



SEEING SHADOWS: THE FBI SURVEILLANCE OF LOUISE THOMPSON PATTERSON

On February 1, 1941, a group of self-identified communists held a secret gathering in New York City. After the meeting had started, a forceful knock at the door alerted the group to the presence of the police. Every group member scrambled to vacate the room. They understood having communist beliefs, let alone meeting to discuss communist ideologies, could lead to intense police persecution. In the chaos of fleeing, Louise Thompson Patterson left something behind. The police investigation of the meeting space led to the discovery of “a small handbag filled with various material relative to the Communist Party, among which was a list of names, apparently the personal property of Louise Thompson....It [was] not known what the following list [represented]; there [were] many names of individuals on it who [were] prominent in the country and who [had] visited other countries during the past few years” (United States, 17 Feb. 1941: 5). This forgotten list was the catalyst for 924 pages of surveillance documentation that came together in the shape of Louise Thompson Patterson’s FBI file.

The history of surveillance of Black people by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is one of suppression and containment under the guise of protecting the values and systems of the United States of America. This deployment of surveillance was established in the early years of the FBI. In 1917, for example, the most prominent vigilante group at the time joined with the Bureau to support

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their wartime efforts of seeking out “disloyal” citizens (Churchill and Vander Wall 1990: 18). People who publicly critiqued social hierarchies or rejected American patriotic values were deemed a threat to the nation and regarded as valid targets of surveillance. The Bureau’s efforts at anti-radical repression continued through the Red Scare of the 1940s and 50s. According to Robert A. Hill, “The Survey of Racial Conditions in the United States,” informally referred to as RACON, investigated the rising tide of “black agitation” stemming from World War II and concluded with a call for the extensive surveillance of all areas of the black community (1995: 4). This racialized surveillance continued for decades, eventually leading to the development of the Communist Infiltration program (COMINFIL) which transformed into the Counter-intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) in 1956. Under the guise of protecting society against communism, Black organizations, activists, and authors were subject to wiretapping, bugging, mail tampering, disinformation, infiltrators and agent provocateurs, pseudo-gangs, bad-jacketing, fabrication of evidence, and false arrests which were effective, to a certain degree, in containing movement organizing (Churchill and Vander Wall 1990: 36).¹ Through informants and social intimidation, then, the FBI indirectly regulated the spaces in which dissident citizens organized (Boykoff 2007: 729).

The experience and impact of finding oneself under surveillance was not monolithic. For the FBI, the visibility and perceived threat of the intended target shaped the strategy of surveillance. In *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015), Simone Browne locates blackness as a central organizing feature of surveillance in the US. Applying the frame of Browne’s racializing surveillance, the FBI can be understood as a deputized apparatus of the white gaze intended to violently reinforce the human hierarchies established during the Transatlantic Slave trade as part of the national order of the United States. Approaching surveillance as a means to uphold social hierarchies underscores that

1. For example, the surveillance of Black authors of the Harlem Renaissance was one such manipulative form of surveillance. For more see, Maxwell’s *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover’s Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (2015), especially p. 62.

the identity of the surveillance target informs one's experience as a subject of surveillance. Black women under FBI surveillance were subjected to different surveillance strategies than their male counterparts. Even more specifically, the surveillance of the wives of prominent Black male leaders differed in strategy and motivation from other targets of the Bureau's surveillance.² Using the FBI file of Louise Thompson Patterson, I argue that the FBI perpetuated an archaic understanding of gender roles in their approach to counterintelligence methods. Patterson was a notable labor organizer, communist, and activist for Black women in her own right, however the FBI placed culpability for Patterson's political ideology and activism onto her husband while she was seen as a helpmate and extension of her spouse.³ Rather than focus on Patterson, the FBI focused on gaining intelligence about Patterson's husband and people in her network. Based on special agent reports, the level of detail, and the language used, I identify three types of surveillance strategies that signified shifts in the FBI's surveillance motives and overall view of Patterson as a key figure in communist organizations. Moreover, examining the type of information contained in the FBI file, I outline the incomplete narrative of Patterson's life crafted by the FBI. Agents repeatedly portrayed Patterson as the wife of an influential Black communist who was also involved with communists. However, by attributing her political activity to her husband and ultimately undermining her politics and agency as a Black communist woman, FBI agents were not able to fully realize Patterson's radical politics.

INCEPTION OF LOUISE THOMPSON PATTERSON'S FBI FILE

Patterson was deemed an appropriate target of surveillance because of her high-ranking position in the International

2. Patterson's surveillance experience differs from other unmarried Black Communist women such as Claudia Jones. For more on Jones, see Boyce Davies's *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (2008), especially "Piece Work/Peace Work: Self-construction versus State repression," pp. 191–238.

3. This article focuses specifically on Patterson's FBI file. For a broader account of Patterson, see Gilyard's *Louise Thompson Patterson: A Life of Struggle for Justice* (2017).

Worker's Order. On the first page of Patterson's FBI file, she is pinpointed as the Vice President of the International Workers Order, and agents made a point of identifying her as a "negress," or more specifically, "a well-educated negress" (United States, 17 Feb. 1941: 5). Patterson was an immediate threat to the social order because of the economic power of the International Workers Order, one of the wealthiest communist groups in the country with a financial reserve of about two million dollars (5). Even more, Patterson's perceived threat level was compounded by her being a "well-educated," well-connected, Black woman with national organizing capabilities who had recently returned from a year-long stay in Russia (5). Patterson's perceived threat was heightened when she delivered a list of 201 new members of the International Workers Order to the Communist Party headquarters in Chicago on June 12, 1941 (United States, 24 Sept. 1941: 10). Four months after the raid on the communist meeting I mentioned at the opening of this article, Patterson was perceived as an influential official of a powerful communist organization and as an individual who perpetuated communist beliefs of her own volition.

Although the Bureau initially regarded Patterson as a "national threat" because of her position as an influential, Black communist woman, her individual competence would ultimately be overshadowed by her marriage to William Patterson. When her file started on February 1, 1941 the FBI knew her only as Louise Thompson. On September 24, 1941, in a report detailing the investigation of Louise Thompson Patterson's marriage, she is identified as "Mrs. William L. Patterson with aliases Mrs. Louise Patterson, Mrs. Louise Thurman, Louise Thompson, [and] Louise Tolls" (United States, 24 Sept. 1941: 10). Patterson had just married William Patterson on December 3, 1940—two months before her FBI file started—and when her marriage to William Patterson was confirmed by agents who talked to informants and reviewed his marriage affidavit, she was conflated with her husband's image through the use of his name (United States, 24 Sept. 1941: 11). Because William Patterson had a surveillance file before the start of Louise Patterson's file he is described as "well-known as a communist in [the] area" (United States, 24 Sept. 1941: 12). From this point forward, Patterson no longer exists as her own entity within her

FBI file. Her communist activity is placed in the context of her connections to her husband and to communist organizations. Her “potential threat” is exacerbated because of her access to influential people in her network, yet Patterson’s individual agency and personal complexity is simultaneously rendered invisible because the FBI’s focus shifted away from Patterson as an individual and toward the network she brings into view.

The beginning of Louise Thompson Patterson’s FBI surveillance sets the tone for her file moving forward. Throughout the rest of her file, agents go back and forth between trying to surveil Patterson and concurrently paying attention to interactions within her network. Because of this split in attention, her surveillance is executed with minimal detail which ultimately weakens the FBI’s understanding of how Louise Patterson operated on all fronts as a Black communist woman and organizer. The FBI’s surveillance is not focused on Patterson as an individual Communist figure but as a supporting figure within communist organizations.

SURVEILLANCE STRATEGIES

Throughout the Federal Bureau of Investigation file on Louise Thompson Patterson, one sees how the Bureau uses different strategies of surveillance to gain intelligence on Patterson’s background and current communist activity. The surveillance techniques in the file are normalized, as the different strategies used to gain information are not explicitly stated. Additionally, due to the restrictions of the Freedom of Information Act, the names of many sources and contacts connected to the Patersons are blacked out. The level of surveillance—the proximity of informants to the targeted subject, the extent of the invasion of privacy, and the amount of detailed new information gained from surveillance—must be inferred from the type of information contained in the file as well as the information that is left out. The deliberate holes within the file simultaneously hide information and offer insights on the surveillance tactics of Special Agents. After careful close reading and analysis of Louise Thompson Patterson’s file, I have identified three main surveillance strategies used by the Bureau to gain knowledge on her whereabouts, activity, and network of people: passive, undercover, and physical

surveillance. These strategies of surveillance shift as Special Agents' perceptions of Louise Thompson Patterson change.

The Bureau's use of passive surveillance places Louise Thompson Patterson as a subsidiary agent in her networks, which reflects their perception that she had a minimal role in communist organizations. I define passive surveillance as an oblique form of observation that derives intelligence from using preexisting monitoring structures put in place to focus on another person in a subject's network. It is a transference of surveillance from a target to a person within the target's network, which is only made possible when two people occupy the same space or interact across a medium that is under surveillance. This type of surveillance was by no means unusual. Through the culling of membership or attendance lists for instance, the FBI frequently deployed passive surveillance measures against known or suspected communists. While surveillance of this nature certainly found large numbers of potential conspiracists, the weak nature of these associations meant most people's links to political activity were tenuous at best.

The Bureau used the passive surveillance strategy most frequently at the start of Patterson's file when the Special Agents were still trying to figure out her identity and gauge her importance within different organizations. At the beginning of Patterson's file, most of the informants' reports associate her with another organization or find her participating in a large communist event. For instance, an informant in attendance at the Illinois Peoples Conference for Legislative Action on May 24, 1941, recounts the formation of a committee to meet with the Abraham Lincoln Hotel on the issue of racial discrimination among hotel management, and "Louise Thompson" was appointed a member of the committee. Additionally, the informant documents the election of different officers; included was "Louise Thompson," from the International Workers Order, elected as Treasurer (United States, 24 Sept. 1941: 13). The Communist Party activity file also contains a report that a confidential informant was present at the June 9, 1941, Midwest District Convention of the International Workers Order: "He stated that the first speaker was Louise Thompson and that the first five speakers urged cooperation and unity in fighting ideals and purposes and in aiding to defeat the 'imperialist forces'

which were responsible for the war” (United States, 24 Sept. 1941: 15). After a further review of the reports of the confidential informant, Special Agents found a variety of pamphlets, flyers, and miscellaneous papers mentioning Louise Thompson; through these they were able to connect her to the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, The League for Women Shoppers, and a group that visited Soviet Russia in 1939 (United States, 24 Sept. 1941: 16). All of this initial intelligence on Patterson was acquired through the passive surveillance structures already in place to survey the communist party and other “suspicious” organizations; it was not the result of a specific focus on Patterson.

The passive style of writing used by the Bureau to reference the informant’s records on Patterson further position her at the margins of their surveillance operation. For instance, the informant report on Patterson’s involvement at the Illinois Peoples Conference for Legislative Action refers to her almost as an afterthought. The main focus of the report is the previously mentioned meeting with the Abraham Lincoln hotel and the proceedings of that meeting. Snippets of Patterson’s activity receive mention—specifically, her role in the organization is addressed along with a one-sentence summary of her speech at a session in the conference. At this stage in the beginning of Patterson’s file, phrases such as “The report mentions...,” “A further review was made of the files...,” “...reviewed for possible additional information concerning Subject,” and the use of the word “reflected” as opposed to “reported,” all signify that Patterson’s involvement was not a priority (United States, 24 Sept. 1941). Once her file was started, agents reviewed previous communist and communist sympathizer files for intelligence on Patterson; that information became foundational knowledge to develop Patterson as a surveillance target. As Patterson became a point of interest for Special Agents, they exploited her association with known communists to map a network of connections between different organizations.

The Bureau turned to undercover surveillance, a more invasive and active form of surveillance, to access personal information about Patterson and to initiate conversations with her. Bureau agents frequently posed as non-threatening persons or friends of Patterson to get her, or people close to her, to give agents

information that would otherwise be hidden from them. As a form of covert surveillance, undercover surveillance was one of the more intrusive tactics—agents would use deceit to access a space or acquire personal information. One can recognize the deployment of this surveillance strategy in Patterson’s file based on the level of detail and type of information contained in a report, as well as the relationships between the people who had access to certain spaces in which the agents reported. Within the FBI files there is no indication that Patterson, or anyone else, was aware of undercover surveillance taking place within their social circle.

Posing as a friend or a non-threatening person over the phone was the easiest way agents uncovered information about Patterson. At the beginning of her file, when agents were trying to connect “Louise Thompson” to William Patterson through marriage, special agents “interviewed Patterson under pretext and he, in addition to supplying the birth data concerning himself, verified he married a Mrs. Louise Thurman, a widow” (United States, 24 Sept. 1941: 11). Later in the file it is revealed that William Patterson was interviewed under a false pretext. Agents told William Patterson that since “the Bureau of Vital Statistics had changed its location, it was necessary to review the various marriage records on file and to bring them up to date. Agent in the course of this interview described himself as [redacted]” (United States, 24 Sept. 1941: 12). William Patterson went on to explain Patterson’s marriage history and the history behind her usage of the names Louise Thurman, Louise Tolls, and Louise Thompson (12). This fake call to her husband was just the first time a person close to Patterson was deceived into giving information; over the next twenty years of Patterson’s surveillance, people within her network would be telephoned repeatedly and interviewed under false pretenses. FBI agents called her places of employment and her home, used fake names, acted as potential clients, and, on one occasion, even posed as her friend. The purpose of most of these telephone calls was to verify her employment at different organizations or to verify previous intelligence received from other forms of surveillance.

Undercover physical surveillance was more prominent than fraudulent phone calls as there were many informants within Patterson’s network who came into contact with her on a daily basis.

In April 1942, “Louise Thompson...stated that she had recently talked to a girl named [redacted] Morale Division of the Office of Civilian Defense. [Redacted] requested Thompson to secure a person for her who would be able to work with all kinds of language groups. Thompson told the informants that she had been unable to furnish anyone immediately, but tried to locate someone from the IWO” (United States 17 Aug. 1962: 27). Based on the use of the words “stated” and “told” in the report, it can be inferred that informants spoke directly to Patterson. Furthermore, the nature of the information, concerning IWO operations, indicates that informants worked closely with Patterson, perhaps even in the IWO office. Although, informants constantly came into contact with Patterson, and possibly operated within her personal space, there is little detail concerning her personal life outside of working with communist organizations.

Lastly, FBI agents conducted physical surveillance, a form of overt observation used to physically keep tabs on Patterson’s movement and activity. Physical surveillance entails the presence of conspicuous FBI agents within the same space as the targeted person of surveillance—tracking her movement, watching her home, and interviewing her directly. The visible nature of this type of surveillance means it also constitutes a method of intimidation. FBI agents made direct contact with Patterson and were visible in the places that were supposed to be secure for her, which sent the message that they had the power to access her personal information and heighten her sense of insecurity.

The physical presence of FBI agents in Patterson’s personal spaces was, in other words, a method of control. On November 30, 1953, for example, two special agents showed up at Patterson’s apartment in New York City. They

advised that she was specifically contacted in connection with an official investigation specifically regarding a meeting allegedly held in 1935 at the time the National Negro Congress was organized. Mrs. Patterson was asked if she was not one of the original members of the National Negro Congress, to which she replied that she supposed she was, adding, ‘I do not care to discuss the matter with you’. She also declined to cooperate to the extent of answering any questions concerning the meeting held in 1935. (United States 7 Dec 1953: 23–4)

This was the first and only time the FBI agents made direct contact with Patterson, however they continued to make their presence known in her life (United States 30 Apr. 1958: 31). FBI agents would routinely watch Patterson's house, not just to affirm her residential address, but also to document her comings and goings. FBI agents even trailed Patterson and her husband throughout New York (31).

The FBI's overt monitoring of Patterson's activity was a method of intimidation to attempt to assert the Bureau's power to regulate its subject. When special agents showed up at Patterson's house to interview her about information they already knew, this sent Patterson the message that she was being watched. Sitting outside of her home, being present at her work, and following her through New York were tactics the Bureau relied on to create a sense of pervasive surveillance. The strategy behind agents being overt instead of covert is that if Patterson knew she was being watched, her illicit behavior might change. Therefore, physical surveillance was used as a tool to influence Patterson's decision making and perceived suspicious activity. In other words, this form of surveillance was not to gain intelligence, but rather to suppress communist activity. The use of surveillance as a tool of suppression means that Patterson was perceived as a person whose activity is pertinent to the operations of the Communist Party.

The surveillance strategies and motivations behind these forms of surveillance align with the FBI's understanding of Patterson's role in communist activity. At the beginning of her file, regardless of the positions she held in communist affiliated organizations she was viewed as an insignificant member, constantly overlooked by surveillance operatives. Her marriage to William Patterson increased her visibility to Bureau agents which led them to seek out information to justify her elevated level of surveillance. As the special agents learned more about her involvement in different organizations, communist affiliated or not, Patterson was understood as a connection between organizations and as a person who possessed a wealth of knowledge pertaining to the operations of the groups. The shift from surveillance as a method to gain intelligence to surveillance as a tool of suppression aligns with the view of Patterson as a key player in communist activity.

The development of her surveillance tells the story of the FBI's approach to a prominent Black communist woman. Patterson was propelled into the circle of focus through her connections—including her marriage to William Patterson. However, she was always seen as being a part of something greater than herself—namely an influential network of communist organizations. Her surveillance was justified because of her role within organizations and not because of her work as an individual who was a “threat to national security” based on her perceived status.

THE FBI'S CRAFTED NARRATIVE

When Patterson's file first began, the FBI justified the continuance of her surveillance by connecting her to William Patterson and communist organizations. Her perceived threat was heightened when it was determined that she worked for the International Workers Order (IWO), “one of the wealthiest communist setups in the country” (United States, 17 Feb. 1941: 5). After this discovery, one of the first things agents did was ascertain her marriage to William L. Patterson, “National Vice-President of the [International Labor Defense], long well-known as a communist in [the] area, Executive of the board of the Communist Party, and long official of the National Negro Congress” (United States, 24 Sept. 1941: 12). Next, FBI agents reviewed their previous files for any prior knowledge in which they uncovered Patterson's involvement in communist affiliated organizations. Agents then looked into her birth records, academic records, arrest records, bank records, and even talked to old college acquaintances to get a sense of who she was. Forty-seven pages into her FBI file, in order to justify a request for technical surveillance of Patterson, Special Agents established her involvement with approximately thirteen communist and labor organizations. At the end of the first section of her file, Special Agents had constructed Patterson's image as a well-educated, Black communist woman heavily involved in communist organizations and connected to Black prominent figures in the Communist Party.

Later in the file, when they submitted a request for technical surveillance of Louise Patterson they included a short profile on her husband, William L. Patterson. They labeled him as a leader of the Communist Party in the Chicago area and as someone

particularly interested in the communist infiltration of the “Negro Situation” (United States, 26 June 1943: 40). Right after reinforcing her marriage to an influential communist leader, the file uses the name “Mrs. William L. Patterson” to refer to Louise Thompson Patterson followed by the description that she is “regarded as one of the leading figures in Communist activity in the Chicago area,” a description also used to describe William Patterson (United States, 17 Dec. 1945: 43). Despite the fact that wives in this period were often referred to by their husbands’ name, the file’s conflation William Patterson with Louise Thompson Patterson through the use of his name contributes to its narrative that William Patterson was the more important communist operative.

Furthermore, Patterson’s FBI file maintained she had an important contributing role in the operations of the International Workers Order, yet they never grounded her actions within ideology. An FBI investigation into the IWO bank account found that Patterson, along with two other anonymous people, were authorized to sign checks on behalf of the account (United States, 21 Aug. 1953: 8). Patterson’s authorization meant she had partial control over the finances in the IWO which positioned her at a high level of influence. Later in the same section of her file, agents describe her as an “executive secretary [who] was the directing force in the Du Sable lodge No. 751, IWO, Chicago, which had the largest IWO membership in the US and was composed mostly of Negroes” (United States, 23 Dec. 1946: 26). The report went on to delineate her connections with the Communist Party, the International Workers Order, the United Auto Workers Union, and the Committee on Race Relations of the Chicago Mayor’s office. The report hints at Patterson’s radical ideologies by citing that her work intersected with the Communist Party, anti-lynching organizations, and labor unions. However, why were her political beliefs and ideologies never fleshed out? Why were her speeches never transcribed and included in her file? Within the file, Patterson was never allowed to be more than her actions and contributions to organizations; agents did not give Patterson the space to grow as a significant figure in her own right. She remained confined to the image of what they perceived her to be.

In contrast to the Bureau's limited view, Louise Thompson Patterson was well-known in many Black activist and communist circles as having a global analysis of racism, capitalism, and sexism. As scholar Erik S. McDuffie has outlined, Patterson's early organizing efforts were numerous and well-regarded. After she returned from her travels in the Soviet Union, Patterson joined the National Committee to Defend Political Prisoners and became the lead organizer for the "Free Scottsboro March," a very successful event as the first major protest for racial equality in Washington D.C. (McDuffie 2011: 75). In 1934, Patterson's arrest in Birmingham, Alabama while organizing for the IWO made headlines (77). The year after, in 1935, in front of a special investigative committee on the Harlem Riots, Patterson testified on the root causes of the riots as "the community's frustration with poverty and racism" (77). In February of 1936, Patterson was elected as the national secretary of the IWO's second largest division, the English section, which made her the highest-ranking Black woman in the IWO (105). Patterson became the director of Du Sable 751 Lodge on the South Side of Chicago in 1940. Under her leadership the lodge became a thriving center for Black political and cultural work, specifically, featuring the art and work of Black women intellectuals in support of left-wing causes (140). Although Patterson was connected to high profile Black leaders such as W.E.B. DuBois, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Ishmael Flory—a Chicago communist leader—Patterson's political impact and visibility as a Black communist woman was because of her own organizing work and the reputation she cultivated before her marriage to William Patterson. The disconnect between Patterson's prominence in communist communities and her shallow portrayal in the FBI file illuminates the FBI's failure to see Patterson's integral place in communist operations because of a limiting, gendered lens that compromised its intelligence gathering.

FBI agents did, however, allow room to discredit the efficacy of Patterson's work for the community of Chicago. A report from William Patterson's FBI file included in Patterson's file documented a complaint from a South Side Section member detailing how William Patterson and Louise Thompson Patterson were not running the center efficiently. It stated that:

Louise had attempted to run the activities of the South Side Section and that when anyone became critical of her activities in that regard, she would immediately go to her husband, a paid [Communist Party] employee [...]. During that time Louise was frequently intoxicated and obnoxious and many South Side CP members became disgusted with the leadership of the section. (United States, 21 July 1951: 42–3)

Including this complaint in her file undermined the perception of her as a powerful leader in the organization and positioned her under her husband in the organization's hierarchy. Additionally, a report from a member of the Negro Allied Veterans of America,

advised that Louise Thompson Patterson might have been a Communist, but he would not consider her a Communist in the same sense that he considered William L. Patterson (her husband) a Communist. Mrs. Patterson was not as aggressive as William in propounding Communist ideology, but she, more or less, went along with her husband's thinking. According to [redacted], Louise was so interested in the fruits of Capitalism that he did not see how she could have a strong feeling for Communism (United States, 7 Aug. 1951: 7).

Once again, Patterson's ideology and actions are attributed to her husband. Additionally, it is reasonable to speculate that the informant's account is exaggerated as most informants were paid to supply information and some even held personal grudges against the people or organizations they were informing against (Lynn 2021). Agents recognized the gravity of the work Patterson was doing and the importance of her role in the organization, yet they did not see her as a leader with her own commitment to radical ideologies.

As a Black communist woman in the predominantly white Communist Party, Patterson openly critiqued the party's social dynamics which often left Black women on the margins (McDuffie 2011: 119). Louise Thompson and Beulah Richardson wrote "A Call to Negro Women" in the summer of 1951, the founding manifesto for the organization known as Sojourners for Truth and Justice (STJ)—an all-Black women's radical group. The manifesto condemned "Jim Crow, lynching, the rape of black women, police brutality, black poverty, political persecution of black radicals, and the imprisonment of Rosa Lee Ingram" (McDuffie 2011: 175). STJ "combined black nationalist and Popular Front organizational strategies with Com-

minist positions on race, class, and gender to advocate for Black women globally (McDuffie 2011: 173). On October 1, 1951, as part of the STJ's inaugural convention in Washington D.C., Patterson led a group of 60 Sojourners into the Civil Rights section of the Department of Justice to speak to the Attorney General and demand the government end racial injustice (McDuffie 2011: 160). Patterson was a leader in her own right, and she publicly proclaimed and acted on her Black feminist ideologies. Her eminence within STJ raises the question: why was her very public and effectual work not reported in her FBI file? Her politics and position as a leader in radical black, communist organizations would have been enough justification for her continued surveillance without her being married to William Patterson. The FBI's focus on men as a potent "threat to national security," limited their understanding of Black liberation and led agents to turn a blind eye to the important work of Black women.

Because the FBI continued to place importance on Patterson's connections instead of her ideology, they continued to misinterpret her ideological growth as an expansion of her network. As a founding member of the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, "the first and only group during the entire Old Left period explicitly organized 'to fight for full freedom of the Negro people and the dignity of Negro womanhood'" (McDuffie 2011: 161), Patterson had an understanding of how race, class, and gender intersected to contribute to Black liberation. The group had a radical ideology that "posited black women across the diaspora as the vanguard of global radical change" (161). However, the documentation about Patterson's involvement with STJ that is present in her FBI file focuses on the communist aspect of the group. Agents describe STJ "as a Communist front, and Mrs. Louise Patterson, one of the members of the initiating committee, as either a CP member or sympathetic toward the CP" (United States, 19 Oct. 1951: 9). Even more, Bureau agents attributed the initiation of the STJ to the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) headed by William Patterson (Lynn 2021). Taking the step to be a founding member of a Black left feminist organization, Patterson evidences a sense of leadership and an astute analysis of Black liberation independent of her husband. Patterson continued to prove her independence, leadership, and radical politics through her actions and involvement with Sojourners for Truth and Justice, yet the FBI

continued to place her within the boundaries of their fixed narrative of Patterson as a communist and as an extension of her husband.

In the eyes of the FBI, Louise Thompson Patterson was the wife of William L. Patterson, a Black communist, a woman, and an active operative within a network of communist organizations. She was a probable drunk, a friend of Paul Robeson and Claudia Jones, and she was a leader, not in her own right, but because of the influence from prominent communists in her network. The FBI came to understand Patterson within the framework of their traditional views on marriage and gender. In the FBI's assessment, the Patterson's marriage made for a transference of ideas from William Patterson to Louise Patterson that increased her surveillance visibility, heightened her potential threat to national security, and simultaneously overshadowed her own intersectional ideologies of race, gender, and class.

It would be an overstatement to label Patterson as a primary target of FBI surveillance. Instead, Louise Thompson Patterson's surveillance was one part of the FBI's strategy to achieve their end goal of repressing communist activity. Patterson was a window through which the Bureau could see into the operations of the IWO and other communist organizations. Special agents did not understand the true agenda of Black communists, specifically Black communist women like Patterson who worked with a complex understanding of race, class, and gender. Agents grasped for information regarding communist organizations and blindly established institutional connections based off the information available to them. Similar to a window, agents saw Patterson, but they looked right through her. Based on Patterson's file, the Bureau did not completely comprehend the depth of Patterson's analysis of oppression along the lines of race, gender, and class. Because of the Bureau's narrow agenda focused on communist repression, and their sexist views on the capabilities of women, the full potential of Patterson's "threat" to the stability of a racial capitalist system as a result of her intersectional ideologies of liberation was not realized. When looking at the FBI file compiled on Patterson one would never know she was an effective political activist at the forefront of shaping Black left feminist thought.

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