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Abstract

In the mid-twentieth century, Claudia Jones and Lorraine Hansberry engaged in a multiplicity of creative works to cultivate a powerful movement of third-world communism that prioritized the abolition of oppressive systems targeting Black working women globally. Though only briefly crossing paths, the two revolutionary figures devoted their lives to the same struggle against the US imperial state. Drawing from past intellectual giants such as Karl Marx, Marcus Garvey, and Sojourner Truth, Jones and Hansberry developed transformative radical feminist theory and laid the foundation for contemporary manifestations of feminism. Their analyses of the indissoluble relation between institutional racism and the global system of capitalism generated a multidimensional critique of the modern world and thus, the necessity of communist revolution. As the roots of communist suppression and racial exploitation grow deeper into US culture, it is more crucial than ever to examine the revolutionary ideas of Jones and Hansberry.

From the 1940s to the 1960s, entering the period of the Second Reconstruction, a radical generation of activists began to bloom. Surfacing within the struggle for Black women's liberation, activist and writer Claudia Jones and playwright Lorraine Hansberry vigorously integrated critical theory and creative strategy into The Civil Rights Movement and anticolonial movements. Influenced by the global popularization of communism, these two pioneers took hold of the feminist movement in the United States, wrestling it from the clutches of liberalism. Their work within the civil rights struggle paved the way for the concept of intersectionality to develop as they rose to become leading threats to the state. Jones and Hansberry implemented Marxist theory into their creative works to progress their movements and reach a larger audience around the world. Their adaptations of leftist theory to their own struggles forced the world to reanalyze the position of the Black working woman and her "super-exploitation" under racial capitalism (Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!" 4). As communist organizers and creative forerunners, Jones and Hansberry fostered strong support systems, powerful theories, and essential educating and organizing strategies to drive the liberation of Black women and build the future of Black radical movements in the US, all of which deviated from mainstream leftism. Through their combined works and efforts, both pioneering thinkers pushed past the ideological divisions between the Marxism and Black radicalism of their time to produce an examination of the intersection of class and racial struggle.

The history of Black Marxist feminism in the United States is too often disregarded due to decades of state suppression and propagandized fear of communism. From the 1930s to the early 1960s, leftist feminism began taking shape in Black women's lives. Fed up with their subjection to the threefold oppression as Black, female workers, these radicals found deeper understanding and potential in the growing communist and anticolonial movement of the twentieth century. Through an adaptation of Marxism into their own movements, they developed a vehicle for liberation from racism, sexism, and material exploitation. This movement centered the Black working-class woman in both its decision-making and its material goals. The leaders in this struggle combined theories of Marcus Garvey's Black radicalism and concept of the global subjugation of Black people together with the anticapitalistic analysis of Karl Marx—a rare combination for a time characterized by tension between Garvey's followers and the Marxist party. Garvey and his followers viewed Soviet Marxism as the strategy of the white man, while Marxists critiqued Garvey for attempting to divide Black and white laborers. Through this process, Jones and Hansberry cultivated a new realm of feminist liberation and established a more complex examination of the exploitative nature of racial capitalism and imperialism.

In their extensive works, both creative and revolutionary, Claudia Jones and Lorraine Hansberry emphasized international women's liberation struggles. Notwithstanding their

fifteen-year age gap, the two crossed paths frequently in communist organizing groups and radical art circles—even momentarily living with each other in an apartment in Harlem in 1952 (Colbert 83). With their focus on Black women's labor issues and global solidarity, Jones and Hansberry can be easily identified as revolutionary leftist feminists with a commitment to building the power of Black women-led coalitions around the world. Best exemplified in their writing, the two forces utilized Marxist terminology and theory to describe the material conditions of Black women globally. Despite the rift that had developed between supporters of Marxism and Black radicals due to racial divisions, it is clear that the impact of Marxist analysis in their works allowed Jones and Hansberry to better understand the insidious nature of imperialism and the global threat it posed to all women and all Black people. Much biographical literature has been written on the lives of the two activists, most prominently Carole Boyce Davies' *Left of Karl Marx* and Imani Perry's *Looking for Lorraine*. But to wholly appreciate their influence on contemporary leftism, the development of their creative works and political consciousness must be observed in the context of their lived experiences.

Born in Chicago in 1930, Hansberry was quickly immersed in education and the arts resulting from the musical traditions passed down from her family lineage. She developed an anticolonialist, antiracist, and antisexist personal philosophy early in her life that would pour into her plays, each character an interpretation of the struggle of living as an exploited and targeted being under the rule of imperialism. Hansberry worked among the Black left and within the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) in Chicago and New York. She joined Jones and other Black activists in implementing political educational forums in Communist Party schools and in publishing in multiple Black libertarian newspapers and magazines (Boyce Davies 18). Most significantly in the years following her university education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Hansberry was hired to write for *Freedom* in 1951, the Black leftist newspaper spawned from the minds of Black activists Louis E. Burnham and Paul Robeson. *Freedom* became the most important space for the growth of Black leftist feminism, as it featured stories of radical female leaders throughout the world, supporting labor, anticolonialist, and feminist struggles of all militant women. It is from this period of Hansberry's life that one can see the closest ideological connection between Jones and herself. While, unlike Jones, Hansberry would move away from explicitly communist themes within some of her works, her intellectual impact remained of equal importance.

Claudia Jones was born in 1915 in Trinidad. She and her family immigrated to Harlem while she was still a child. After succeeding in school, Jones would go on to become an influential journalist specializing in the analysis of the state's exploitation of Black working women. In 1958 while residing in the United Kingdom, she founded the *West Indian Gazette,* which became a critical resource for building consciousness among the Caribbean diaspora and developing an anticolonial solidarity among Black communities in Britain. Through a

multiplicity of media—most prominently poetry, essays, and speeches—Jones integrated her theories into the arts. Historian Carole Boyce Davies describes her works as a "resistance to silencing" and an effort "to speak in the face of perhaps the most concentrated and directed attack on her freedom" during her time imprisoned by the state periodically from 1948 to 1955 due to her participation in the CPUSA (6-7). The state's efforts to portray Jones as merely an extremist radical, as noted in her extensive Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) surveillance documents, ultimately led to her deportation from the US ("Claudia Jones Part 8 of 10").

In one of Jones' most infamous pieces, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Women" (1949), she argues that the power Black women hold poses a threat to the capitalist state:

> The bourgeoisie is fearful of the militancy of the Negro woman, and for good reason. The capitalists know, far better than many progressives seem to know, that once Negro women begin to take action, the militancy of the whole Negro people, and thus of the anti-imperialist coalition, is greatly enhanced. Historically, the Negro woman has been the guardian, the protector, of the Negro family... As mother, as Negro, and as worker, the Negro woman fights against the wiping out of the Negro family, against the Jim Crow ghetto existence which destroys the health, morale, and very life of millions of her sisters, brothers, and children. Viewed in this light, it is not accidental that the American bourgeoisie has intensified its oppression, not only of the Negro people in general, but of Negro women in particular. (3-4)

Her artful writing style and powerful rhetoric acknowledge the depth of the Black working woman's struggle throughout US history—extending beyond the Marxist analysis of worker exploitation, in which the capitalist exploits the worker through the theft of surplus value created by the labor of the worker. She identifies the historical violence Black women experience as a multiplied oppression—not only as Black Americans, but as the designated caretakers of their children and families.

Jones' theory of the super-exploitation of Black women conceptualized the way that "the capitalist process brutally exploited black women's role as breadwinners and protectors of families by forcing them to work back-breaking, menial service sector jobs" and the state's role of quashing any efforts of liberation through systemic rape and violence (McDuffie 8). As economic conditions rapidly deteriorated from the 1930s through the Great Depression, workers became more vulnerable to the will of their employers due to the fear of losing their income. As working conditions worsened, many workers had the opportunity to turn to their unions for protection. However, Black women were predominantly excluded because of their areas of work and the broad racial lines within the labor movement. In Jones' analysis, due to the inability of US unions to protect both domestic workers and unpaid laborers, the struggles faced by Black women were largely neglected. The domestic worker "is also the victim of

exclusion from all social and labor legislation," and thus is left unprotected by both unions and policy (Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!" 11). Domestic workers, though not directly exploited by the capitalist, undergo the forced performance of surplus labor. By providing for and tending to her husband and children, she sustains their capacity to work—creating the product of labor power. This power is then exploited by the capitalist, who robs the domestic worker of control over her product. Outside of the private realm, Jones examined the use of racial lines as a tool of the capital-owning class to divide white and Black workers, preventing any solidarity or organization for paid laborers. According to Alrick X. Cambridge, these artificial divisions forced Black workers "to organize autonomously around extra-class lines to resist extra-class exploitation…in opposition to both white workers and capitalists" in order to protect their interests at the job (208). Furthermore, Jim Crow laws persistently hindered the freedoms of Black women, preventing them from owning property and integrating into politics. To achieve liberation from these conditions, Jones believed that full emancipation from the capitalist production system, and not merely political reformation, was necessary—an objective that would be outlined in the collection of her journal articles, essays, and poetry.

Jones' unwavering political goal of human liberation led to the development of a critical analysis of US colonization and imperialism as well as a commitment to international solidarity. To appreciate Jones' critiques of imperialism, a baseline understanding of Marxist theory of the capitalist origin of imperialism is necessary. The theory states that capitalism must continue expanding through the conquest of foreign markets for its survival (Marx, *Capital* 580). In the process of market conquest—also known as colonization—the capitalist state engages in the destruction of the native people's previous means of production, coercing them to work under a slavery system within the colonies. Because the natives are no longer able to compete with the cheaper modes of production, they are forced into the role of the proletariat by the capitalist state. The colony is encumbered by extreme brutality against the population, taxation, and debt systems as the land is converted for the extraction of raw materials. Once the transformation from the native mode of production into the capitalist mode is complete, the capitalist state remains in control of the country even after decolonization (Marx, *Capital* 915). At this stage of capitalism, decolonized countries become inescapably reliant on the powerful capitalist state and fall into their debt traps, since colonization and extraction of raw materials stunt the development of economically progressive infrastructure. Most violently impacting the countries with populations consisting predominantly of Black and Brown people, imperialism forces these proletariats to undergo the most extreme poverties. However, through the global consolidation of workers into one oppressed group, Marxists argue that it is possible to unite the working class under the goal of the abolition of imperialism for revolution.

Drawing from Vladimir Lenin's theory of world revolution, Jones centered the necessity of a global class struggle in the unity of the working class in both colonized and colonizer countries. From this struggle, the ruling class would be destabilized, and the fall of imperialism would be imminent as economic and political crises around the world advanced—inevitably inciting the organization of the international working class (Cambridge 211). From Jones' liberation theories, the objects of her political activism become considerably clear. In an article for the *West Indian Gazette*, Jones writes, "imperialism is the root cause of racialism. It is the ideology which upholds colonial exploitation. It preaches the 'superiority' of the white race whose 'destiny'; it is to rule over those with coloured skins" (qtd. in Boyce Davies 87). Her understanding of the permanent correlation between racism and imperialism shaped the heart of her activism. Racializing was utilized by the ruling class to destroy solidarity in working-class movements. Thus, to abolish imperialism is to eradicate systemic racism. She devoted her organizing work to supporting the Civil Rights Movement in the US, Afro-Asian solidarity, and communist revolution. Jones continued to support employment and racial issues from Britain, integrating African and Asian solidarity into the Civil Rights Movement (Cambridge 218). She viewed the US state and its military as the enemy. They upheld racial capitalism and imperialism, targeting African and Asian countries and permitting the murders of millions around the world for the accumulation of wealth within the ruling class. Her writing on internationalism and frequent meetings with communist leaders around the world during her time as an active member of both the US and British communist parties demonstrate her focus on centering third-world communism within the global movement, deviating from the Soviet communist tradition.

In the 1940s and 1950s, as the criminalization of communism progressed considerably, Jones faced excessive state surveillance and punishment. As the secretary of the CPUSA National Women's Commission and a well-known leftist activist, Jones' organizing work became a spotlight for the FBI (Mullen and Smethurst 559). Using her published essays and status as an immigrant, the US state held her in prison multiple times before her inevitable deportation in 1955, following a decade of racist convictions and appalling treatment. Throughout her four periods of imprisonment, her poetry flourished, reflecting her staunch ability to "maintain the beauty of creativity in the face of oppression" (Boyce Davies 110). Alongside Jones' political and cultural organizing of Black women, her call for transformative change in the face of super-exploitation found a home within her creative works. In "For Consuela— Anti-Fascista," one of her many poems from prison, Jones' stance against US imperialism, particularly in the context of Puerto Rico, is clearly illuminated. In part, she writes:

> Oh wondrous Spanish sister
> Long-locked from all your care

> Listen—while I tell you what you strain to hear And beckon all from far and near.
> We swear that we will never rest Until they hear not plea
> But sainted sacrifice to set
> A small proud nation free
> O anti-fascist sister—you whose eye turn to stars still
> I've learned your wondrous secret—source of spirit and of will I've learned that what sustains your heart—mind and peace of soul Is knowledge that their justice—can never reach its goal. (Jones, *Claudia Jones: Beyond Containment* 189)

This powerful solidarity with women around the world paved the way for an understanding of intersectionality and an analysis of imperialist oppression as a woman of color. Jones believed that all women of color faced a type of special oppression under capitalism, an idea which can be linked to the work of Sojourner Truth and her struggle against both racism and sexism; In "Ain't I a Woman?," Truth expresses how the Black woman experiences all the woes of womanhood plus all the discrimination the Black man endures.

In another poem from 1955, titled "Lament for Emmett Till," Jones captures the violent nature of Jim Crow and racism in the US through a cry to avenge the death of Emmett Till. Though short, Jones' poem sorrowfully addresses the need for unity to battle against the injustice of the lynching of Emmett Till in "Vengeance for this brutal hour" (*Jones, Claudia Jones: Beyond Containment* 192). Moreover, it centers on his mother, who experienced an incredibly profound harm from the lynching—perhaps hinting at the emotional and physical violence Black women experienced under the Jim Crow capitalist state, their exploitation as unpaid laborers, and the emotional trauma they were subjected to as mothers of children targeted by the racist system.

The influence of nature and the reality of economic and living conditions appear within her poetry from her four separate periods of imprisonment, beginning in 1948 and continuing up to her deportation in 1955 (Boyce Davies 120). In the 1950 poem "The Elms at Morn," Jones compares her own incarceration to the nature contained within a "barbed wire fence" (*Jones, Claudia Jones: Beyond Containment* 186). In jail, Jones awaited trial while enduring a worsening heart condition (Boyce Davies 142). Through her creative process of writing poetry, she found an outlet of resistance autonomous from the constraints of imprisonment. The totality of her conditions fell under the control of the state during this time. Without the ability to continue organizing efforts or to get her work published in journals, poetry writing became a space in which she could continue rendering solidarity and relaying the isolating environment of jail. Jones' poetry would continue to be an expression of self and connection, thus acting as a method of resistance from the racist narratives of the state.

In the 1958 poem, "There Are Some Things One Always Remembers," Jones recalls the trauma that attaches to oneself through life and struggle. The "forgotten dreams" are only

remembered until "it hurts remembering too" (qtd. in Boyce Davies 123). The pain and, to some extent, hopelessness that accompanies reality cannot be forgotten until it reaches a point where one must move forward, leaving that pain in the past. The writing arouses a deep sense of humanity and empathy for the isolated conditions she occupies in prison. In a country that suppresses this compassion for individuals who break the law—and even more harshly to non-white immigrants—this poem encourages the reader to find sympathy and concern within the mistreatment of the regarded criminal. Through poetry, Jones resists the ideological methods of the state to suppress her humanity. Further developing her identity and emotional state in the public eye, she wrote multiple poems for and about her close friendships. These windows into her personal life illustrate the depth of Jones' love for humanity beyond purely the abstract realm of theory. In a piece she dedicated to her close friend and comrade, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, she reveals their great connection through a series of prose presenting the places in which they will reunite in memory. Jones writes: "Before the sun will fade / I'll conjure up your twinkling laugh / Your eyes so much like jade" (*Jones, Claudia Jones: Beyond Containment* 188).

Despite her imprisonment and later deportation, Jones continued her work with the Communist Party. She ceaselessly demanded the formation of an international women's movement for the pursuance of world peace. By uniting the anti-imperialist movement with both the labor and the feminist movements, the liberalism embedded in those struggles was extracted. Through her writing for the Party, Jones pushed the global communist movement to reconsider the lack of Black female leadership and to focus on the liberation of colonized women around the world through persistent support of local struggles. Bourgeois feminism could not liberate the victims of imperialist war in the Third World. She vigorously believed that women were the future of communism and the escape from a movement that played within the rules of the current system. Upon her deportation, Jones reported in an interview the context of her criminalization, stating:

> I was deported from the USA because as a Negro woman Communist of West Indian descent, I was a thorn in their side in my opposition to Jim Crow racist discrimination against 16 million Negro Americans… my work for redress of these grievances, for unity of Negro and white workers, for women's rights… because I fought for peace, against the huge arms budget which funds should be directed to improving the social needs of the people… because I urged the prosecution of lynchers rather than prosecution of Communists and other democratic Americans who oppose the lynchers and big financiers and warmongers, the real advocates of force and violence in the USA. (qtd. in Boyce Davies 144)

Only under a new system of socialism could women be released from being the target of the state. Due to this, Jones states that imperialism and feminism were inexorably connected. Her

transformation of beliefs into strategy for the Party transcended Jones' writing and activism in numerous communist circles around the world, forcing the global movement to diverge from male-centered and Soviet forms of leftism.

There is an evident intersection between the Black Marxist feminist liberation theories within the creative works of Jones and Lorraine Hansberry. Their similar aspirations for the future of the US and dreams of revolution distinguished them from the base of Soviet communism and male-centered civil rights movements. Together, their works bring attention to the necessity of centering the Black woman in the struggle for liberation. Playwright and revolutionary Lorraine Hansberry made striving efforts throughout her career to center international solidarity between women of color and women's labor rights through the evolution of her plays. Though her reputation was often mollified by popular media—diluting her lifetime of radical work to fit into a liberal narrative of the Civil Rights Movement—Hansberry must be recognized as one of the great revolutionaries of her time.

Influenced by Jones' anticapitalistic journalism, Hansberry explored the African woman's struggle amid British colonialism in several articles, writing stories of hope and solidarity (McDonald 76). In the article "Cry for Colonial Freedom Jolts Phony Youth Meet," Hansberry highlights the demands from young African women freedom protestors: "We want not only political, but economic freedom [from US and British colonialism]" (qtd. in Fusco). *Freedom* provided an environment for Hansberry to grow her political and class consciousness which would later strongly shape her plays.

A frequently overlooked essay by Hansberry, "This Complex of Womanhood," was written later in her career; it is a clear exhibition of the inspiration she had drawn from Jones. Hansberry's 1960 essay reflects her understanding that Black women face multiple oppressions due to their gender and race, an idea rooted in Jones' "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!" Hansberry similarly argues "[the] ailing world, which sorely needs our defiance, may we, as Negroes or *women*, never accept the notion of our place" ("This Complex of Womanhood" 88). The desire to center strong women in the freedom movement persevered within Hansberry's plays. Though her plays often frame a man as the main character and center his struggle, the women portrayed have powerful presences that push the men to actualize their potential. In the 1960 play *Les Blancs,* which she deemed her most important work, Hansberry animates the anticolonial resistance struggle in Africa around the protagonist Tshembe and the character of the unnamed and nonspeaking Woman (Nemiroff and Hansberry, *Les Blancs* 53). The Woman appears to Tshembe as a reminder of his culture and as an essence of strength. He is resistant to her presence at first, as she arrives "majestic and motionless, spear in hand," then begins to dance with the beat of the drums (Hansberry, *Les Blancs and the Collected Last Plays* 83). But in the final scene, once Tshembe has chosen to commit to the revolution against colonialism despite the risk to his life, she returns "in a

pool of light facing him" (Nemiroff and Hansberry, *Les Blancs* 114). Her presence forces him to stay in Africa and fight in the revolution, a reminder of his duty to his family and culture. The Woman, who represents all Black women in Hansberry's perspective, is the strength of the revolution and a constant image of physical and spiritual support. She is the mother and the creator, yet also the oppressed. Her freedom represents a core tenet of the anticapitalist, anticolonial revolution.

The most prominent manifestation of Hansberry's Marxist feminism is the work *The Drinking Gourd*. Written to become a television series (though ultimately rejected for not being the right fit), *The Drinking Gourd* told the story of the dehumanizing and abusive labor process of slavery that laid the foundation for contemporary capitalism in the US. The play was loosely based on Hansberry's grandmother and the stories she had conveyed to her, but also expanded into a larger work on the social relations between white and Black people—expressing the humanity in all people rather than strictly villainizing white slave owners (Carter 121). By centering humanity amid an evil economic system, Hansberry presents a materialist retelling of the method in which economic conditions shaped all social relations, forcing each person into a fixed role within society. The female characters, who are central in this play (unlike many of her others that place male characters in the forefront), become a representation of the different ways women are exploited or oppressed, depending on their positionality. Maria Sweet, the wife of the plantation owner, desires power yet can only fulfill her ambitions through the manipulation of her husband and the promotion of her son's position in society. She has no other mechanisms for gaining power due to the restraints of plantation capitalism, only shrewd and sneaky maneuverings to advance her goals. While at first glance, it appears that Maria is finding a sense of agency, Hansberry artfully expresses that the wealthy white woman's drive for autonomy merely strengthened the grip of capitalistic social relations by maintaining white men's economic power (Carter 126).

The story focuses on Rissa, a strong and ambitious woman who is an enslaved mother on the Sweet Plantation. Rissa exemplifies militancy and feminism through her struggle to ensure the safety of her children and provide them with the opportunity to escape enslavement. During the play, she begins to experience a political and revolutionary awakening, initially stemming from her desire to protect her family and later extending to larger goals of abolition. Originally grateful for the relative kindness she received from the master on the Sweet Plantation, Rissa—after witnessing the horrific act of the overseer gouging out her son's eyes—undergoes a political transformation. She starts to understand that the only way to completely protect her family is to embrace revolution. In the final scene, Rissa steals a gun from the Sweets, giving it to her children before they escape. As they run into the forest, she watches and sings "The Drinking Gourd." Without her preparation and help, the children would not have been able to escape. Her final militant act of stealing the gun differs

greatly from Hansberry's other plays because it closes with a focus on a strong, revolutionary woman able to materially fight the system of slavery—demonstrating the necessity of Black women in the movement for liberation (McDonald 14). The play ends with a soldier's speech, which can be associated with Hansberry's overall critical analysis of the developing system of US imperialism within the twentieth century:

> Slavery is beginning to cost this nation a lot. It has become a drag on the great industrial nation we are determined to become . . . And now, in the nineteenth century, we are determined to hold on to that dream. And so—we must fight. There is no alternative. It is possible that slavery might destroy itself—but it is more possible that it would destroy these United States first. That it would cost us our political and economic future. (He puts on his cap and picks up his rifle) It has already cost us, as a nation, too much of our soul. (Nemiroff and Hansberry, *Les Blancs* 187)

Each character's perspective in *The Drinking Gourd* sheds light on the overarching dominance of slavery capitalism over all lives, regardless of outward identity. Whether it be the poor white worker or the enslaved child, Hansberry connects inner and familial suffering with material conditions and slavery; she argues that these concepts are inseparable while maintaining focus on the development of the revolutionary consciousness of Rissa. Following this work, some have criticized Hansberry's plays for diverting from more radical themes addressed in *The Drinking Gourd*. The sentiment of the era and the rise of McCarthyism may explain her cessation of the integration of militant radicalism, but her creative works never lose her antiracist, socialist spirit. Though she was never arrested, Hansberry remained a surveilled subject of the FBI until her death (FBI, "Lorraine Hansberry Part 1 of 3"). The government attention she drew may be a contributing factor in her transition to less explicitly radical works.

The class distinction and social conflict portrayed in *The Drinking Gourd* draw from a Marxist materialist perspective. For Marx, the forces of production drive history. For instance, the development of the plow shifted property relations because of the way the plow operated in a straight line, as well as dividing labor more significantly than before. These two effects created hierarchies within the land and distinct work relations which then gave rise to social relations. Under capitalism, the relations of production—or the relations of effective control that are expressed by ownership roles such as "boss" or "slave"—fetter the productive forces and thus sustain the system of exploitation, preventing it from transforming (Marx, *Karl Marx: A Reader* 185-193). Maria's efforts to encourage her son to remain strong in the face of obstacles, paired with her prioritization to keep peace within her family, further stabilized her own submissiveness within the system (Carter 126). These hierarchies in white society strengthened the system of slavery; control over the masses was maintained by conglomerating power

in the hands of the few. Hansberry further shows the stabilization of slavery through social relations by acknowledging the economic exploitation of poor white people. When confronting a runaway slave, the character known as "Preacher" says: "Seems to be three things the South sends out more than anything else. A steady stream of cotton, runaway slaves and poor white folks. I guess the last two is pretty much lookin' for the same thing and they both runnin' from the first" (Nemiroff and Hansberry, *Les Blancs* 169). This line embodies the belief that slavery and racial capitalism subject the masses to exploitation while accumulating profit within a small group of white men. Poor white people are oppressed by the system because of their class, despite the color of their skin.

Hansberry's commitment to global solidarity within the communist movement strengthened amid the historical conditions of the advancement of African liberation movements. In the early 1960s, around the time Hansberry began contributing to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee[1], she found a passionate interest in Patrice Lumumba[2]. After participating alongside Malcolm X as an orientation leader on the African "airlift" governmental program, in which African students were brought to the US to attend universities, Hansberry learned of Lumumba's assassination. Following her discovery that the US government was to blame, she aimed to distance herself from American politicians, realizing her disgust with the government (Perry 153). After working alongside W.E.B. Du Bois to study the history of the Congo and colonialism in Africa, she became more outspoken about her contentions with the US government, openly criticizing American crimes committed against other countries (Perry 153). The House Un-American Activities Committee was a key target in her goal of abolition. Hansberry vocally supported the Cuban Revolution, the Ghanaian liberation movement led by Kwame Nkrumah, and the independence for all countries from imperialist entrapment, always focusing on the Black struggle underlying these issues in her articles and speeches. By bringing attention to the gruesome imperialism of the US, she shed light on the material suffering and horrible racism both in the belly of the beast and throughout the world, further perpetuated by the drive for profit in the US. In her 1964 speech "The Black Revolution and the White Backlash," she calls for "the white liberal to stop being a liberal and become an American radical" (qtd. in American Public Media). For Hansberry, this would mean establishing solidarity between all oppressed people around the world.

In her effort to push for the self-determination of Black people, Hansberry believed that Black people in the US must enlighten the rest of the world about their suffering and engage in an international struggle. In a letter, Hansberry writes that the Civil Rights Movement should:

> use international sensitivity on the matter [of segregation and racism] as a weapon on behalf of our otherwise mostly powerful people. This to me, is the real value of things like the Montgomery struggle and the subsequent students' movements: they

> make it possible for the Negro question to be forced upon the conscience of a nation which is otherwise delighted to have any number of priority questions that it must always deal with first. (qtd. in Perry 160-161)

There is an awareness of the necessity to connect all liberation movements past mere immediate goals for true freedom. Despite facing oppression through differing modes of marginalization, Hansberry saw the need to unite global struggles against racial capitalism to create tangible social and material change. She believed that it was the Black American's duty to commit to this struggle, whether it be "legal, illegal, passive, active, violent and non-violent" (Nemiroff and Hansberry, *To Be Young* 222). She lived by this principle—constantly resisting the state through her art, political action, international solidarity, and protest. Through a diverse array of tactics for resistance, Hansberry felt genuine hope that the future could be in the hands of the oppressed. However, to lose this hope would be to lose the fight, as she writes in a letter: "The acceptance of our present condition is the only form of extremism which discredits us before our children" (Nemiroff and Hansberry, To Be Young 222). In the current economic system, the potential for liberation could not be achieved. Therefore, the struggle would inevitably lead to the creation of a new society and new economic structures that would no longer rely on the exploitation of Black people and the Third World.

As repression and McCarthyism grew with the commencement of the Cold War, both Claudia Jones' and Lorraine Hansberry's work aimed to shift the goals of the CPUSA to center Third World socialism. As a result, both women became targets of the state. Hansberry criticized the Communist movement for evading the need to tackle the oppression of women *as well as* class and race and for failing to understand that Black women must be a prominent part of the revolution (Kelley 136). Jones furthered this idea in her writing, arguing that Black women were the revolutionary vanguard because they experienced the greatest oppression under racial capitalism. Their attention to the intersection of the exploitation of the Black woman caused the two radicals to stand out within the US leftist movement of the mid-twentieth century. Modern conceptions of the necessity of decolonization can be traced back to their writing.

The imprints of Claudia Jones and Lorraine Hansberry continue to be felt amid the contemporary struggle against imperialism. Though pronounced divides existed and remain present between Marxism and Black leftism, Jones and Hansberry successfully demonstrated a method to syndicate ideologies by prioritizing global solidarity and decolonization. In doing so, the two revolutionaries set themselves apart from their contemporaries. By calling attention to both a historical analysis of racism *and* revolutionary struggles around the world in their writings and actions, Jones and Hansberry show an in-depth and realistic understanding of the necessary ideology to spark a movement for the liberation of all people. It is necessary to continue building upon their comprehensive examination of the intersections of gender, race,

and class in conversation with the impact of capitalism in the modern world. In both their activism and works, they share a common goal for the collective deliverance from oppression, a goal only achievable by putting creative and intellectual theory into organized practice.

Notes

[1] Hansberry's involvement in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee centered around increasing membership and helping organize fundraisers. Additionally, she attempted to incorporate more international solidarity into their movement by openly criticizing the Cuban Missile Crisis and other US imperial schemes while participating in fundraising events.

[2] Patrice Lumumba was the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1960. His Pan-Africanism and radical anticolonial ideology made him a threat to Western foreign powers. Lumumba was brutally assassinated in 1961, a plot planned and carried out by Belgium and the US.

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