

Josephine Baker

Josephine Baker (born **Freda Josephine McDonald**, naturalised French **Joséphine Baker**; 3 June 1906 – 12 April 1975) was an American-born French entertainer, French Resistance agent, and civil rights activist. Her career was centered primarily in Europe, mostly in her adopted France. Baker was the first African-American to star in a major motion picture, the 1927 silent film *Siren of the Tropics*, directed by Mario Nalpas and Henri Étiévant.^[2]

During her early career Baker was renowned as a dancer, and was among the most celebrated performers to headline the revues of the Folies Bergère in Paris. Her performance in the revue *Un vent de folie* in 1927 caused a sensation in Paris. Her costume, consisting of only a girdle of artificial bananas, became an iconic image and a symbol of the Jazz Age and the 1920s. She was the first African-American to star in a major motion picture, the 1927 silent film *Siren of the Tropics*, directed by Mario Nalpas and Henri Étiévant.^[3]

Baker was celebrated by artists and intellectuals of the era, who variously dubbed her the "Black Venus", the "Black Pearl", the "Bronze Venus", and the "Creole Goddess". Born in St. Louis, Missouri, she renounced her U.S. citizenship and became a French national after her marriage to French industrialist Jean Lion in 1937.^[4] She raised her children in France. "I have two loves, my country and Paris", Baker once said, and she sang: «J'ai deux amours, mon pays et Paris».^[5]

She was known for aiding the French Resistance during World War II.^[6] After the war, she was awarded the Croix de guerre by the French military, and was named a Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur by General Charles de Gaulle.^[7]

Baker refused to perform for segregated audiences in the United States and is noted for her contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. In 1968 she was offered unofficial leadership in the movement in the United States by Coretta Scott King, following Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. After thinking it over, Baker declined the offer out of concern for the welfare of her children.^{[1][8]}

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Josephine Baker



Baker in her banana costume

Born	Freda Josephine McDonald <div>3 June 1906</div> <div>St. Louis, Missouri, United States</div>
Died	12 April 1975 (aged 68) <div>Paris, France</div>
Resting place	Monaco Cemetery
Residence	Roquebrune, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, ^[1] (French Riviera), France
Nationality	American (renounced) <div>French (1937–1975)</div>
Occupation	Civil rights activist, vedette, singer, Decorated World War II Spy

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Early life

Freda Josephine McDonald was born in St. Louis, Missouri.^{[1][9][10]} Her mother, Carrie, was adopted in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1886 by Richard and Elvira McDonald, both of whom were former slaves of African and Native American descent.^[1] Josephine Baker's estate identifies vaudeville drummer Eddie Carson as her natural father despite evidence to the contrary.^[11] Baker's foster son Jean-Claude Baker wrote a biography, published in 1993, titled *Josephine: The Hungry Heart*. Jean-Claude Baker did an exhaustive amount of research into the life of Josephine Baker, including the identity of her biological father. In the book, he discusses at length the circumstances surrounding Josephine Baker's birth:

The records of the city of St. Louis tell an almost unbelievable story. They show that (Josephine Baker's mother) Carrie McDonald ... was admitted to the (exclusively white) Female Hospital on May 3, 1906, diagnosed as pregnant. She was discharged on June 17, her baby, Freda J. McDonald having been born two weeks earlier. Why six weeks in the hospital? Especially for a black woman (of that time) who would customarily have had her baby at home with the help of a midwife? Obviously, there had been complications with the pregnancy, but Carrie's chart reveals no details. The father was identified (on the birth certificate) simply as "Edw"... I think Josephine's father was white – so did Josephine, so did her family ... people in St. Louis say that (Baker's mother) had worked for a German family (around the time she became pregnant). He's the one who must have got her into that hospital and paid to keep her there all those weeks. Also, her baby's birth was registered by the head of the hospital at a time when most black births were not. I have unraveled many mysteries associated with Josephine Baker, but the most painful mystery of her life, the mystery of her father's identity, I could not solve. The secret died with Carrie, who refused to the end to talk about it. She let people think Eddie Carson was the father, and Carson played along, (but) Josephine knew better.^[1]

Carrie McDonald and Eddie Carson had a song-and-dance act, playing wherever they could get work. When Josephine was about a year old they began to carry her onstage occasionally during their finale. She was further exposed to show business at an early age because her childhood neighborhood was home to many vaudeville theaters that doubled as movie houses. These venues included the Jazzland, Booker T. Washington, and Comet Theatres.

Josephine spent her early life at 212 Targee Street (known by some St. Louis residents as Johnson Street) in the Mill Creek Valley neighborhood of St. Louis, a racially mixed low-income neighborhood near Union Station, consisting mainly of rooming houses, brothels, and apartments without indoor plumbing.^[1] Josephine was always poorly dressed and hungry as a child, and developed

Years active	1921–1975
Spouse(s)	Willie Wells (m. 1919; div. 1919) William Baker (m. 1921; div. 1925) Jean Lion (m. 1937; div. 1940) Jo Bouillon (m. 1947; div. 1961)
Partner(s)	Robert Brady (1973–1975)
Children	adopted 12 children; informal Jean-Claude Baker
Musical career	
Genres	Cabaret · music hall · French pop · French jazz
Instruments	Vocals
Labels	Columbia, Mercury, RCA Victor

street smarts playing in the railroad yards of Union Station.^[12] She had little formal education, and attended Lincoln Elementary School only through the fifth grade.

Josephine's mother married a kind but perpetually unemployed man, Arthur Martin, with whom she had son Arthur and two more daughters, Marguerite and Willie.^[13] She took in laundry to wash to make ends meet, and at eight years old, Josephine began working as a live-in domestic for white families in St. Louis.^[14] One woman abused her, burning Josephine's hands when the young girl put too much soap in the laundry.^[15] By age 12, she had dropped out of school.^[16]

At 13 she worked as a waitress at the Old Chauffeur's Club at 3133 Pine Street. She also lived as a street child in the slums of St. Louis, sleeping in cardboard shelters, scavenging for food in garbage cans,^[17] making a living with street-corner dancing. It was at the Old Chauffeur's Club where Josephine met Willie Wells and married him the same year. However, the marriage lasted less than a year. Following her divorce from Wells, she found work with a street performance group called the Jones Family Band.^[18]

In Baker's teen years she struggled to have a healthy relationship with her mother, Carrie McDonald, who did not want Josephine to become an entertainer, and scolded her for not tending to her second husband Willie Baker, whom she had married in 1921 at 15.^[19] Although she left Willie Baker when her vaudeville troupe was booked into a New York City venue and divorced him in 1925, it was during this time she began to see significant career success, and she continued to use his last name professionally for the rest of her life.^[1]

Though Baker traveled, then returned with gifts and money for her mother and younger half-sister, the turmoil with her mother pushed her to make a trip to France.^[20]

Career

Early years

Baker's consistent badgering of a show manager in her hometown led to her being recruited for the St. Louis Chorus vaudeville show. At the age of 15, she headed to New York City during the Harlem Renaissance, performing at the Plantation Club, Florence Mills' old stomping ground, and in the chorus lines of the groundbreaking and hugely successful Broadway revues *Shuffle Along* (1921)^[21] with Adelaide Hall^[22] and *The Chocolate Dandies* (1924).

Baker performed as the last dancer on the end of the chorus line, where her act was to perform in a comic manner, as if she were unable to remember the dance, until the encore, at which point she would perform it not only correctly but with additional complexity. A term of the time describes this part of the cast as "The Pony." Baker was billed at the time as "the highest-paid chorus girl in vaudeville".^[1]

Her career began with blackface comedy at local clubs; this was the "entertainment" of which her mother had disapproved; however, these performances landed Baker an opportunity to tour in Paris, which would become the place she called home until her final days.^[23]

Paris and rise to fame

Baker sailed to Paris for a new venture, and opened in *La Revue Nègre* on 2 October 1925, aged 19, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées.^{[24][25]}

In a 1974 interview with *The Guardian*, Baker explained that she obtained her first big break in the bustling city. "No, I didn't get my first break on Broadway. I was only in the chorus in 'Shuffle Along' and 'Chocolate Dandies'. I became famous first in France in the twenties. I just couldn't stand America and I was one of the first coloured Americans to move to Paris. Oh yes, Bricktop

was there as well. Me and her were the only two, and we had a marvellous time. Of course, everyone who was anyone knew Brick. And they got to know Miss Baker as well."^[26]

In Paris, she became an instant success for her erotic dancing, and for appearing practically nude onstage. After a successful tour of Europe, she broke her contract and returned to France to star at the Folies Bergère, setting the standard for her future acts.^[1]

Baker performed the "Danse Sauvage" wearing a costume consisting of a skirt made of a string of artificial bananas. Her success coincided (1925) with the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, which gave birth to the term "Art Deco", and also with a renewal of interest in non-Western forms of art, including African. Baker represented one aspect of this fashion. In later shows in Paris, she was often accompanied on stage by her pet cheetah, "Chiquita", who was adorned with a diamond collar. The cheetah frequently escaped into the orchestra pit, where it terrorized the musicians, adding another element of excitement to the show.^[1]

After a while, Baker was the most successful American entertainer working in France. Ernest Hemingway called her "the most sensational woman anyone ever saw."^{[27][28]} The author spent hours talking with her in Paris bars. Picasso drew paintings depicting her alluring beauty. Jean Cocteau became friendly with her and helped vault her to international stardom.^[29]

Baker starred in three films which found success only in Europe: the silent film Siren of the Tropics (1927), Zouzou (1934) and Princesse Tam Tam (1935). She starred in Fausse Alerte in 1940.^[30]

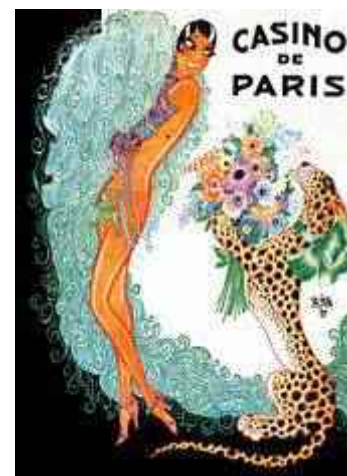
At this time she scored her most successful song, "J'ai deux amours" (1931). At the start of her career in France, Baker met a Sicilian former stonemason who passed himself off as a count, who persuaded her to let him manage her.^[20] Giuseppe Pepito Abatino was not only Baker's management, but her lover as well. The two could not marry because Baker was still married to her second husband, Willie Baker.^[19]

Under the management of Abatino, Baker's stage and public persona, as well as her singing voice, were transformed. In 1934, she took the lead in a revival of Jacques Offenbach's opera La créole, which premiered in December of that year for a six-month run at the Théâtre Marigny on the Champs-Élysées of Paris. In preparation for her performances, she went through months of training with a vocal coach. In the words of Shirley Bassey, who has cited Baker as her primary influence, "... she went from a 'petite danseuse sauvage' with a decent voice to 'la grande diva magnifique' ... I swear in all my life I have never seen, and probably never shall see again, such a spectacular singer and performer."^[31] Despite her popularity in France, Baker never attained the equivalent reputation in America. Her star turn in a 1936 revival of Ziegfeld Follies on Broadway generated less than impressive box office numbers, and later in the run, she was replaced by Gypsy Rose Lee.^{[32][33]} Time magazine referred to her as a "Negro wench ... whose dancing and singing might be topped anywhere outside of Paris", while other critics said her voice was "too thin" and "dwarf-like" to fill the Winter Garden Theatre.^[32] She returned to Europe heartbroken.^[24] This contributed to Baker's becoming a legal citizen of France and giving up her American citizenship.^[1]

Baker returned to Paris in 1937, married the French industrialist Jean Lion, and became a French citizen.^[34] They were married in the French town of Crèvecœur-le-Grand, in a wedding presided over by the mayor, Jammy Schmidt.



Play media
Arrival of Baker in The Hague in 1928



Depiction, drawn by Louis Gaudain, of Baker being presented a flower bouquet by a cheetah

Work during World War II

In September 1939, when France declared war on Germany in response to the invasion of Poland, Baker was recruited by the Deuxième Bureau, French military intelligence, as an "honorable correspondent". Baker collected what information she could about German troop locations from officials she met at parties. She specialized in gatherings at embassies and ministries, charming people as she had always done, while gathering information. Her café-society fame enabled her to rub shoulders with those in the know, from high-ranking Japanese officials to Italian bureaucrats, and to report back what she heard. She attended parties and gathered information at the Italian embassy without raising suspicion.^{[35]:182–269}

When the Germans invaded France, Baker left Paris and went to the Château des Milandes, her home in the Dordogne département in the south of France. She housed people who were eager to help the Free French effort led by Charles de Gaulle and supplied them with visas.^[36] As an entertainer, Baker had an excuse for moving around Europe, visiting neutral nations such as Portugal, as well as some in South America. She carried information for transmission to England, about airfields, harbors, and German troop concentrations in the West of France. Notes were written in invisible ink on Baker's sheet music.^{[35]:232–269}

Later in 1941, she and her entourage went to the French colonies in North Africa. The stated reason was Baker's health (since she was recovering from another case of pneumonia) but the real reason was to continue helping the Resistance. From a base in Morocco, she made tours of Spain. She pinned notes with the information she gathered inside her underwear (counting on her celebrity to avoid a strip search). She met the Pasha of Marrakech, whose support helped her through a miscarriage (the last of several). After the miscarriage, she developed an infection so severe it required a hysterectomy. The infection spread and she developed peritonitis and then sepsis. After her recovery (which she continued to fall in and out of), she started touring to entertain British, French, and American soldiers in North Africa. The Free French had no organized entertainment network for their troops, so Baker and her entourage managed for the most part on their own. They allowed no civilians and charged no admission.^[35]

In Cairo, Egypt's King Farouk asked her to sing; she refused because Egypt had not recognized Free France and remained neutral. However, she offered to sing in Cairo at a celebration of honor for the ties between Free France and Egypt, and asked Farouk to preside, a subtle indication of which side his officially neutral country leaned toward.

After the war, Baker received the Croix de guerre and the Rosette de la Résistance. She was made a Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur by General Charles de Gaulle.^[37]

Baker's last marriage, to French composer and conductor Jo Bouillon, ended around the time Baker opted to adopt her 11th child.^[19] After the separation, Baker's chateau in France was foreclosed and she had to be physically removed from the property.

Later career

In 1949, a reinvented Baker returned in triumph to the Folies Bergere. Bolstered by recognition of her wartime heroics, Baker the performer assumed a new gravitas, unafraid to take on serious music or subject matter. The engagement was a rousing success, and reestablished Baker as one of Paris' preeminent entertainers. In 1951 Baker was invited back to the United States for a nightclub engagement in Miami. After winning a public battle over desegregating the club's audience, Baker followed up her



Baker in 1940.

sold-out run at the club with a national tour. Rave reviews and enthusiastic audiences accompanied her everywhere, climaxed by a parade in front of 100,000 people in Harlem in honor of her new title: NAACP's "Woman of the Year". Her future looked bright, with six months of bookings and promises of many more to come.

In 1952 Baker was hired to crown the Queen of the Cavalcade of Jazz for the famed eighth Cavalcade of Jazz concert held at Wrigley Field in Los Angeles which was produced by Leon Hefflin, Sr. on June 1. Also featured to perform that day were Roy Brown and His Mighty Men, Anna Mae Winburn and Her Sweethearts, Toni Harper, Louis Jordan, Jimmy Witherspoon and Jerry Wallace.^{[38][39]}



Baker in Amsterdam, 1954

An incident at the Stork Club interrupted and overturned her plans. Baker criticized the club's unwritten policy of discouraging black patrons, then scolded columnist Walter Winchell, an old ally, for not rising to her defense. Winchell responded swiftly with a series of harsh public rebukes, including accusations of Communist sympathies (a serious charge at the time). The ensuing publicity resulted in the termination of Baker's work visa, forcing her to cancel all her engagements and return to France. It was almost a decade before U.S. officials allowed her back into the country.^[40]



Baker in Havana, Cuba

In January 1966, Fidel Castro invited Baker to perform at the Teatro Musical de La Habana in Havana, Cuba, at the 7th anniversary celebrations of his revolution. Her spectacular show in April broke attendance records. In 1968, Baker visited Yugoslavia and made appearances in Belgrade and in Skopje. In her later career, Baker faced financial troubles. She commented, "Nobody wants me, they've forgotten me"; but family members encouraged her to continue performing. In 1973 she performed at Carnegie Hall to a standing ovation.^[35]

The following year, she appeared in a Royal Variety Performance at the London Palladium, and then at the Monacan Red Cross Gala, celebrating her 50 years in French show business. Advancing years and exhaustion began to take their toll; she sometimes had trouble remembering lyrics, and her speeches between songs tended to ramble. She still continued to captivate audiences of all ages.^[35]

Civil rights activism

Although based in France, Baker supported the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s. When she arrived in New York with her husband Jo, they were refused reservations at 36 hotels because of racial discrimination. She was so upset by this treatment that she wrote articles about the segregation in the United States. She also began traveling into the South. She gave a talk at Fisk University, a historically black college in Nashville, Tennessee, on "France, North Africa And The Equality Of The Races In France".^[35]

She refused to perform for segregated audiences in the United States, although she was offered \$10,000 by a Miami club.^[6] (The club eventually met her demands). Her insistence on mixed audiences helped to integrate live entertainment shows in Las Vegas, Nevada.^[8] After this incident, she began receiving threatening phone calls from people claiming to be from the Ku Klux Klan but said publicly that she was not afraid of them.^[35]

In 1951, Baker made charges of racism against Sherman Billingsley's Stork Club in Manhattan, where she had been refused service.^{[40][41]} Actress Grace Kelly, who was at the club at the time, rushed over to Baker, took her by the arm and stormed out with her entire party, vowing never to return (although she returned on 3 January 1956 with Prince Rainier of Monaco). The two

women became close friends after the incident.^[42]

When Baker was near bankruptcy, Kelly offered her a villa and financial assistance (Kelly by then was princess consort of Rainier III of Monaco). (However, during his work on the *Stork Club* book, author and New York Times reporter Ralph Blumenthal was contacted by Jean-Claude Baker, one of Baker's sons. Having read a Blumenthal-written story about Leonard Bernstein's FBI file, he indicated that he had read his mother's FBI file and, using comparison of the file to the tapes, said he thought the Stork Club incident was overblown.)^[43])

Baker worked with the NAACP.^[6] Her reputation as a crusader grew to such an extent that the NAACP had Sunday, 20 May 1951 declared "Josephine Baker Day". She was presented with life membership with the NAACP by Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Ralph Bunche. The honor she was paid spurred her to further her crusading efforts with the "Save Willie McGee" rally after he was convicted of the 1948 beating death of a furniture shop owner in Trenton, New Jersey. As the decorated war hero who was bolstered by the racial equality she experienced in Europe, Baker became increasingly regarded as controversial; some black people even began to shun her, fearing that her outspokenness and racy reputation from her earlier years would hurt the cause.^[35]

In 1963, she spoke at the March on Washington at the side of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.^[44]

Baker was the only official female speaker. While wearing her Free French uniform emblazoned with her medal of the Légion d'honneur, she introduced the "Negro Women for Civil Rights."^[45] Rosa Parks and Daisy Bates were among those she acknowledged, and both gave brief speeches.^[46] Not everyone involved wanted Baker present at the March; some thought her time overseas had made her a woman of France, one who was disconnected from the Civil Rights issues going on in America. In her powerful speech, one of the things Baker notably said was:

I have walked into the palaces of kings and queens and into the houses of presidents. And much more. But I could not walk into a hotel in America and get a cup of coffee, and that made me mad. And when I get mad, you know that I open my big mouth. And then look out, 'cause when Josephine opens her mouth, they hear it all over the world ...^{[47][48]}

After King's assassination, his widow Coretta Scott King approached Baker in the Netherlands to ask if she would take her husband's place as leader of the Civil Rights Movement. After many days of thinking it over, Baker declined, saying her children were "too young to lose their mother".^[46]

Personal life

Relationships

Josephine Baker was bisexual.^[49] Her first marriage was to American Pullman porter Willie Wells when she was only 13 years old. The marriage was reportedly very unhappy and the couple divorced a short time later. Another short-lived marriage followed to Willie Baker in 1921; she retained Baker's last name because her career began taking off during that time, and it was the name by which she became best known. While she had four marriages to men, Jean-Claude Baker writes that Josephine also had several relationships with women.^[49]

During her time in the Harlem Renaissance arts community, one of her relationships was with Blues singer Clara Smith.^[49] In 1925 she began an extramarital relationship with the Belgian novelist Georges Simenon.^[50] In 1937, Baker married Frenchman Jean Lion. She and Lion separated in 1940. Lion died in 1957 of Spanish influenza. She married French composer and conductor Jo Bouillon in 1947, and their union also ended in divorce but lasted 14 years. She was later involved for a time with the artist Robert Brady, but they never married.^{[51][52]}

Children

During Baker's work with the Civil Rights Movement, she began adopting children, forming a family she often referred to as "The Rainbow Tribe". Baker wanted to prove that "children of different ethnicities and religions could still be brothers." She often took the children with her cross-country, and when they were at Château des Milandes, she arranged tours so visitors could walk the grounds and see how natural and happy the children in "The Rainbow Tribe" were.^[53] Her estate featured hotels, a farm, rides, and the children singing and dancing for the audience. She'd charge admission for visitors to enter and partake in the activities, which included watching the children play.^[54] Baker used her children as metaphors: living examples of what humanity should look like, and her diverse children were used in a sort of attack against racism. She created dramatic backstories for them, picking with clear intent in mind: at one point she wanted and planned to get a Jewish baby, but settled for a French one instead. She also raised them as different religions to further her model for the world, taking two children from Algeria and raising one Muslim and the other Catholic. One member of the Tribe, Jean-Claude Baker, said:

She wanted a doll.^[55]

Another, Akio who was adopted from Japan, said

She was a great artist, and she was our mother. Mothers make mistakes. Nobody's perfect.

Baker raised two daughters, French-born Marianne and Moroccan-born Stellina, and 10 sons, Korean-born Jeannot (or Janot), Japanese-born Akio, Colombian-born Luis, Finnish-born Jari (now Jarry), French-born Jean-Claude and Noël, Israeli-born Moïse, Algerian-born Brahim, Ivorian-born Koffi, and Venezuelan-born Mara.^{[56][57]} For some time, Baker lived with her children and an enormous staff in the château in Dordogne, France, with her fourth husband, Jo Bouillon.

Later years and death

In her later years, Baker converted to Roman Catholicism.^[58] In 1968, Baker lost her castle owing to unpaid debts; afterwards Princess Grace offered her an apartment in Roquebrune, near Monaco.^[59]

Baker was back on stage at the Olympia in Paris in 1968, in Belgrade and at Carnegie Hall in 1973, and at the Royal Variety Performance at the London Palladium and at the *Gala du Cirque* in Paris in 1974. On 8 April 1975, Baker starred in a retrospective revue at the Bobino in Paris, *Joséphine à Bobino 1975*, celebrating her 50 years in show business. The revue, financed notably by Prince Rainier, Princess Grace, and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, opened to rave reviews. Demand for seating was such that fold-out chairs had to be added to accommodate spectators. The opening night audience included Sophia Loren, Mick Jagger, Shirley Bassey, Diana Ross, and Liza Minnelli.^[60]

Four days later, Baker was found lying peacefully in her bed surrounded by newspapers with glowing reviews of her performance. She was in a coma after suffering a cerebral hemorrhage. She was taken to Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital, where she died, aged 68, on 12 April 1975.^{[60][61]}



Baker with ten of her adopted children, 1964



Baker at the Château des Milandes, 1961

She received a full Roman Catholic funeral that was held at L'Église de la Madeleine.^{[58][62][63]} The only American-born woman to receive full French military honors at her funeral, Baker's funeral was the occasion of a huge procession. After a family service at Saint-Charles Church in Monte Carlo,^[64] Baker was interred at Monaco's Cimetière de Monaco.^{[60][65][66]}

Legacy

Place Joséphine Baker (48°50′29″N 2°19′26″E﻿ / ﻿48.84139°N 2.32389°E﻿ / 48.84139; 2.32389) in the Montparnasse Quarter of Paris was named in her honor. She has also been inducted into the St. Louis Walk of Fame,^[67] and on 29 March 1995, into the Hall of Famous Missourians.^[68] St. Louis's Channing Avenue was renamed Josephine Baker Boulevard^[69] and a wax sculpture of Baker is on permanent display at The Griot Museum of Black History.

In 2015 she was inducted into the Legacy Walk in Chicago, Illinois, USA.^[70] The Piscine Joséphine Baker is a swimming pool along the banks of the Seine in Paris named after her.^[71]

Writing in the on-line *BBC magazine* in late 2014, Darren Royston, historical dance teacher at RADA credited Baker with being the Beyoncé of her day, and bringing the Charleston to Britain.^[72] Two of Baker's sons, Jean-Claude and Jarry (Jari), grew up to go into business together, running the restaurant Chez Josephine on Theatre Row, 42nd Street, New York City. It celebrates Baker's life and works.^[73]



Baker dancing the Charleston, 1926



Château des Milandes which she rented from 1940 before purchasing in 1947.

Château des Milandes, a castle near Sarlat in the Dordogne, was Baker's home where she raised her twelve children. It is open to the public and displays her stage outfits including her banana skirt (of which there are apparently several). It also displays many family photographs and documents as well as her Legion of Honour medal. Most rooms are open for the public to walk through including bedrooms with the cots where her children slept, a huge kitchen, and a dining room where she often entertained large groups. The bathrooms were designed in art deco style but most rooms retained the French chateau style.

Baker continued to influence celebrities more than a century after her birth. In a 2003 interview with *USA Today*, Angelina Jolie cited Baker as "a model for the multiracial, multinational family she was beginning to create through adoption".^[74] Beyoncé performed Baker's banana dance at the Fashion Rocks concert at Radio City Music Hall in September 2006.^[74]

Writing on the 110th anniversary of her birth, *Vogue* described how her 1926 "danse sauvage" in her famous banana skirt "brilliantly manipulated the white male imagination" and "radically redefined notions of race and gender through style and performance in a way that continues to echo throughout fashion and music today, from Prada to Beyoncé."^[75]

On 3 June 2017, the 111th anniversary of her birth, Google released an animated Google Doodle, which consists of a slideshow chronicling her life and achievements.^[76]

In August 2019, Baker was one of the honorees inducted in the Rainbow Honor Walk, a walk of fame in San Francisco's Castro neighborhood noting LGBTQ people who have "made significant contributions in their fields."^{[77][78][79]}

Portrayals

- Baker appears in her role as a member of the French Resistance in Johannes Mario Simmel's 1960 novel, *Es muss nicht immer Kaviar sein* (*C'est pas toujours du caviar*).^[80]
- A character loosely based on Baker is featured in an episode of *Hogan's Heroes* titled "Is General Hammerschlag Burning?", which originally aired on 18 November 1967. The character Kumasa (played by Barbara McNair) is a chanteuse based in Paris. She later reveals herself to be Carol Dukes, a high-school classmate of Sergeant James Kinchloe (Ivan Dixon), on whom she had a secret crush.
- The Italian-Belgian francophone singer composer Salvatore Adamo pays tribute to Baker with the song "Noël Sur Les Milandes" (album *Petit Bonheur* – EMI 1970).
- Diana Ross portrayed Baker in both her Tony Award-winning Broadway and television show *An Evening with Diana Ross*. When the show was made into an NBC television special entitled *The Big Event: An Evening with Diana Ross*, Ross again portrayed Baker.^[81]
- A German submariner mimics Baker's *Danse banane* in the 1981 film *Das Boot*.^[82]
- In 1986, Helen Gelzer^[83] portrayed Baker on the London stage for a limited run in the musical *Josephine* – "a musical version of the life and times of Josephine Baker" with book, lyrics and music by Michael Wild.^[84] The show was produced by Baker's longtime friend Jack Hockett in conjunction with Premier Box-Office, and the musical director was Paul Maguire. Gelzer also recorded a studio cast album titled *Josephine*.
- British singer-songwriter, Al Stewart wrote song about Josephine Baker. It appears in album "Last days of the century" from 1988.
- In 1991, Baker's life story, *The Josephine Baker Story*, was broadcast on HBO. Lynn Whitfield portrayed Baker, and won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Miniseries or a Special – becoming the first Black actress to win the award in this category.
- Artist Hassan Musa depicted Baker in a 1994 series of paintings called *Who needs Bananas?*^[85]
- In the 1997 animated musical film *Anastasia*, Baker appears with her cheetah during the musical number "Paris Holds the Key (to Your Heart)".^[86]
- In 2002, played by Karine Plantadit in *Frida*.^{[87][88]}
- A character based on Baker (topless, wearing the famous "banana skirt") appears in the opening sequence of the 2003 animated film *The Triplets of Belleville* (*Les Triplettes de Belleville*).^[89]
- The 2004 erotic novel *Scandalous* by British author Angela Champion uses Baker as its heroine and is inspired by Baker's sexual exploits and later adventures in the French Resistance. In the novel, Baker, working with a fictional black Canadian lover named Drummer Thompson, foils a plot by French fascists in 1936 Paris.^[90]
- Her influence upon and assistance with the careers of husband and wife dancers Carmen De Lavallade and Geoffrey Holder are discussed and illustrated in rare footage in the 2005 Linda Atkinson/Nick Doob documentary, *Carmen and Geoffrey*.^{[91][92]}
- Beyoncé has portrayed Baker on various occasions. During the 2006 Fashion Rocks show, Knowles performed "Dejá Vu" in a revised version of the *Danse banane* costume. In Knowles's video for "Naughty Girl", she is seen dancing in a huge champagne glass à La Baker. In *I Am ... Yours: An Intimate Performance at Wynn Las Vegas*, Beyonce lists Baker as an influence of a section of her live show.^[93]
- In 2006, Jérôme Savary produced a musical, *A La Recherche de Josephine – New Orleans for Ever* (Looking for Josephine), starring Nicolle Rochelle. The story revolved around the history of jazz and Baker's career.^{[94][95]}
- In 2010, Keri Hilson portrayed Baker in her single "Pretty Girl Rock".^[96]
- In 2011, Sonia Rolland portrayed Baker in the film *Midnight in Paris*.^{[97][98]}
- Baker was heavily featured in the 2012 book *Josephine's Incredible Shoe & The Blackpearls* by Peggi Eve Anderson-Randolph.^[99]
- In July 2012, Cheryl Howard opened in *The Sensational Josephine Baker*, written and performed by Howard and directed by Ian Streicher at the Beckett Theatre of Theatre Row on 42nd Street in New York City, just a few doors away from Chez Josephine.^{[100][101]}
- In July 2013, Cush Jumbo's debut play *Josephine and I* premiered at the Bush Theatre, London.^[102] It was re-produced in New York City at The Public Theater's Joe's Pub from 27 February to 5 April 2015.^[103]
- In June 2016, *Josephine, a burlesque cabaret dream play* (<http://josephinetheplay.com/>) starring Tymisha Harris as Josephine Baker premiered at the 2016 San Diego Fringe Festival. The show has since played across North America and had a limited off-Broadway run in January–February 2018 at SoHo Playhouse in New York City.^[104]
- In February 2017, Tiffany Daniels portrayed Baker in the *Timeless* television episode "The Lost Generation".
- In late February 2017, a new play about Baker's later years, *The Last Night of Josephine Baker* by playwright Vincent Victoria, opened in Houston, Texas, starring Erica Young.

Film credits

- *Siren of the Tropics* (1927)^[105]
- *The Woman from the Folies Bergères* (1927) short subject
- *Zouzou* (1934)^[30]
- *Princesse Tam Tam* (1935)^[30]
- *Fausse alerte (The French Way)* (1945)^[106]
- *Moulin Rouge* (1941)^[30]
- *An jedem Finger zehn* (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0044352/?ref_=nm_film_act_2) (1954)^[30]
- *Carosello del varietà* (1955)^[30]

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External links

- Josephine Baker at the Casino de Paris, 1931 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86HqDSY9I9A>) at YouTube
- Official website (<http://www.cmgww.com/stars/baker>)
- Les Milandes – Josephine Baker's castle in France (<http://www.milandes.com/>)
- Josephine Baker (<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/p3081>) at AllMusic
- Josephine Baker (<https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/30698>) at the Internet Broadway Database 
- Josephine Baker (<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001927/>) on IMDb (self)
- Josephine Baker (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/6789>) at Find a Grave
- A Josephine Baker photo gallery (<https://web.archive.org/web/20031003102312/http://silent-movies.com/Ladies/PBaker.html>)
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