

DEDICATION SPEECH: JOSEPHINE BAKER PORTRAIT UNVEILING

PARIS, FRANCE ON OCT 9, 2024

***BY LOREN R. DOUGLASS
NATIONAL PRESIDENT
SIGMA PI PHI FRATERNITY, INC.***

Greetings

Greetings to all official guests and friends. We are delighted that you came to witness this joyous occasion with us. On behalf of the Boulé, I'd like to greet most warmly Ms. Baker's family. We honor your proud legacy with great appreciation and gratitude. Your mom was one of Americas finest examples of excellence and heroism.

Thank you, **Ambassador Bauer**, for your gracious hospitality. After missing you on our visit, last year, I am delighted that we made it work, this year. This is a very proud moment for us, and your presence makes all the difference.

The Occasion

Tonight, we gather to honor the extraordinary **Josephine Baker**—a beacon of **perseverance**, **heroism**, and **unwavering dedication to freedom**. Her profound dedication to activism accompanied her extraordinary artistry, making her a staunch defender of liberty and democracy. Our gift to this esteemed residence is also a tribute to the French people, to whom we as Americans owe an enduring debt of gratitude. Were it not for French financial and military support, the American struggle for independence might have failed. It is sobering to recall that the immense sacrifice of the French, helped secure American freedom from the British Crown. The financial strain of that support is said to have helped ignite the French Revolution.

Josephine Baker holds a unique place in our shared history. She was a symbol of joy, style, and courage. She was also a relentless champion of **liberation, activism, and equality**. Her life bridged the ideals of freedom that laid the foundation for American democracy. **Ironically**, just as Benjamin Franklin and Voltaire, two thinkers whose masonic bond shaped the ideals of American liberty, Ms. Baker came to France seeking refuge from the painful discrimination of Jim Crow America. **In her**, we see a long legacy of Black Americans who, despite being marginalized at home, became passionate defenders of the intellectual

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heritage we inherited from French Enlightenment thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire.

It is with deep pride and conviction that, on behalf of the **men of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity**, I present this gift to the **U.S. State Department** and to **the French people**. **The Boulé**, with our 120-year pursuit for equality, stands here today as a testament to our shared reverence for justice and freedom.

In the words of the **Grand Orient of France**, in its masonic tradition.... and the ideals of ***Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité***, we offer this symbol of peace, liberty, and unity. In celebrating the legacy of Josephine Baker, we honor not only her artistry and heroism, but all that she stood for.....the relentless pursuit of justice, freedom, and equality for all.

It is in that spirit we present to you our gift..... *remove covering to unveil the portrait*