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Jake Kiesow – 6th Grade, Wilson Middle School African-American Observance Ceremony Essay

During the time of the two World Wars the United States still hadn't given equal rights to African Americans, who by then still had limited access to transit, were told to use separate designated bathrooms, and who were discouraged from voting, and sometimes even threatened. The reality was that many in the wider community simply looked down on blacks. This mistreatment, however, did not stop African Americans from fighting bravely in World War I and World War II, as African-American squadrons joined in the fight for their country.

The Harlem Hellfighters (United States 369th Infantry), who in World War I fought under the French, were the first majority African-American regiment — and one who had as much or more combat time than any other American unit. The Hellfighters' commander James Reez even became famous for introducing jazz to the British, French and other audiences while in Europe. The Hellfighters would go on to fight the Germans on the western front and continue to fight for the United States to liberate France and its allies.

Only 20 years after World War I, World War II had begun which meant more bloodshed. World War II introduced more advanced vehicles and aircraft than had World War I, and African-American units would again rise to the challenge. One example of African Americans serving in World War II was the Tuskegee Airmen (332nd Fighter Group and 477th Bombardment Group of the United States Army Air Forces). The Tuskegee Airmen served the United States overseas in the Mediterranean theater, becoming an all-black fighter group by 1944. The Airmen were one of the most successful groups in United States fighter and bomber operations, with more than 80 pilots receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross.

All in all, the Harlem Hellfighters and the Tuskegee Airmen represent very important parts in our history. They overcame hate, showed the world that the color of your skin does not matter and fought hard, no matter the circumstances.