

men could successfully confront their former masters on the battlefield. The courage of the 54th so affronted the Confederate defenders at Fort Wagner that, when Shaw fell at the front of his troops, rebel soldiers stripped his body of all evidence of high rank and dumped it into a mass grave with the tangled bodies of other Union dead. When the battle ended, federal officers, following customary practice, requested the return of Shaw's remains. The Confederate commander refused, contemptuously observing that Shaw had been buried with "his niggers." Later, when a Union naval bombardment allowed Northern forces to occupy the fort, officials ordered a search for Shaw's body. Much to its credit, Shaw's grieving family put an end to that grisly enterprise, noting that it was appropriate for an officer to be buried with his men.

The powerful message of Shaw's death and his family's affirmation of universal equality captured the imagination of the abolitionist North. Shaw, celebrated as the flower of Northern idealism, inspired hundreds of patriotic sermons and political speeches. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Robert Lowell wrote eulogies and odes to the fallen hero, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens carved a magnificent bas-relief of Shaw reviewing the 54th Massachusetts. It was placed on Boston Common, where it now stands.

To the critics of *Glory*, the renewed celebration of Shaw's martyrdom overshadows the real story of the 54th regiment—the men in the ranks. They note that Shaw dominates the movie as he dominated Emerson's sermon, Lowell's poem, and Saint-Gaudens's frieze.

It is difficult to argue the point. The film gives Matthew Broderick, who plays Shaw, top billing. *Glory's* story line centers on Shaw's efforts to overcome self-doubts and transmit a battle-won confidence to his men. Conceding this, however, does not denigrate Shaw's story or deny that it is a tale well told. It is wrongheaded and condescending to dismiss *Glory* as merely an exploration of "White racism, with White abolitionists who opposed its evils, and the Blacks who endured them." Shaw was an authentic hero, who did the right thing. His letters (read by a voiceover) are a magnificent statement of nineteenth-century American idealism. They reveal a young man struggling with the profound implications of slavery and race at a crucial moment in the nation's and his own life. It is appropriate to celebrate Shaw and the abolitionists who propelled him to his moment in history, and blatantly unfair to condemn Shaw as yet another white paternalist or, more strangely yet, a surrogate master.³

Moreover, while *Glory* places Shaw at the front, it does much to tell the story of the 54th. Viewers learn that black soldiers, unlike their white comrades, fought under the threat of enslavement or death, because Confederate president Jefferson Davis ordered captured black soldiers to be treated not as prisoners of war but as rebels in arms. (White officers of black regiments, like Shaw, faced a similar danger.) *Glory* also demonstrates how Northern racism informed federal policy,