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The work I chose is *The Harlem Hellfighters* written by Max Brooks and illustrated by Caanan White. I chose this because it was one of the first graphic novels I ever read. I didn’t read comics much as a kid as comics had passed into other mediums, I had some old *Star Wars*, *G.I. Joe*, *Transformers*, and superhero comics but that was about it. When it came to comics, I mostly interacted with them in how their popularity had allowed them to transcend comics, watching cartoons or movies based on comic books and such.

I like this book because it is a visceral, realistic depiction of the First World War and of race relations in America in the early 1900s. This was a time largely disregarded in the history of civil rights, with periods like reconstruction when black Americans, in some cases, flourished and widely served in state governments and the fifties and sixties where activists like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X lead to huge success in civil rights. However, it is still influential. The First Great Migration of black Americans north into factories from southern farms began at this time. Critically to the story as well, *The Birth of A Nation* was released in the spring of 1915. Just like how with women entering the workforce during WWI helped charge the feminist movement and lead eventually to the 19th amendment, the service of the 369th infantry regiment and other black soldiers in WWI helped to charge the civil rights movement going forward. It is a compelling story of courage to fight not just against the enemy abroad, but the enemy at home.

The writer of this book is Max Brooks, one of my favorite authors. His name on the cover is one of the factors that originally motivated me to read this. Max Brooks most famously writes zombie horror, his most well-known works being *World War Z* and *The Zombie Survival Guide*, he also wrote a novel set within the game *Minecraft* from a first-person view called *Minecraft: The Island*. Caanan White, a famous African-American comic artist, is the illustrator, on the back of the book it says he is the artist for the WWII comic series *Über*, and when I looked him up it also said he illustrated the book *Son Of Shaolin*. As these are his only major works, I can’t tell if Caanan White has a particular Genre he’s associated with.

*The Harlem Hellfighters* has been highly praised. On the back of the book, I found this quote that I think is the most important of all the praise: “Informed by judicious historical research and vividly illustrated storytelling, this book itself is an historical ‘first,’ and is a major contribution to our understanding of Black History” - Henry Louis Gates, Jr., The Alphonse Fletcher University Professor, Harvard University (Brooks, the back). The illustrations too have been praised, the Washington Post review stated, “White’s grid work is forever shifting, as his overlapping panels shuffle like snapshots fallen from a scrapbook, and his full “splash” pages are so visually engaging that the greedy reader wishes he’d provided yet more of them” (Cavna). The violent images aren’t just gore for the sake of gore like we sometimes see, they instead serve to drive home the point of the hellish nature of The First World War, and how much these black soldiers fought through on the front, but how it still couldn’t compare to the mental hell of knowing that even though they fought so well through some of the worst of the war, they still would have to keep fighting another war at home. The books narrator says it himself: “In 1917 we left our home to make the world ‘safe for democracy’, even though democracy wasn’t exactly ‘safe’ back home” (Brooks, 221-222). I think this work is influential because, as it is a comic book, it is a much more approachable way to teach people about the story of the 369th. I know if I was in middle or high school, I’d much rather read this than *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Brooks states, not many people even know about the story of these men, when he was in college, his African-American professor of Virgin Islands history, who railed against the whites burying black history, didn’t know about the Harlem Hellfighters (Brooks, 240). I, for one, would like to see a world where this book is up there with comics like *Maus*, *March*, and *Persepolis* in its influence and even its use in education.

I think that this is a good representation of comics storytelling because of how much effort that Brooks clearly put into creating it. There is an extensive bibliography at the back of the book, and when reading it, you wouldn’t know that Brooks wasn’t normally a comics writer because it just flows so smoothly and reads so naturally, *The Power of Comics* gives us several examples of how famous prose writers struggled when writing comics such as Jonathan Lethem and Jodi Picoult, but Brooks has clearly put his best foot forward with this book (Brooks, 247-253; Duncan et al., 104). I instantly recognized this as a complex narrative that we learned in *The Power of Comics*, there is an extended backstory, character development, and the subplot of either The Great War or racism depending on the scene (Duncan et al., 105). Interestingly, there is next to no depiction of sound, the only possible exception being musical notes used to signify singing instead of talking. This is an example of synaesthetics, described in *Understanding Comics* as “unit[ing] the different artforms which *appealed* to those different senses” (McCloud, 123). I never saw, written on the page, the *boom!* of the artillery, the *crack!* of the sniper’s rifle, or the *ratatatatatat* of the machine gun, but I still heard them in my head. I felt disgust seeing the poor conditions of the trenches, I heard the cries of death, I smelled the rotting bodies of No Man’s Land, I (wished I could) taste the french wine as the soldiers celebrated a victory, and I did it all by reading this book.

I think this book could be classified under memoir, but also generally as fiction, as it is a fictionalized account of real events. Almost all of the major characters were either real soldiers, or were based on real soldiers. If there is a subgenre of the fictional memoir, then this is definitely it. Otherwise, I would classify it as historical fiction. It reminds me a lot of the comic that was mentioned in class, *Six Days*, especially in the great attention to detail. Since it is fictionalized, we don’t get anything like the Authoring I (except in the notes and such) (Duncan et al., 239). It leans heavily on the fictional side, but there are strong elements of nonfiction as well, since the story is well researched and the story heavily influenced by actual events.

I would recommend this comic to anyone who is a fan of Max Brooks, as his writing style is still clear even though he is a bit out of his element. I would also recommend this book to anyone who is interested in military history or the history of civil rights, as both of these are portrayed with utmost accuracy, touching on both famous events like the release of *The Birth of A Nation* and the battle of Verdun as well as lesser known events like the Houston riots and the fact that the Hellfighters were the first unit of any army or color to reach the Rhine River. If you like a good piece of historical fiction and are in for a good story and want to learn, this book is for you. If you want a gritty story about a two sided conflict, this book is for you. If you’ve read this paper and are interested in the book, this book is for you.

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