

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Josephine Baker dancer, performer, activist

“You must go to school... and learn to protect yourself with the pen and not the gun.”



Background Information

Born: June 3, 1906; April 12, 1975

Josephine Baker was born in St. Louis, Missouri. She was a controversial American-French entertainer and performer. Born to former slaves in the Deep South, Baker wanted to get out of her hometown. She moved to NYC and then Paris, France, after facing years of oppression as a Black woman in the US.

Baker rose to stardom in Paris as a singer, actress, and activist. In 1927, she was the first Black person to star in a movie. She even aided the French Resistance during WWII. Baker returned to the US throughout the 1950s and 1960s to protest Jim Crow laws and segregation.¹

Baker's Resistance

Baker was an international celebrity, and she used her fame to make a difference. As a dancer, she refused to perform for segregated audiences in the US. She was also an important leader in the Civil Rights Movement. She worked with the NAACP, and even spoke at the March on Washington alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.. She was the only woman to give a speech at the historic march.

As an openly bisexual woman, she was also influential in early LGBTQ+ movements. Baker fought for justice in every aspect of her life, whether she was dancing or attending a civil rights protest.²

Achievements

Josephine Baker fought for civil rights in the U.S. and France. She used her fame to advocate for others. Baker adopted and raised 12 children of different races, ethnicities, and religions. She referred to her children as “The Rainbow Tribe.” Baker made such an impact on the Civil Rights Movement that she was asked to be the next leader after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated.³

