



A TIMELINE OF THE WOMEN
WHO CHANGED AMERICA



May 2025 Her Story ENewsletter American Women - and Paris!

Americans have been intrigued by the allure of Paris, France for centuries. Women profiled in our book are no exception. Painter Mary Cassatt made her mark in the art world in Paris. Josephine Baker found that Paris was more receptive to her in the first half of the twentieth century than her experiences in her home country, at a time when segregation was rife in the United States. Let's learn more about these two intrepid women.



Mary Cassatt (1844-1926) spent much of her adult life in France; she became renowned for her paintings of mothers and children. Born in Pennsylvania in 1844, Cassatt's youth involved travel, learning languages, and being educated abroad. Although her family did not approve of her becoming a professional artist, she was not deterred. She moved to Paris in 1866 with her mother and other chaperones. As the École des Beaux-Arts did not accept women at that time, Cassatt studied privately and got the required permit to copy daily at the Louvre.

In 1868, one of Cassatt's paintings was accepted for a juried art show. After a brief sojourn back to U.S., Cassatt returned to Europe in 1871 and, in 1877, was invited to join the Impressionist salon. Residing in France for the rest of her life, Cassatt focused on painting and, from 1914 on became a suffrage supporter. She and her paintings have been featured on U.S. postage stamps, and she has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.



In 1925, African American dancer and entertainer **Josephine Baker** (1906-1975) accepted an offer to appear in a show in Paris. This invitation allowed Baker to flee from the segregation in the U.S. In France, she rose to stardom amidst a French appreciation for African American culture and jazz. She became famous for her banana-skirt dance routines. In 1938, Baker joined a prominent antiracist league, and in 1939 she began working for France's counterintelligence services, gathering information from German officials whom she met at parties. She used her performances as cover for her spying activities during World War II, when she was active in the French Resistance.

In 2021, Baker became the first American-born citizen, the first Black woman, the first performer, and the sixth woman to be immortalized in the Pantheon in Paris, one of the country's rarest honors. She was praised for her world-renowned artistic career, her active role in the French resistance during World War II, her work as a civil rights activist, and her humanist values – which she demonstrated through her adoption of twelve children from all over the world.

Mary Cassatt and Josephine Baker are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Continue to help us tell women's stories!

Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen

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