



A HISTORY® CHANNEL ORIGINAL

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**HARLEM**  
**HELLFIGHTERS**

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HISTORY.

### Video Resource:

This documentary introduces students to the accomplishments and legacy of the Harlem Hellfighters. This guide offers ways to incorporate the documentary and discussions of the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment into classroom

activities and discussions related to World War I and 20<sup>th</sup>-century U.S. history. The documentary is appropriate for upper middle school and high school students.

### Terms to Define:

Before or after watching the documentary, ask students to define the terms below to build context for understanding the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

Citizenship  
Ethereal  
Infantry  
Jim Crow  
Mustered

Paradox  
Prejudice  
Reinforcements  
Valor

## 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment: Brief Timeline

Ask students to review the timeline below. They can also add additional key dates to the timeline as they research the Harlem Hellfighters and World War I.

- **June 2 1913** - Parent unit constituted in the New York National Guard as of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (colored).
- **June 29, 1916** - 15<sup>th</sup> New York National Guard in New York City is organized.
- **July 25, 1917** - The 15<sup>th</sup> mustered into federal service at Camp Whitman, New York where they undergo training in basic military practices, and is drafted into Federal service August 5, 1917.
- **October 8, 1917** - The 15<sup>th</sup> travels to Camp Wadsworth, South Carolina where they receive combat training.
- **December 1917** - The 15<sup>th</sup> commanded by Col. William Hayward, embarks from New York to France.
- **March 1, 1918** - Reorganized and redesignated as the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry
- **March 14, 1918** - The 369<sup>th</sup> is assigned to the French Army.
- **March 1918 - December 1918** - The 369<sup>th</sup> serves with the French 16<sup>th</sup> Division and the French 161<sup>st</sup> Division.
- **May 1918** - Private Henry Johnson and Private Neadom Roberts fight off a German patrol unit near Saint Menehoul, France. Both are severely wounded.
- **July 1918 - December 1918** - The regiment fought at the Second Battle of the Marne and at Meuse-Argonne. They captured the village of Sechault.
- **December 1918** - Over 170 members of the 369<sup>th</sup> awarded with the Croix de Guerre.
- **February 1919** - The 369<sup>th</sup> returns to New York and to the New York Army National Guard. The unit leads a parade in New York City in which World War I soldiers are honored.
- **June 2015** - Henry Johnson receives a Medal of Honor for his valor while serving with the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.



Photo and caption courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration



SERGEANT HENRY JOHNSON OF ALBANY, N. Y., THE OUTSTANDING HERO. Single-handed he routed 24 Huns, killing 4 of them and wounding the remainder. When the ammunition ran out he used a bolo knife. SERGEANT JOHNSON, OF THE 369th Central Postal Directory (old 15th of N. Y.), was the first man in his regiment to win the French War Cross.

## Discussion Questions:

1. Why was the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment assigned to serve with the French Army during World War I?
2. What were some of the obstacles the members of the 369<sup>th</sup> faced, both in the United States and once they were fighting in Europe?
3. Who is Henry Johnson, and what contributes to the lasting remembrance of his legacy today?
4. Why might the soldiers of the 369<sup>th</sup> consider the objective of democracy significant, and what motivations could have led the members of the 369<sup>th</sup> to participate in World War I?
5. Why do you think the accomplishments of the 369<sup>th</sup> were not fully acknowledged during World War I? What are some of the ways they have been honored today?
6. Why do you think we should remember the service of the 369<sup>th</sup>?



Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration  
<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/369th-infantry/>



## Did You Know?

- Approximately 380,000 African Americans served in the U.S. armed forces during World War I.
- Nearly 200,000 African Americans who served during World War I played roles in Europe as support troops and over 40,000 served in combat.
- Many members of the 369<sup>th</sup> were from Harlem, New York; the nickname “Hellfighters” is said to have been coined by German troops, or more likely, the American press.
- When they returned from the war in February 1919, over one million people lined the streets of New York City’s Fifth Avenue. The 369<sup>th</sup> marched first in the parade, led by legendary bandleader James Reese Europe.
- The 369<sup>th</sup> was one of the few units to have black officers in addition to black soldiers.

## Activities:

### 1. The 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment: Explorations

**Students can choose one soldier who fought with the 369<sup>th</sup> who served during World War I to research. (Examples might include James Reese Europe and Henry Johnson.) Students can research one Harlem Hellfighter and create a one-sheet with bullet points about their life or a short visual presentation.**

### 2. The 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment: Legacy

**After watching the documentary and doing their own research, ask students to write a short op-ed or article about the legacy of the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. What was their contribution to U.S. history, and why should they be remembered today?**

### 3. Henry Johnson:

**In 2015, Henry Johnson was awarded the Medal of Honor for his service in World War I. After researching Johnson’s story and watching the video, ask students to create a short biography, PowerPoint presentation, article or short story about Johnson’s service and accomplishments. (Students can share these stories with younger grades or fellow students.)**

### 4. The Harlem Hellfighters: Photo Analysis

**Students can visit the National Archives’ website to view images of the 369<sup>th</sup>, and educators can find tools to help students analyze these photographs. Visit this page at: [www.archives.gov/education/lessons/369th-infantry](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/369th-infantry) to find these photos and resources.**

**Websites:**

More background information and short videos about World War I:  
[www.History.com/wwi](http://www.History.com/wwi)

The United States World War I Centennial Commission:  
[www.worldwar-1centennial.org](http://www.worldwar-1centennial.org)

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture: African Americans and World War I: <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-world-war-i.html>

**Books:**

Brooks, Max (Author) and Canaan White (Illustrator). *The Harlem Hellfighters*. (Broadway Books, 2014).

Myers, Walter Dean and Bill Miles. *The Harlem Hellfighters: When Pride Met Courage*. (Amistad, 2005). (For Readers Ages 8-12).

Sammons, Jeffrey T. and John H. Morrow, Jr. *Harlem's Rattlers and the Great War: The Undaunted 369th Regiment and the African American Quest for Equality*. (University Press of Kansas, 2014).

