



# THE LEGACY OF JOSEPHINE BAKER

## A Conversation with Honorable Laurent Gallissot Consul General of France in Miami



Hon. Laurent Gallissot, Consul General of France in Miami, next to Josephine Baker



The Pantheon in Paris

On November 30th 2021, Josephine Baker, will enter the Pantheon, in Paris. In this “Temple des grands hommes” (Temple of great men), she will take her place next to Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Aimé Césaire and Marie Curie. Throughout her life, Josephine Baker challenged conventions and broke down barriers through her style, art and beliefs. A true symbol of the fight for equality and an emblematic figure of the Roaring Twenties, she will be the first Black Women to enter the Pantheon.

The Consulate General of France in Miami with local partners, artists and local leaders are organizing different events to pay tribute to Josephine Baker during the months of October and November.

**Due to these important events, and celebration, Laurent Gallissot, Consul General of France in Miami, sat down for an interview with Christine I. Caly-Sanchez, Associate Director, Miami-Florida Jean Monnet Center of Excellence at FIU, and reflected on the legacy of Josephine Baker and all the events organized in Miami.**

**MFJMCE: Could you please tell us a little bit about Josephine Baker?**

In two words, **Josephine Baker was a trailblazer and a rule breaker!**

In one sentence, she was a fabulous dancer playing with the norms or “codes” of her time to make her own, a wonderful singer with a timeless performances in many languages including French, Spanish, Portuguese and even Yiddish, the first black actress to star as the main character in major motion pictures, a great humanist, a War hero, and a Civil rights fighter.

For those who are eager to learn more about her multifaceted and rich life, the French Consulate has [published articles in English](#) and [French](#) along with videos that can be viewed [here](#).

**MFJMCE: What does Josephine Baker represent to France?**

**Josephine, as the French called her, is a popular icon for many generations: she held high the motto of the French Republic “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”.** For Fraternity, Josephine Baker very often used the term “Brotherhood”, emphasizing that all humans are of “the same blood” and should reach unity.

Since the 20s -when she conquered the Parisians’ hearts almost overnight with her unique, modern style- she is seen in France as an accomplished artist, a muse, and more and more as a true hero thanks to the work that has been done around her legacy as a French Resistant!

We dedicated a webinar in partnership with the World Affairs Council of Miami, on “Joséphine Baker, the Résistant” that you can watch again here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8FJtZXlvWM>

On Nov. 30, 2021, she will be making history again by entering the [Pantheon](#), which is France’s national mausoleum dedicated to great figures in history. **She will be the first Afro-American woman and the first artist of music hall to be inducted in this prestigious monument.**



► For more information on “The Legacy of Josephine Baker”, and events organized in Miami, [click here](#)



# THE LEGACY OF JOSEPHINE BAKER



Josephine Baker at the March on Washington DC in 1963

## MFJMCE: Could you share with us the accomplishments of Josephine Baker?

She has numerous great accomplishments but, above all, she will forever be **THE first black international star!** While in Paris, she rose herself to stardom in an unprecedented short period, conquering European audiences with jazz and Afro-American culture. During her 50-year-career, she never hesitated to reinvent herself. Very early, while she had great success on stage, she embraced the newly-born cinema to rise as **the first black actor to be starred as the main character** in major motion pictures!

In France, then in the United-States, **she used her fame and her talents to support great humanist causes:** giving food and resources to the poor in the 30s, helping war refugees and saving Jews during WWII, raising fund for the Resistance, supporting the French troops and the Allies – mostly with her own money-, influencing foreign leaders to help the General de Gaulle in the process of becoming the future Leader of Free France, and while in the United-States, by supporting the Civil rights activists.

One of the pinnacles of her advocacy for equality – and the most recorded- was at the **March on Washington in 1963, where she addressed the quarter million persons present on the National Mall, just before the famous speech of Martin Luther King Jr.** She gave her speech in her French military uniform, a strong symbol of her fight against discrimination, while stating that it was the “best day of her life” and a day that she waited for so long.



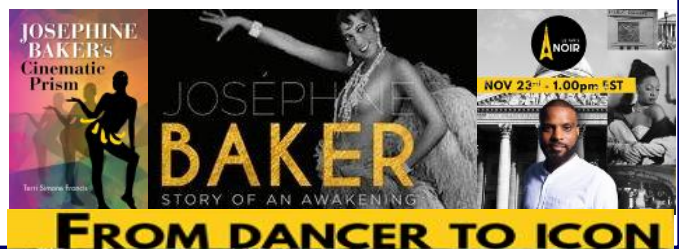
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## MFJMCE: This year, in October and November Miami celebrates Josephine Baker. What are some of the events that have been planned for this occasion?

Considering Josephine Baker’s print in South Florida, The French Consulate with local partners, artists and local leaders put together a series of events called **“Miami celebrates Josephine Baker”** in November around the time of her National recognition in France.

With these happenings, we are trying to highlight her multifaceted career and her incredible life. We first had a discussion at Books and Books (Coral Gables) around her role in cinema thanks to [Terri Francis](#), author of “Josephine Baker’s Cinematic Prism” and then, a webinar focusing on her role during WWII. On November 19, we had [the screening of a documentary](#) “Josephine Baker: Story of an Awakening” by Ilana Navaro, unveiling her tough beginning, her rise to stardom and her struggle to change the world. On November 23, [Kevi Donat, founder of the guided tour “Le Paris Noir”](#), made a presentation of the places where Afro-American artists met in Paris during the last century.

And as a “Grand Finale”, on November 28, there will be a collective tribute by local artists and local leaders at the National Hotel, the Art Deco flagship of Miami Beach, a cultural movement that embraced her and made her a true icon!







# THE LEGACY OF JOSEPHINE BAKER



**Proclamation of Josephine Baker Day on Nov 28 by Mayor Dan Gelber (right) and the City Commission; Consul General of France, Laurent Gallissot (center)**

**MFJMCE: The City of Miami Beach has proclaimed November 28th as Josephine Baker Day. What does this proclamation mean?**

To answer, I will go back to the connection between Josephine Baker and Miami.

When Josephine Baker was invited to perform at the Copa City Club in Miami Beach in January 1951, she convinced the owner to desegregate the audience, which set a precedent for all the venues that she toured in the United-States. The City of Miami Beach’s Proclamation setting November 28, 2021 as “Josephine Baker Day” is a recognition of her courage as a rule-breaker and trailblazer!

The city and the FIU-Wolfsonian Museum will name the Art Deco bridge tender located on Washington avenue “Josephine Baker Pavilion 1951”; a plaque will tell the

story of the concerts of January 1951 for residents and tourists. Last but not least, the Miami Dade County has decided to create a “Josephine Baker Award” that will support a local Black Dance company. For emerging dancers, it is a fabulous gift to perpetuate her unique artistic contribution to popular and modern dance.

**MFJMCE: Do you have any last thoughts you would like to share with us?**

I am amazed to hear that the young generation is inspired by her life. Students and artists particularly are coming back to me to express warmly how her courage has stimulated them to express their own cultural approach and to think about the role of artists in our societies today.

**MFJMCE: “MERCII” Mr. Consul!**

*By Christine I. Caly-Sanchez  
Associate Director, Miami-Florida Jean Monnet Center of Excellence & EESP, FIU*



# THE LEGACY OF JOSEPHINE BAKER

## A Conversation with Hon. Laurent Gallissot Consul General of France in Miami



Proclamation of Josephine Baker Day on Nov 28 by Mayor Dan Gelber (right) and the City Commission, Consul General of France, Laurent Gallissot, (center).

**PROCLAMATION**  
THE CITY OF MIAMI BEACH

**WHEREAS** Josephine Baker was born Freda Josephine McDonald in St. Louis, Missouri in 1906, eventually changing her last name and dropping use of her first name after marriage, and grew up performing on stage in shows with her parents before running away at 13 to perform with an African American theater group where she flourished as a dancer in Vaudeville shows and eventually moved to New York City, where Baker was part of the celebration of black art and life that we know as the Harlem Renaissance before her successes took her to Paris; and,

**WHEREAS** In France Baker was immensely successful, with a signature dancing style and costumes, and performances that followed African themes, before aiding French officials in the fight against the Nazi regime during World War II by passing on secrets she heard while performing, transporting them in invisible ink on music sheets, then later returning to the United States and confronting discrimination by refusing to perform for segregated audience, which forced clubs to integrate for her shows, as was the case at the Miami Beach Copa City Club in 1951, and speaking at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where she said as a black woman she had "walked into the palaces of kings and queens [...] but I could not walk into a hotel in America and get a cup of coffee, and that made me mad."; and,

**WHEREAS** The City of Miami Beach is proud of Josephine Baker's legacy of activism and advocacy against segregation and discrimination, including in our own community, and recognize her as a symbol of the Jazz Age and the Harlem Renaissance, an iconic figure of the Roaring Twenties who transformed music and nightlife around the globe, a fashion trend-setter, a world-renowned performer, a daring World War II spy, adoptive mother to 12 children from various countries, and true legend of history; and,

**WHEREAS** On November 28, 70 years after challenging the segregated audience rule in Miami Beach clubs, Josephine Baker will be honored at the National Hotel Miami Beach, in collaboration with Villa Albertine Program for the Arts between France and the U.S., the Consulate General of France in Miami,

NOW THEREFORE, DO I, as Mayor of the City of Miami Beach, hereby proclaim November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021 as

## JOSEPHINE BAKER DAY



- ▶ For more information on "The Legacy of Josephine Baker", and events organized in Miami, [click here](#)
- ▶ To read Proclamation Josephine Baker Day, [click here](#)



Display of a memorial plaque in front of FIU the Wolfsonian Museum in Miami Beach on Nov. 28, 2021