

Harlem's Rattlers and the Great War

THE UNDAUNTED 369TH REGIMENT
AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN
QUEST FOR EQUALITY

Jeffrey T. Sammons and John H. Morrow, Jr.

“An absorbing book, a work of deeply important and distinguished scholarship.”*

When on May 15, 1918, a French lieutenant warned Henry Johnson of the 369th to move back because of a possible enemy raid, Johnson reportedly replied: “I’m an American, and I never retreat.” The story, even if apocryphal, captures the mythic status of the 369th Regiment, the African-American combat unit that never lost a man to capture or a foot of ground that had been taken during the first World War. *Harlem's Rattlers and the Great War* reveals as never before the poignant history of this unit from its beginnings as the 15th New York National Guard to its singular performance in WWI and the pathos of postwar adjustment. This book details the Regiment's instrumental role in the story of World War I and the African-American campaign for equality, and the importance of both in our understanding of American history.

*“The authors, both eminent historians, depict the epic struggle to transform a New York State Guard unit composed almost entirely of black soldiers into a one of the most decorated regiments of the United States Army in World War I. Harlem's Rattlers is an absorbing book, a work of deeply important and distinguished scholarship, nuanced in its exploration and handling of the layers and layers of contradictory and incomplete accounts that are the natural character of all history. The pith of this book is the ferocious and unending drama of race, the core narrative that tracks the American experience. Harlem's Rattlers is an engrossing social history, brimming with humor, irony, courage on a grand scale and the small acts of human decency and painful betrayal that are the grist of the wartime narrative. Men skirmish in the legislature, manipulate the media, get trampled in the military bureaucracy, compete ruthlessly for recognition and at every turn the underlying racial dynamic shapes their behavior and deforms the culture. The integration of the armed forces was a focal point of the civil rights cause for the first half of the twentieth century. Sammons and Morrow have given us a panoramic tale, rich in its evocation of the strains of class, ambition, patriotism, bravery and prejudice that run deep in the American story.” - *Hamilton Fish, Publisher and Editorial Director, the Washington Spectator (Amazon Customer Review)*



About the Authors

Jeffrey T. Sammons is a professor in the Department of History at New York University, where he has taught since 1989. He began his academic career at the University of Houston and as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Cape Town before being named, in 1987, a Henry Rutgers Research Fellow at Rutgers University-Camden where he completed his critically acclaimed *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society*. Sammons has also taught at Princeton University and at Hollins University as a Jessie Ball du Pont Scholar. In 2001, Sammons was awarded a fellowship by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and History and soon after received a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship in support of what became *Harlem's Rattlers and the Great War*. Sammons is a national senator of the Phi Beta Kappa Society and a member of the Museum and Library Committee of the United States Golf Association and is at work on a book about race and golf.

John H. Morrow, Jr., Franklin Professor of History at The University of Georgia, earned his BA with Honors in History from Swarthmore College and his PhD in Modern European History from the University of Pennsylvania. In 1971 Professor Morrow became the first African American faculty member in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where he taught for seventeen years. Morrow served as Head of the UTK History Department from 1983 to his departure from the University in 1988 and won numerous teaching awards there as well as at the University of Georgia where he served two terms as chair and was Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Morrow has been appointed to numerous visiting professorships in military history and has served on many prestigious advisory committees in the field. He is the author of *German Airpower in World War I* and *Building German Airpower*. Morrow's book, *The Great War in the Air: Military Aviation from 1909 to 1921* is considered the definitive study of air power in the First World War. His comprehensive history of the First World War, *The Great War: An Imperial History* recently appeared in a centennial edition.

