

less disciplined or less committed to a principled cause. For the record, the former slave soldiers who composed the South Carolina Colored Volunteers acquitted themselves well on the battlefield.

*Glory's* comparison of Shaw and the 54th, on one hand, and Montgomery and the *South Carolina Colored Volunteers*, on the other, illustrates the problem of plausibility as the basis of cinematic narrative. It may be useful—and, sadly, even necessary—to remind the audience of the persistence of racism by presenting a white officer who cared nothing for his men to balance the celebration of Shaw's deep concern, just as it is useful to see the 54th as black society in microcosm. However, the utility of these lessons becomes moot when the viewer finds they have no validity. History without a basis in fact loses its warrant. The debate over Shaw's role in the making of the 54th becomes a hollow exercise once it is discovered that the composition of the 54th is misrepresented and the regiment's true history ignored. Likewise, a discussion of the derivation of social discipline—from the top or the bottom—is rendered moot once it is admitted that the South Carolina Colored Volunteers and its commander enter the film only as foils to the 54th and Shaw, not as a true representation of former slave soldiers and their officers.

The dangers of such a misappropriation of history become most evident in the discussion of Afro-American manhood, another subject of great contemporary importance, particularly when educators concede the necessity of separate schools to tutor young black men in manly responsibilities. Appropriating the language of the recruiting broadsides, *Glory* argues that black soldiers proved their manhood by bloodying the slave-holding enemy in battle. "Ain't much matter what happens tomorrow," reflects the rebel Tripp on the eve of 54th's suicidal attack on Fort Wagner, "'cause we men, ain't we?" Many people thought so, and *Glory* reinforces this message. But there is little evidence that black people—former slaves or former free men—thought their manhood contingent upon military service or suicidal sacrifice. While black leaders brandished the sable arm in pressing their claim to equality, black people understood that manhood had many more fundamental sources. If they needed a text, they could of course find one in the nation's founding charter. *Glory's* disservice is not so much in making the contrary case, but in fabricating the evidence upon which its own argument rests. Without appropriate sources, the experience of the 54th can have no weight in contemporary debates. History is reduced to whoever is holding the camera.

*Glory* then demonstrates the necessity of applying the same standards of historical validity to cinematic reconstructions of the past that are applied to other historical genres. To be sure, providing an accurate portrayal of the 54th on film would be difficult, but in many ways no more difficult than an accurate portrayal in text or on stage. The dangers of failing to do so are great. If movies are going to carry a portion of the burden of understanding our past, they must provide—