

From *Josephine, The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker*
Patricia Hruby Powell and Christian Robinson

France Made Me What I Am
1936-1947

But she still needed to
CONQUER AMERICA—
so she sailed home,
across the wide Atlantic.

The very first thing,
she divorced Willie Baker—
ended that long-ago marriage.

Then, ON TO THE SHOW.
She starred in the
ZIEGFELD FOLLIES—
the all-white Follies—
in New York City.
Josephine bubbled with joy.
She became the FIRST and ONLY
Negro *Follies* star. EVER.
Yet she had to enter her hotel
through the servants' entrance.
All the white stars ignored her.

Worst of all,
critics called her a “negro wench...buck-toothed,”
“a dime a dozen.”

She EXPLODED with a SCALDING BLAST.
A *Negro* wench indeed!
But those reviews made her more determined than ever
to fight for her race.

“Life is a series of summits
and behind each crest looms
another peak to be scaled”

Back in France she made the most of her volcanic steam.
To recover from the hurt
she became a stunt pilot,
flew loop-the-loops over the countryside,
met a MILLIONAIRE in MIDAIR,
married him.
But he wanted her to live at home—
she divorced him.

“An artist cannot abandon the stage!”

Europe had come to a hard simmer.
In Germany, Jewish people were beaten,
their houses burned.
In 1939, WAR ERUPTED.
Josephine, remembering her childhood
—the FEAR, HATRED, DESPAIR—
made a decision.

“France has made me what I am...
I am prepared to give my life for France.”

JOSEPHINE joined the Red Cross,
ladled soup for the Parisian poor,
flew first aid to Belgium,
and SPIED FOR FRANCE.

As a star, she traveled everywhere.
In Lisbon, Marseille, Algiers,
at embassy events
She FLIRTED with friend and foe,
eavesdropped on Nazi enemy officials.

Then, safe in her room,
She wrote it all out in INVISIBLE INK
on her sheet music
or pinned her notes in her underwear
and carried them home to France.

“Who would dare
search Josephine Baker
to the skin?”

A little COUGH in Barcelona turned into
PNEUMONIA in Madrid.
Sent on a mission to Casablanca,
EXHAUSTED and still coughing,
she landed in a North African hospital.
Her visitors—Resistance members—
Held secret meetings at her bedside.
Newspapers reported her DEAD.
But she got well.

Well enough to comfort the wounded,
bounce along dirt roads,
get lost in sandstorms,
sleep on the ground like a soldier

with the sand fleas—
all to perform for the U.S. troops.

BLACK soldiers
must sit down FRONT, she said,
together with the white soldiers
in her audience.
Never had she been happier.

Josephine became A HERO.
She helped win the war
for France, the U.S., and their allies.
And she was awarded France's Highest honor,
The Legion d'Honneur.
VIVE LA FRANCE.

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