

Good News and Truth



Josephine Baker

On October 14, 2021, a woman was acquitted in indictment by the Senate and People of Rome v. Boudica by a jury of 10-1 in the British Supreme Court of committing terrorist acts. She was tried under the Terrorism Act of 2000. The Court rejected the charge that her actions were designed to influence the government of Rome and to advance a political or ideological cause, namely dissidence and secession. She was justified in using self-defense against a "a rotten and illegitimate Roman government." The Court said she was free to leave without any stain on character, and that she would remain as a national symbol of an inspirational heroine.

The Celtic warrior Queen Boudica had long left the courtroom. After the death of her husband who had been a "client king" of the Romans who had invaded the country in 43 AD, Boudica led the Iceni tribe in what is now East Anglia against the Roman occupiers, 60-61. She destroyed several towns, Colchester, London, Verulamium (near St. Albans) and massacred more than 80,000 Romans and pro-Roman Britons before

ultimately being defeated by Roman general Paulinus. She died either by taking poison or from illness.

As the Court said, Boudica is a national symbol of an inspirational heroine, a priestess as well as a warrior, one of the great women warriors of history such Cleopatra, Joan of Arc, Greek Amazons, and Queen Elizabeth I. Paradoxically, Boudica and her daughters are on display in a statue at the Thames Embankment in Central London, while general Paulinus stands at the entrance to the Roman baths in Bath, Somerset.

Another extraordinary, though physically non-violent, woman is currently being honored in Paris. This is the star of stage, screen, and song, Resistance fighter, and spy, Josephine Baker.

Fifty years after her death this American born icon has become the first Black woman to be placed in the Pantheon, the mausoleum for great men. At the Pantheon an inscription reads

“To great men from a grateful nation.” It is particularly symbolic at this moment when xenophobia is increasing in France that a Black woman is being honored. President Emmanuel Macron on August 21, 2021, after a petition signed by 37,000 people had been presented, announced that Baker, the first Black woman and only the sixth woman over all, would be inducted in the Pantheon. The reason given is that she is an exceptional figure who embraced France and its values in the name of her lifelong struggle for freedom and emancipation. She was inducted into the Pantheon on November 30, the anniversary of her naturalization as a French citizen. Her plaque will contain soil from St. Louis, her birthplace, from her chateau at Milandes, and from Monaco her final home.

Her life and career were truly extraordinary., one that subverted racial and sexual stereotypes. Born in poverty in St. Louis in June 1906, the daughter of a washerwoman and a

part time drummer, by 1921 she had two husbands and then moved to New York where she worked as a dancer in revues. In 1925 she left for Paris where she was an immediate success, where she was feted, pampered and loved as a result of her frenetic dances in feather skirt, her version of the Charleston, her "danse sauvage," and banana tutu. She became the darling of the French artistic and intellectual elite. Her song in 1931. *J'ai deux amours*, "I have two loves, my country and Paris, by them always is my heart ravished," was an international hit.

During World War II, she worked for the Resistance, in counterintelligence, smuggling documents and coded messages between music sheets, raising funds for the forces, and entertaining allied troops in North Africa and the Middle east., and joined the air force,

After the war, she returned to the US for a short time and joined the civil rights movement and refused to perform for segregated audiences. She was asked to replace Martin Luther King as leader of civil rights after his death, but she refused. Back in France, she adopted a Rainbow Tribe of children, 12 orphans, from different countries, a universal mother.

Baker died in 1975, aged 68. At her funeral. She was given a 21 gun salute, the first U.S. woman to receive such full French military honors. Her career, uneven but always spell binding straddled continents and epochs. She was a significant a Black figure.

It is good news that on the 80th anniversary of the massacre in Babi Yar, Ukraine, a group of researchers have revealed for the first time the names of many perpetrators of the atrocities and some of their testimonies. Nazi soldiers, SS personnel, policemen, and their collaborators murdered thousands of Jews at the Babi Yar ravine outside Kiev. Though the massacre was one of the largest mass killings at a single

location during World War II, the site and the event were largely ignored for decades. On September 29 and 30, 1941 the massacre of 33,771 Jews took place under Einsatzgruppe C. Killings there continued until the fall of 1943. Altogether 100,000 Jews and non-Jews were murdered there.

The Germans tried to cover up their crimes. However, some who were complicit in the massacre were tried in January 1946, but only a few were convicted or punished. Some were acquitted because of lack of "base motive" for their actions. At first, there was virtual silence on the massacre. There was no memorial of the events until 1976 when the Soviet Union erected one which spoke of the deaths of civilians without indicating that most of the victims were Jews. On the 50th anniversary, September 29, 1991, a menorah-shaped monument to Jews was set up.

Now the Babi Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, assisted by Father Patrick Desbois, a French Roman Catholic priest, has started to identify those who participated or were complicit in the massacre. Their action indicated an important truth concerning all those involved in the Holocaust, that anyone who was involved in any way, directly or indirectly, should be considered responsible and judged accordingly. Details revealed so far of the perpetrators and accomplices at Babi Yar portray a varied group of people, educated and uneducated, teachers, engineers, businessmen, criminals, thugs, who were never convicted.

It is very good news that they and their reputations get the attention and possible belated punishment they deserve. The truth will out.