

condemning black soldiers to inferior rations, tattered uniforms, continuous fatigue duty, and—perhaps most significantly—pay nearly half of that of white soldiers. But black soldiers were not mere victims. *Glory* features the resistance of black soldiers to such demeaning treatment, particularly the regiment's principled refusal to accept any pay until it was given equal pay.

*Glory* does not stop with this surface review of the 54th's accomplishments amid adversity, and merely reprise an all-too-common theme of Afro-American history. Instead, the film attempts the more difficult task of exploring the internal workings of Afro-American society. Playing off the diverse experiences of Tripp, an angry fugitive slave played by Denzell Washington, Searles, an Emerson-reading free black intellectual (he wears glasses) played by Andre Braugher, Jupiter, the stuttering plantation hand played by Jihmi Kennedy, and Rawlins, the sage master sergeant played with great effect by Morgan Freeman, *Glory* makes much of the tensions among black enlistees as they come to terms with their common mission. *Glory's* presentation of the 54th is more than black and white.

Yet, despite its considerable accomplishments, *Glory* fails to capture the black military experience. This is not because, as one critic charges, "'*Glory*' chooses instead to tell its story through the prism of White consciousness,"<sup>4</sup> or because the diversity of the black community is too often put in terms of personality types rather than social experience.

*Glory* fails because its history of the 54th relies mostly on plausibility rather than the regiment's authentic past. In contrast to the film's faithful account to Shaw, *Glory's* representation of the 54th is a curious mixture of historical fact and fiction, ideological posturing and projection. It makes the history of the 54th into a Frank Capra-like view of black America: one Southern rebel and one Northern intellectual, one naive fieldhand and one wise old head.<sup>5</sup>

Take, for example, the question of origins. The 54th was not a representative sample of black America in 1863, as *Glory* implies. Although a few former Southern slaves entered its ranks (many Northern free blacks had escaped from the South), most of the members of the 54th had been Northerners, free by birth. Some came from families that had enjoyed freedom for generations. Moreover, since the 54th was recruited before any other black regiment—in fact, the War Department had denied the petitions of several midwestern governors to enlist their own black regiment until well into the summer of 1863—the 54th drew black men from all over the North. Many of those who traveled half a continent to Massachusetts had been pressing for the chance to enlist since the war began. Some had been drilling independently in militia units organized within their own communities. In short, the new recruits were highly politicized, hardened by long years of participation in the struggle for equality, and fully aware of the implications of their service for themselves, their people, and their nation.