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2002



Black History

AN AMERICAN STORY

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Recognizing Black History Makers

She dreamed of dancing on Broadway to later become the most celebrated chorus girl

In the field of dance entertainment, can you guess who was black vaudeville's entertainer on two continents in the following personal account?

At the age of fourteen, I quit my job as a domestic worker and entered the black vaudeville circuit. Audiences either liked or hated my crazy antics and frantic dancing. It was a dream of mine to be a chorus girl on

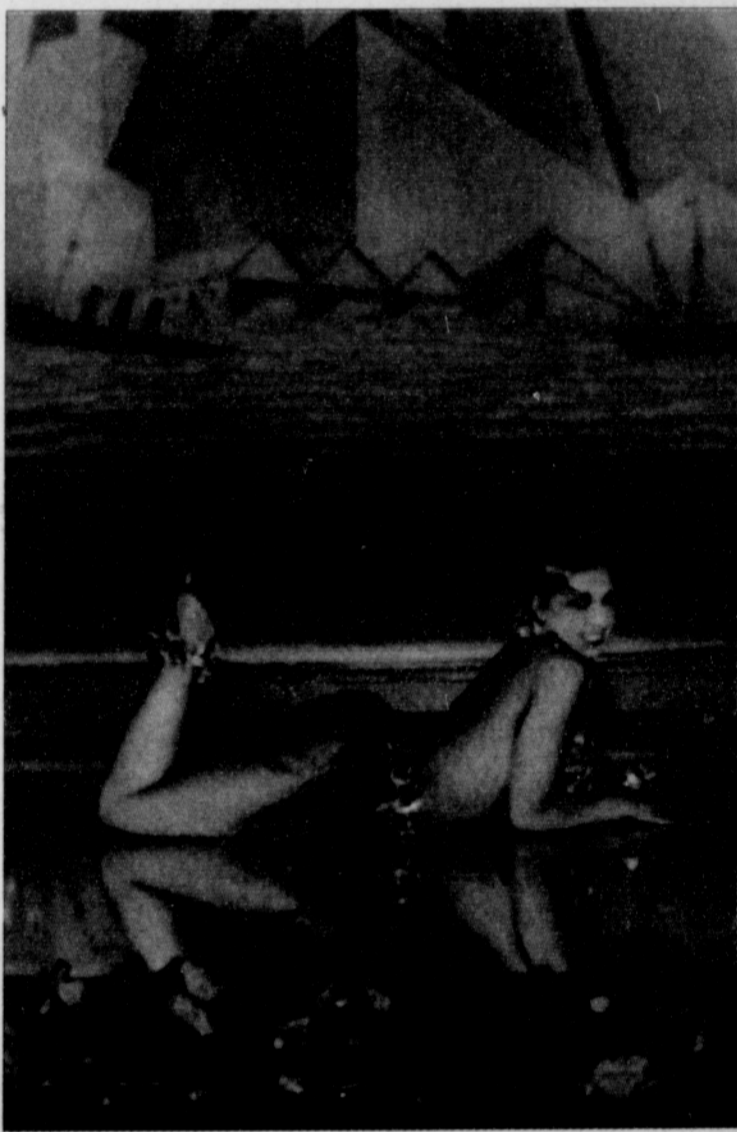
Broadway. Early in my career, I joined a traveling road show and was billed "the highest paid chorus girl in the world." My big break came when a white society woman who wanted to show Parisians "real" Negro music and dance, gave me a ticket to go to Paris and perform. I became an African American expatriate, joining a French troupe as lead dancer, singer and comic.

On opening night at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in 1925, the house was packed. I entered the stage dressed as an animal making strange noises. Before the audience could comprehend what I was, I burst off-stage on all fours, stiff-legged, derrière extended into the air, with my hands spanking the boards as I scuttled into the wings.

I took Paris by storm with my scandalous costumes and dance moves. Many said that I embodied the energy of *le jazz hot* and the elegance of the black Venus.

During the late forties and fifties, I did several tours of the United States and refused to entertain to segregated audiences. Through the early sixties, I gave benefit concerts for American civil rights groups.

In 1975, I had died of a fatal cerebral hemorrhage - fifty years after arriving in Paris. I was one of the few performers who was ever given a state funeral in France.



(1906-1975) Answer: Josephine Baker

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Black History Month was established as a tribute to the many African Americans who have greatly influenced others with their struggle for freedom and equality.

Learn about these brave innovators and test your knowledge of their place in history by guessing the name of the individuals profiled. The answer is blocked out, upside down, for your reference with the photos.