

## Title: Photographs of the 369th Infantry and African Americans during World War I



### Context:

In April 1917 the United States declared war on Germany. Americans started to send some regiments to help French, Italians, English soldiers. Between these regiments there was the Harlem Hellfighters' battalion or 369th regiment. It was all-black under the command of white officers, like Colonel William Hayward. These troops were originally from New York and despite segregation these men fought for democracy in the world. Americans thought about equality in other countries but not in their own. That is at least the opinion of some men like Philip Randolph, who thought that social equality was impossible despite the participation of black men in the Great War. Instead W.E.B. DuBois, another major black personality, thought that the war could have been an opportunity for African-Americans, who would thus gain their rightful importance and recognition in the country's functions. Through newspapers's headlines regiment have gained much fame in Europe and in America, in particular Corporal Henry Johnson and Private Needham Roberts.

One hundred and seventy-one of them won a medal and later they received a Croix de Guerre. Even if the regiment was not allowed to participate in the parade of New York's National Guard, colonel Hayward tried to create a parade for his men. World war 1 changed the lives of Americans. There was the Great Migration; million of African-Americans migrated from the rural south to the industrial north and so the black culture officially entered the American tradition.

In this particular picture we can see part of the Harlem Hellfighters posing for a war photographer whose name is unknown. The main aim of this picture was probably, as previously anticipated, to spread the fame of these brave soldiers. In my opinion, the fact that they are black means that the photographer was probably involved in some kind of social activity and therefore was trying to show that every man in America could serve his country regardless of the color of the skin.

National Archives

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