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# The Harlem Hellfighters



## Synopsis

From bestselling author Max Brooks, the riveting story of the highly decorated, barrier-breaking, historic black regiment—the Harlem Hellfighters. In 1919, the 369th infantry regiment marched home triumphantly from World War I. They had spent more time in combat than any other American unit, never losing a foot of ground to the enemy, or a man to capture, and winning countless decorations. Though they returned as heroes, this African American unit faced tremendous discrimination, even from their own government. The Harlem Hellfighters, as the Germans called them, fought courageously on—and off—the battlefield to make Europe, and America, safe for democracy. In **THE HARLEM HELLFIGHTERS**, bestselling author Max Brooks and acclaimed illustrator Caanan White bring this history to life. From the enlistment lines in Harlem to the training camp at Spartanburg, South Carolina, to the trenches in France, they tell the heroic story of the 369th in an action-packed and powerful tale of honor and heart.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

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## Customer Reviews

Like a lot of people, I am really looking forward to a day when we can stop referring to important parts of American history as "Black" history and simply recognize that it is all "American" history. And while I'm not holding my breath, I hope that day is soon so that a book as wonderful as *The Harlem Hellfighters* will be read by a wide and all-inclusive audience. The book is wonderful fictionalization of an important event and people that is generally relegated to an afterthought or

footnote. In that sense alone, this is an important work. That being said, and out of the way, it is also a terrific work of historical fiction where the words and pictures work together to create a seamless and moving whole. I have never previously read any of Brooks' work, though it has been recommended to me from time to time, but if this is any indication, I will likely be reading more in the future. This story is well-paced, involving - wrenching in many places - and his main characters live and breathe and never fall into stock ciphers or cardboard cutouts. Which is also a reflection of the art here. The action sequences are suitably chaotic without ever becoming confusing, and the quieter moments are illuminating, as well. The details are telling and apt (a well-placed wink plays an important part in a character's development, for example) and the grim mood never becomes morose or bathetic. I am very glad that I read a review of this (in a different forum) that pointed me to this worthy book. I hope that this review, as well as the other fine and more detailed reviews here, pique others to pick this up and be transported into an important chapter of American history. Highly recommended.

This is an exceptionally well-done book that details the story of the 369th infantry regiment's involvement in the First World War. The truly shameful aspects of Jim Crow America and the dignity of these men who still fought for it are the focuses of this graphic history. This is a book that should be, but due to Common Core Social Studies blather that destroys any emphasis on cultural literacy won't be, a part of every Modern American History class. Students interested in learning more about the First World War through graphic novels should look to Pat Mills' *Charley's War* (Vol. 1): 2 June - 1 August 1916 or Jacques Tardi's *It Was the War of the Trenches*. (For those interested in a specific Military History focus, the book does a good job with the First World War in general but probably needs a supplementary text on the nitty-gritty of French-loaned equipment of and battles fought within by the 369th to fill that need. (This seems like an ideal title for the Osprey Elite series but sadly such a Harlem Hellfighters volume does not exist.)

I read an article about this in *Entertainment Weekly* and had just finished reading another book about World War 1 (*Sergeant Stubby*) which had whetted my appetite to find out more. Canaan White's illustrations are FANTASTIC. Each character is clearly identifiable, the inked black and white pages are both moving and able to capture movement. Some of the best art I've personally encountered in a graphic novel in quite some time. As to the narrative itself, Edge is the main character (he is fictional, but named after someone Brooks knew in real life). Edge like many soldiers before him is eager to get to the front lines and prove himself in battle. However, he and the

rest of his battalion learn that this isn't that kind of war. Through Edge's eyes and experience Brooks takes his readers on a tour of both World War 1 trench warfare but also the experiences specific to the Harlem Hellfighters ( a name given to them by the German troops, they had others too). Like many groups that continue to face adversity their most triumphant moments in history are often swept under the carpet of general knowledge. Brooks learned of this group of soldier via an enthusiastic college student that worked for his parents when he was younger. He carried this story with him through his whole childhood and and education and into adult hood. He tried at first to get it made into a film (and we can see where that is going to happen now, no doubt) and was told there would be no public interest in such a venture. Edge himself is a fairly straightforward character, since he is mostly serving as a POV for the audience. There are other characters that he encounters in his story that have more flare to them. They are both fictional as well as non-fictional. We meet, for example, one of Jazz's most influential early members, James Europe. What this book is great for is giving its reader a snapshot of something all Americans should have been learning about since it happened. It is a really quick read and you finish it feeling like you know a bit more about the world you live in. Because it is so quick and also has to pack in fact after fact it doesn't allow much room for character depth--everyone we meet is a pretty quick sketch. What we essentially get is a tour of Harlem Hellfighter life. It isn't a character driven piece (which hopefully whenever they do develop it into a movie, they will add more character depth, its potential is there). With all of the facts that Brooks has packed in a reader runs the risk over being overwhelmed, he luckily has set the narrative a such a pace that that really doesn't happen. It is definitely worth reading and I wouldn't be surprised to see it earning a place along side Maus in terms of the educational importance of graphic novels.

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