You’re listening to *A People’s Anthology*. Produced by Boston Review, this is a new podcast that highlights and explores key texts from US history, with our first six episodes surfacing a few important documents related to the urban rebellions of the 1960s and 70s.

The next six episodes focus on a range of figures from Claudia Jones to the Combahee River Collective. What ties the works together is that they are all, in our judgement, important contributions to the era of social upheaval in cities during the mid-twentieth century. The texts touch on racism, incarceration, housing struggles… feminism, Communism, and more.

In each episode, I’ll introduce the text with the help of historians and researchers close to each topic. Then we’ll hear the text itself, performed by some of our favorite poets and scholars... I’m your host, Rosie, and I hope you’ll stick around and join the book club!

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This is episode one, on Claudia Jones’s 1949 essay, *An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!*, introduced and read by Carole Boyce Davies

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“I was just teaching a class and we showed the Karl Marx site and her next to it, and it never fails to blow students minds away! [LAUGHS] There she is - left of Karl Marx as I call her.... Her life and her experience position her in a way that was able to take ideas that were pretty consistently articulated in the communist party and then make them palatable for black women, workers, black people, and this positions her then left of karl marx where is buried in highgate cemetery london.”

One of the key figures in black feminist, communist thought, Claudia Jones was born in 1915 in Port Au Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. Moving to New York just in time for middle-school, she grew up in Harlem during its famed “renaissance” — when a social and cultural explosion turned the area into a black cultural mecca.

“At the age of 18 is exposed to amazing street corner discussions about the scottsboro who were a group of black young men who were tried for allegedly raping woman on box
car of a train. This turned out to be not true of course and they were eventually exonerated. But the community party was active in their defence... and there was an amazing discussion around them that influenced many people, including rosa parks, to become active.

So Claudia Jones joins the community party then when she is about 18 or 19 years old and because of this active involvement from such a young age she becomes visible to US surveillance structures, particularly the FBI, which began to look at her more closely. And because of this she is never able to gain citizenship in the US ... applies many times and is denied.

In the words of Jones herself, it was her working-class poverty and Jim Crow experiences that led her to the (quote) “philosophy of my life, the science of Marxism Leninism – that philosophy that not only rejects racist ideas, but is the antithesis of them.”

But she also thought that Communist Party’s position on race and class was lacking, and opposed the leadership of the Party, which she accused of following a quote “pious hope”--that equality of black people would be legislated through reforms from on top. Jones, alongside people like Harry Haywood, advocated for land and freedom for the Black Nation—not integration. Jones also argued that -- because black women experienced a triple oppression along lines of race, class, and gender -- it was only through their liberation that all would be liberated. In Jones's eyes, women formed maybe the biggest and most important slice of the Black masses, and so were key to the revolution. Black women were just as vitally needed, she argued, to take up the most advanced positions of leadership in the Communist Party.

And this would be one of the reasons then that when she is eventually arrested and tried for having communist ideas because of a piece she wrote called “international women's day and the struggle for peace” she is imprisoned in virginia and in the same prison that billie holding was in. and also martha stewart.”

Jones was eventually incarcerated for a year and a day—but actually only served 10 months. In December 1955, five weeks after she came out of prison, Jones was forcibly deported from the United States, and arrived in London that same month, after 350 people came to see her off. It was here, Carole Boyce-Davies says, that Jones' life really begins to unfold. She not only
created Britain’s first major black newspaper, the West Indian Gazette (which survives to this day), but also founded the iconic Notting Hill Carnival, the largest annual celebration of Black British culture.

Jones was also a writer, and contributed essays on black, communist, feminist thought to Marxist publications like Political Affairs. It was in their pages that she published *An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!* In 1949:

“according to one of my colleagues who is producing a book on black feminist, she wants to date black feminist thought from that particular essay. One could of course take it back further to harriet tubman and some other figures who actually talked about enslavement in different ways, or even Ida B Wells, but she wants to look at that particular essay itself as giving that sort of theoretical grounding for putting together questions that became central to black feminist theorizing that would include race, gender and class in particular.

So by the time we get to angela davis who would actually write a book called women, race, and class, you could see then that claudia jones, who angela cites as influential, was already putting together that in that particular essay. So if we want to talk about a theoretical positioning, it would be precisely that - its come out and generated by her study and her knowledge of class as it comes out of communist party - but more at the level of application and more at the level of how then one could take those theoretical positions even as marx argued and make them workable in another kind of context --- to me that would be her major contribution.

And particular in there she defines the super-exploitation of the black woman taking classic marxist thought about use value exchange value surplus value and then saying that while workers are exploited, there are other class factions that have the capacity to further exploit other groups, and in this case then she breaks down the location of black women working as domestic workers and service work (as she did) -- and how then they are able to live in a society which operates on the basis of exploiting their labor in multiple ways. So the black women in a super-exploited - not just class but class, race AND gender and position in society”
An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman! By Claudia Jones (Full text here).

You’ve been listening to episode one of A People’s Anthology, featuring excerpts from Claudia Jones’s essay An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!

The text was read and introduced by Carole Boyce-Davies, a professor of African studies and English at Cornell and author of Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones. Our theme music is by Marisa Anderson.

A People’s Anthology is a production from Boston Review, a political and literary magazine both online and in print since 1975. Visit us at Bostonreview.net.