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### Living the United Way is the Only Way

“We weren’t asked to march with the Rainbow Division because; as we were told... ‘Black is not a color of the rainbow.’”

(When the NY National Guardsmen, ‘Rainbow Division’ excluded the 369th regiment from the grand parade), The Harlem Hellfighters, Max Brooks.

This was the sendoff by the United States Government in 1917 when the 369th National Guard regiment, composed of African-Americans, from Harlem left New York for Europe to fight the Germans in the First World War. These brave, unsung heroes who were treated with little dignity by their own government were being sent overseas to fight, ironically, for a democracy that wasn’t available to them. For isn’t democracy about being treated equally and fairly?

And yet, when the 369th regiment fought with so much courage, that their enemy nicknamed them ‘The Harlem Hellfighters’, the American government still did not acknowledge their contribution. The French government awarded Pvt. Johnson of the 369th regiment the Croix de Guerre, their highest honor to an American for his valor while the American government sent a memo asking that, “... French military personnel shall not eat with, or shake hands with, or visit or converse with Negro troops except as required by military matters. Negro troops should not be overly praised especially in the presence of white Americans, regardless of rank.” It took seventy-five years for the American government to recognize the achievements of the 369th regiment and award the Harlem Hellfighters the medals of Honor, posthumously.

Today, almost a century later, we have our first African-American President. I am fortunate to live in these times because people like the Harlem Hellfighters, Martin Luther King, Jr, Rosa Parks, Cesar Chavez, and countless others worked hard to ensure everyone is accepted and treated equally. Our world is not perfect but I believe America continues to work hard to ensure we are truly a free society without prejudice. My generation does not have the burden of past generations’ prejudices. We have learned much from history: the forced conversions in the name of religion, the persecution of the Jews, slavery, and discrimination due to race, religion, or personal preferences. We also need people like Max Brooks to highlight achievements of Americans like Pvt. Johnson.

How can we live in unity? If each of us practiced what Anne Frank said, “How wonderful that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world,” then I believe we would truly achieve unity. Without unity, we are just drifting in and out of conflict, prejudice, and hateful behavior. Nothing gets accomplished and nobody moves forward. This afternoon, I reiterated my pledge as an Eagle Scout at a Boy Scout Court of Honor, “...and for better citizenship with my troop, in my community, and in my contact with other people regardless of race, color, or creed. To this I pledge my sacred honor.” We are the same species; we have the same origins.

We must strive to, indeed, live united.

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## Unity for All

Living united is where people come together, accepting the differences of others. It is something that creates trust and is fought over. As commonly known, everything valuable comes with a price, thus making unity “expensive”. Unfortunately, greed is something that adds some “tax”.

If people wish to achieve unity, it is important that they acknowledge others and themselves fairly. People could live united if everyone followed such concepts. The graphic novel, *The Harlem Hellfighters* by Max Brooks, clearly illustrates racial dissension. This historical fiction piece is about the “Harlem Hellfighters,” exquisite Negro soldiers of World War I, and the horrific troubles of discrimination.

People need to realize that racism was not meant to be; it is something taught, not inborn. When I was younger, I remember asking my mother, “Are my eyes small?” I’d never noticed my Asian difference to Americans until then. In *The Harlem Hellfighters*, it is displayed that people's egos have huge impacts on opinions, “They would rather lose this war than see us help win it! They would rather see white Germans instead of black Americans march in triumph up Fifth Avenue.” This shows that even if they don't know anything about another person, people would immediately discriminate. But there are also the other types of people in this world who open up to total strangers. In Florida, a young boy with autism held a birthday party and no one attended. His mother posted how upset she was on Facebook and soon hundreds of kind strangers appeared.

Indeed there are many factors like similarities that bring people together, but unity requires more than just handpicked friends. What everyone needs to realize is that “a \$20 bill, crumpled and dirty is still worth \$20.” The assumption that unique people don't belong cannot be demolished, but people can be changed. It's a harsh reality to face that world peace can never exist, but wars don't solve anything. One can't change a person's heart without connecting with them. In about a 400 year long time span, slave rates have shrunk down immensely. This is because strong people like Martin Luther King Jr. decided to stand up for what is right that the world is able to continue to grow. It wasn't the power of war.

*The Harlem Hellfighters* could barely survive in their hell, but in the end they proved to be successful. Despite being mistreated, they fought on, inspiring new people every day. Imagine being a black soldier during World War. It would have been hellish. Now, in 2015, being a black man fighting in the American military would seem somewhat pleasant. There are many biased opinions in this world, and if people wish to live united, they need to look into other people's hearts and need to learn how to open their hearts to be patient with developing hearts still in progress.

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### Living United

Living united means working together to achieve a common goal. When we live united, we think not just about our own personal needs, but the welfare of others. The United Way's goal is, "To improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of our community." We can make contributions to our community by volunteering to help in areas of need. Although it can be challenging to put aside our own desires, we all benefit when we work together to help others.

A historical example of "living united" is illustrated in *The Harlem Hellfighters*, a graphic novel by Max Brooks. The "Harlem Hellfighters" was a group of African American soldiers who fought together, under horrible circumstances, in order to make the world better for everyone. During World War One, these soldiers fought for their country even though they were not given equal rights during that time. Few African Americans were allowed to be in the army. Those that were, were in segregated, all black regiments.

African Americans were not allowed to be officers. The "Harlem Hellfighters" were the first all black unit that played a big role in changing the way American's thought about the African American Soldiers. They fought for 191 days, never lost a member of their unit, and became one of the most decorated regiments in the entire American force. Despite the prejudice they experienced, they were determined to work together and succeed in making a positive impact on the world.

My great-grandfather was in the British Army during World War One, and my grandfather was in the Royal Canadian Air Force in World War Two. I have heard stories about their experiences and the sacrifices they made during those wars. They left their homes and family, and they lost friends who sacrificed their lives for others. Because of them, and others like them, I live in a country where people have freedom and equal rights.

Throughout the history of the United States, groups of people have made great sacrifices in order to improve the lives of others. Since World War One, gains have been made in the area of civil rights, due to sacrifices of people like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. We have seen improvements in providing services for people in need. Members of the United Way volunteer many hours of their time in order to provide needed resources to members of their communities. The Harlem Hellfighters, and other members of the military, have been willing to give their lives in order to improve the welfare of others. This is important because, in order to make positive changes, we must put aside our own ambitions, and think about others. The Harlem Hellfighters wondered if their sacrifice was all for nothing, and decided, "Only if we're forgotten." Living united means that we remember and appreciate the hard work of others and do our part to continue this work.

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### Live United

“u·nit·ed, adjective 1. joined together for a common purpose, or by common feelings.” This word is simple, but to live united is a greater challenge. Max Brooks’ graphic novel, *The Harlem Hellfighters*, shows how the courageous 369th Regiment made an impact on the world, and to “live united”, according to United Way, means to “choose to improve your community by giving of yourself to make an impact,”. This can be challenging in many ways. It seems like the easiest way to live is to only “look out for number one”, and it probably is, but that is definitely not the best way to live. When you only take care of yourself, you lead a very boring life, as no one wants to be around a narcissist. This is shown by Ebenezer Scrooge in “*A Christmas Carol*”, when Dickens writes, “Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, 'My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?'

No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o'clock no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge.” This shows that Scrooge’s antisocial personality pushes everyone away. This is not, in any sense of the word, united. Scrooge could do so much good for his community, but instead, he shuts himself in.

True united living, as shown in *The Harlem Hellfighters*, is hard to come by.

“In December 1917, when Colonel Hayward's men had departed from New York City, they had not been permitted to participate in the farewell parade of New York's National Guard, the so-called Rainbow division. The reason Hayward was given was that “black is not a color in the Rainbow.” (*Hellfighters*, 63). These valiant troops weren't treated as good as their white counterparts (in fact, they were treated horribly), but they still fought on, as shown here, “The 369th Infantry helped to repel the German offensive and to launch a counteroffensive. General John J. Pershing assigned the 369th to the 16th Division of the French Army. With the French, the Harlem Hellfighters fought at Chateau-Thierry and Belleau Wood. All told they spent 191 days in combat, longer than any other American unit in the war. ‘My men never retire, they go forward or they die,’ said Colonel Hayward. Indeed, the 369th was the first Allied unit to reach the Rhine.” (National Archives) These men gave of themselves to improve the community (in this case, the world), even though their lives were at risk.

Ebenezer Scrooge and the Harlem Hellfighters paint two very opposite pictures. Scrooge was a selfish shut in, while the 369th Regiment selflessly gave of themselves to defend our freedom. These opposites show us a middle ground, where we can truly live united.