, the woman who stood up to speak told her fellow cadre that Black women in particular did not have the luxury of being housewives and instead were the most exploited workers; thus, their support for peace was an essential part of the civil rights movement. (Jones, 1950). In another column, Jones argued that the Party had to raise the consciousness of women cadre on the causes of war. War was not to secure freedom and democracy, but rather to secure capitalist interests. Proof was in the fact that casualties of war came from the ranks of working people and not among the bourgeois.³⁷

In the summer of 1951, Jones was facing deportation hearings, regular FBI surveillance, and another arrest. She took this as a sign that American intelligence agencies were scared of women’s organization. In a *Daily Worker* article titled “Warmakers fear America’s Women,” she described the FBI harassment of herself and other women activists. On 20 June 1951, she and a number of other prominent communist women, including Dorothy Ray Healey, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and Betty Gannett, were arrested and charged under the Smith Act. The Smith Act made it illegal to advocate, or belong to an organization that advocated, the violent overthrow of the United States government. This, she explained, was a typical “American Gestapo” tactic used against women activists that advocated “peace and social progress.” She wrote that the arrests were all part of the suppression of women’s activism for “social progress, for home and family” and against the Truman administration’s policy of “fascism at home” and “world war abroad.”³⁸

The CPUSA was mired in legal battles after dozens of its members were arrested and charged under the Smith Act. The Party argued that the suppression of Party members and leaders was an unconstitutional attempt to silence the enemies of capitalism. It also insisted that

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Jones 1950.

³⁸ Jones 1951.

it was an expression of American racism since the Party accused the United States of waging a racist war in Korea, and its own membership advocated racial equality. For Jones, it was more than just racism, it was about the policing of Black Americans and non-white people abroad. She argued that the United States' "imperialist racist policy of war and fascism" sought to silence the Black freedom struggle at home, and the anti-colonial resistance. While the United States supported the French war in Vietnam, and intervened in the Korean civil war, Jones argued that it was all in an attempt to secure global white male supremacy.³⁹

In her "Half the World" article a week before, Jones reiterated the same analysis, Party leaders were targeted because of their resistance to war and fascism. Black activists in particular were targeted for harassment because the peace movement was an integral part of securing Black equality. In its calls for unity between men and women, white and Black, and all working people, the peace movement attacked the foundations of capitalist manipulation and its efforts to divide working people among themselves.⁴⁰ The attempt to suppress unity and organization was particularly aimed toward women because of how powerful their organization for peace could be.

Federal agencies understood this well, and this is why, Jones believed, they targeted women. They did not just target women activists but also the wives and children of Party leaders. Jones argued that it was reminiscent of Hitler's policy that also silenced women's progressive organization. Under these regimes, women's one role was meant to be as mothers to a nation's next generations of soldiers. These children were used to secure capitalist domination, without receiving the benefits capitalists received. Capitalism rested on white male superiority and saw any resistance as a threat to its goal to secure power. Jones remained optimistic, closing her article with a call to action and warning war-mongers that a united front defeated Hitlerism, and a united front will defeat American fascism.⁴¹

Jones's vocal opposition to the American containment policy and attacks on American activists came at great personal cost. Her trial, along with twelve other defendants all indicted under the Smith Act, took place during 1952. In January 1953, all thirteen were found guilty and sentenced. Jones received a sentence of one year and one day in jail and a \$2000 fine. The appeal process took two years, in that time Jones experienced heart failure; she was not yet forty-years-old. As a teenager Jones contracted tuberculosis, and before becoming a Communist Party leader she worked in unhealthy factories and shops, all exacerbating her weakened health. Since her first arrest in 1948, federal officials threatened deportation away from her family, friends, and the communists she spent her entire adult life working with. The stress of the trial, appeal, and impending imprisonment took its toll on Jones's health and she would never fully improve, arguably shortening her life.

All thirteen convicted communists gave a speech before their sentencing hearing. In her speech, Jones's questioned the legitimacy of her prosecution in light of the constitution's guarantee of freedom of speech. The bulk of the evidence used against her was her own writing which did not show evidence of a conspiracy to overthrow the United States government. She also attacked the court's racism, the lack of working people and people of color on the jury, and

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

the prosecutor’s refusal to read any of her writing into evidence, lest the court indict itself for its indifference to Black Americans and women’s pleas for equality and justice. She also noted that her efforts on behalf of peace and against American war-mongering were essential to her prosecution. She found it curious that the court used her article “Women in the Struggle for Peace and Security” as evidence against her but would not read any of it into the court record. She argued that it simply called on women, both Black and white, to join the peace struggles with their “anti-fascist sisters” in the USSR, and in Asia and Africa. The article warned women against supporting American policies that left “Korean babies murdered,” similar to those in Hiroshima, Japan. She asked the judge to consider whether children in their own time and in the future would be safer because thirteen communists, all who supported peace and equality, were jailed.⁴² In February, Jones told the *Daily Worker* that she was convicted for her opposition to the Korean war and agitation for racial equality.⁴³

Law enforcement officials continued to relentlessly pursue Jones during the appeals process. She and the other defendants were on supervised parole and restricted to the Southern District of New York. She was denied all requests to travel and do work outside of that district and was warned not to continue her political activities. Jones told law enforcement that she would not “desist in the fight for peace,” and continued her activities attending May Day celebrations, giving speeches, and writing. Jones had no intention of making things easier for law enforcement.⁴⁴ She was asked by an Immigration and Naturalization Service’s Agent where in the British West Indies she wanted to be deported, she refused to speak to the agent. Even as the FBI noted that continued communist activities could lead to further criminal prosecution, an already convicted Jones continued to ignore the warnings and was seen entering CPUSA headquarters with fellow defendants in clear violation of her parole.⁴⁵ Jones’s resistance to Cold War oppression persisted throughout her persecution.

Her health continued its decline and she was hospitalized again for high blood pressure. On 14 October 1954, the Smith Act convictions were upheld when the Supreme Court refused to hear the cases. On 11 January 1955, Jones was remanded to the Women’s House of Detention in New York City and eventually transported to a segregated federal penitentiary in Alderson, West Virginia. Allies organized on Jones’s behalf and managed to secure the low-salt diet required to manage her hypertension.⁴⁶ After serving her sentence, Jones was released to her lawyer Mary Kaufmann, on 23 October 1955, and had to begin a new battle resisting a deportation order. All the while Jones remained ill going into the hospital upon her release. After months of trying to secure a permanent stay of deportation, her precarious health forced Jones to make an agreement with the INS to voluntarily leave the country on 9 December 1955.⁴⁷ After living in the United States for over thirty -years, a sick Jones was deported to London, England ending the American chapter of her life.

Some historians have argued that the CPUSA only used Black Party members as symbols

⁴² Jones 1953.

⁴³ FBI 1953.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ FBI 1954.

⁴⁷ FBI 1955.

for their anti-racist campaigns. Claudia Jones was far from being used by the Party hierarchy. She pushed the Party theoretically toward a more integrated, enlightened, and universal emancipatory politics. She insisted in the Party's theoretical journals that the CPUSA needed to foster women's leadership, because women, especially Black women, were the backbone of all social justice causes. Jones had the respect and devotion of many Party leaders and cadre, she was an influential leader and thinker, and the Party became a conduit for her to expound on her theories for emancipation. It was here that she popularized the idea that achieving peace in her lifetime was a prerequisite for achieving women's and Black liberation.

Despite great personal risk, Jones continued her peace, anti-racist and anti-sexist activism throughout the period of her harassment at the hands of American law enforcement. She believed that women's leadership in the peace movement was essential and that war and the war economy affected women more. Jones regularly pushed the Party hierarchy to use women's skills in its resistance to the Cold War machinery and growing American militarism. She also encouraged women to embrace the same gendered internationalism that inspired much of her own activism. For Jones, peace on all frontiers, at home in the civil rights movement, and abroad in resistance to colonial oppression, was essential to secure women's rights because in militarized societies like the United States, women were expected to produce each new generation. Jones was also concerned that Black women would bear the brunt of military aggression, as women of color did globally, because of their disadvantages in the economy and the use of violence to restrain resistance. Peace therefore was necessary to secure equality and guarantee women's rights, important enough that Jones continued to push for it despite her poor health and threats to her freedom.

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