



Image: **Famous New York Soldiers Return Home, the 369th Infantry, New York City, 1919**, gelatin silver photographic print, courtesy of National Archives



Object: **Bust of Henry Johnson**, modeled by Vincent Forte, Sr., 1995, plaster, Albany Institute of History & Art, gift of Michelina T. Forte, 2015.42

ALBANY INSTITUTE  
OF HISTORY & ART

Henry Johnson



Capital Region  
**50**  
OBJECTS



# The Capital Region in 50 Objects

## Henry Johnson

Henry Johnson (1891–1929) was an infantry soldier who served during World War I, at time when African Americans were segregated into “colored” units. Serving with the French on the front line, Johnson’s heroic actions in combat earned him France’s highest military honor, *the Croix de Guerre avec Palme*; though did not gain official recognition in the United States until after his death. In 1996 he was awarded the Purple Heart, in 2002 the Distinguished Service Cross, and in 2015 President Obama awarded Johnson the U.S. Congressional Medal of Honor.

Born in 1891 in North Carolina, Johnson moved to Albany as a teenager. He worked various jobs, including as a railway porter at Albany’s Union Station. At the onset of the United State’s involvement in World War I in 1917, Johnson traveled to New York City to enlist in the United States Army. He was placed in the 369th Infantry Regiment as part of the American Expeditionary Forces that consisted mostly of African American soldiers. They were known as the “Harlem Hellfighters.”

On May 15, 1918, Johnson was on sentry duty with another soldier when they were attacked by German forces. Johnson fought off nearly a dozen German soldiers and caused several casualties. When his fellow soldier on sentry duty was wounded, Johnson prevented his capture. With fighting reduced to hand-to-hand combat, Johnson was able to hold off the German advance and survive battle, although he sustained multiple wounds. In 1929, Johnson died without recognition or a disability pension. Henry Johnson Boulevard, Henry Johnson Charter School, and this bust sculpted by Vincent Forte, Sr., are a few examples of how the memory of Henry Johnson lives on in the city of Albany.

## Vocabulary

**Bust** – a sculptured representation of the upper part of the human figure including the head and neck and usually part of the shoulders and breast

**Enlist** – to sign up (a person) for duty in the army, navy, etc.

**Infantry** – the part of an army that has soldiers who fight on foot

**Pension**- money paid by the government to those who can no longer work

**Segregation** – the practice or policy of keeping people of different races, religions, etc., separate from each other

**Sentry**- A standing guard

## Henry Johnson

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Directions

Use the depiction of the object, image, and corresponding text to answer the following questions.

1. Who was the bust sculpted to commemorate? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What challenges did African American soldiers experience during World War I?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Which nation was the 369th Infantry fighting? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. What honors did Henry Johnson receive?  
a. \_\_\_\_\_  
b. \_\_\_\_\_  
c. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Why do you think the United States did not honor Henry Johnson for his service before his death?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. By what nickname was the 369th Infantry Regiment known? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. In what city was the photograph taken? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_