

person who tells a hard luck story.

No system can eliminate begging altogether. There always are some people who will resort to it, and some willing to give their change. Indeed, most people would willingly give to people in actual need who have no other resort. Yet, as suggested, people

who are disabled and unable to work are provided for by the welfare system. They may not go hungry—although some say they do—but do lack the minor amenities of life. One might wish to help out an elderly beggar. He may be provided for. But why not help him, even if he has enough to eat. It is hard to be old, unable to work, and poor enough to beg.

The problem that must and can be solved is begging by young and able persons. Since employment is available, they beg because they find begging profitable enough to prefer it to the work which, to coin a phrase, goes begging. The quarter we give them discourages them from working and encourages them to go on begging. The remedy, then, and it is the only practi-

cal remedy we have, is, with the exception of the old and disabled, to refuse to give anything to beggars. For some this hard course may come hard. But it is socially and morally far better than to take the easy way out, assuage guilt feelings, and encourage parasitic living. We have been paying young people too much for begging. We will have fewer of them begging if we pay less. □

EMINENTOES



SENIOR CITIZENS

by Joe Queenan

Inspired by the success of the fledgling Senior Baseball League, a Florida real estate developer has launched a Senior House of Representatives based in Pompano Beach, Florida.

"So far, Jim Wright, Tip O'Neill, Tony Coelho, and John Jenrette have all committed to a 16-week legislative season," beams Kirby Moffett, the wealthy condominium developer who came up with the novel idea for a roving legislative ensemble. "The Congress will travel around to eighteen different shopping malls in southern Florida and stage lifelike debates on all the pivotal legislative issues of our time: abortion, disarmament, airline de-regulation, sex with congressional pages. We have every expectation that it will be a huge boost to tourism."

Moffett, who charges a \$3.99 admission to each congressional session, concedes that salaries are nothing like those the legends of American politics used to haul down while they were on Capitol Hill; down in the Grapefruit League pay starts at \$400 a week, plus motel lodging (shared double beds), and an \$18 per diem for meals. But none of the senior congressmen seem to be complaining.

"Much as I enjoyed being in the House of Representatives, I never had any real fun up there," laughs recently deposed House Speaker Jim Wright. "This here Senior Circuit gives me a chance to crack jokes, slap fannies, even squish a few cream pies in Republican faces. I think it's going to be a hoot."

The thirty-two ex-congressmen who

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make up the Senior Congress are a rich and varied lot, ranging from retired but cash-strapped legends such as O'Neill to disgraced figures such as Pat Swindall, the convicted Georgia congressman who has been granted weekend passes from federal prison to participate in the ersatz House's bogus deliberations. Moffett also has high hopes that convicted jail-bait aficionado Buz Lukens may join the group should Ohio voters chuck him out of office in the next congressional election. "It would sure bring out the teenyboppers," chuckles Moffett.

The ex-congressmen travel around the state in two oversized mobile homes, plus a ferry—the Houseboat—that plies its way through the swamplier regions of the interior. "We hit backwaters of the Okefenokee where people have never even heard of the House of Representatives," notes Coelho, who resigned from Congress last spring, amidst allegations of fiscal improprieties involving Drexel Burnham Lambert. "It's a real civics lesson for these yahoos."

Wherever the Senior House has appeared so far, the ex-politicians have been vastly outnumbered by an ancillary group of Senior Lobbyists, Senior Pundits, and Senior Legislative Assistants. Senior Girlfriends have also been spotted, but Moffett denies that any are on the payroll.

Though most members of the Senior Congress are seasoned warriors whose political careers are clearly over, more than a handful admit that they are wandering around the wilds of semi-rural Florida in the

hopes of getting their careers back on track.

"I can still filibuster, I can still pork barrel, and I can still pin hopelessly inappropriate legislation onto omnibus bills with the best of them," says Wright. "I still think I can cut it in the bigs."

Moffett says that if the Senior House, whose deliberations will be carried live on CNN starting in March, is a success, he may consider adding a Senior Senate, a Senior Su-

preme Court, a Senior Department of Transportation, and even a Senior White House sometime next summer.

"Reagan wants big bucks—you know, that Japan thing—and Nixon's still pouting," says the good-natured Moffett. "But Ford got shortchanged on his term, only serving those two years, so he'll do it for lunch money plus a guarantee of a couple of good tee times. And Carter, well, we know we can get Jimmy cheap." □

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THE TALKIES



BLACK AND WHITE IN COLOR

by Bruce Bawer

For weeks now, a movie theater near my home has been playing *Glory*, the much-lauded movie about the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, the first black regiment in the Civil War. The movie is doing very good business there, and much of the credit should doubtless go to the New York City Board of Education: for whenever I walk by that theater at noon or thereabouts on a weekday, I find myself in a crowd of high school students, mostly black, who are waiting to see the picture. Yep, you heard right: at a time when American schools—especially those in the inner cities—are graduating kids who can't read, write, or find the United States on a map, teachers (in New York City, at least) are hauling their classes to the movies during school hours.

Presumably, the idea behind these midday movie-theater trips is to use *Glory* as an educational tool—to make history come alive for students, and to give the black kids pride in their heritage. There's nothing wrong with these goals, I suppose, although (a) making history come alive for kids is hardly of any use if they don't also learn the facts of history and come to understand them, and (b) pride in something over which one has no control—whether it's one's sex, race, ethnic background, or national origin—seems to me a less meaningful commodity than it's sometimes cracked up to be.

Or maybe New York's high school teachers have been reading Hendrik Hertzberg, who in a recent issue of the *New Republic* wrote passionately about the experience of seeing *Glory* in "the cozy screening room of the Motion Picture Association of America." Hertzberg came away convinced that *Glory*, by illustrating "that the Civil War was a revolutionary war, that black soldiers were freedom fighters in that war, and that they were all the more heroic because they not only fought but had to fight to fight . . . could do more to alleviate the alienation of young blacks from the 'mainstream' than any

amount of . . . curricular victimology."

The other day, in an attempt to test Hertzberg's theory, I went to see *Glory* at a little past noon on a weekday. It was not an affair to warm a Hertzberg's heart. When Trip (Denzel Washington), a truculent ex-slave, began to deliver the movie's obligatory and improbable Big Speech, in which he expressed a prescient skepticism about postbellum race relations and proclaimed stirringly that he was fighting not for the white man's Union but for himself, the high school kids who were seated all around me grew bored and rambunctious, and jabbered noisily among themselves. When Trip tormented his fellow soldier Thomas (André Braugher), an intelligent, Emerson-reading Bostonian, the kids hooted delightedly, showing no empathy whatsoever for Thomas's poignant, acutely ironic position as a privileged member of society who has relinquished his cherished freedom only to find himself in the company of fellow blacks who seem thoroughly alien to him. And the kids laughed, too, when the seemingly hard-hearted Trip stood up, on the eve of battle, and, choking back tears, told his fellow soldiers that he loved them.

The only portions of the movie that drew as enthusiastic a response as the pre-movie soft-drink commercial—in

which an eminent basketball player leaped up and, to the cheers and applause of the entire audience, slam-dunked a six-pack of Coke into a tree-house—were the hideously graphic battle sequences. The kids savored these episodes: they relished every thrust of a bayonet, every bullet in a chest, every exploding shell, every flying limb. It didn't seem to matter to them who was being sliced and diced, or for what cause, so long as there was a generous display of blood and guts. Plainly, they hadn't enjoyed anything so much since *Rambo*. (To be sure, there were demurrers. When the movie ended, a girl sitting near me shook her head at all the carnage. "I hate this kind of movie!" she declared.)

If I've gone on so extensively about the audience reaction to *Glory*, it's because this film has been acclaimed—not only by Hertzberg, but by many well-meaning white liberals—for something other than its artistic or entertainment value; they've celebrated it largely because, like Hertzberg, they figure it must be inspiring to blacks, especially to disaffected young members of the "underclass." But popular culture is not going to save these kids. On the contrary, it's part of

the problem: these kids' lives, as a rule, are already tragically circumscribed by rap music and slasher movies and MTV, by aggressive sounds and images with little or no thought content. Far from making them think, a movie like *Glory*, with all its grisly combat sequences, is experienced by them as simply one more raucous, belligerent, visceral event.

This is not to say that *Glory* is without merit. It is true, however, that the only surprising thing about this film is how thoroughly unsurprising it is: the characters, the conflicts, the big scenes are all exactly what you'd expect. In addition to Washington's Angry Young Slave and Braugher's Genteel Negro, the 54th contains one Wise Old Trooper (Morgan Freeman) and one Good-Natured Innocent (Jihmi Kennedy). The 24-year-old leader of the regiment, Colonel Robert Gould Shaw (Matthew Broderick), whose parents are longtime abolitionists, is uncomplicatedly earnest and upstanding—a regular little Eagle Scout—and the obstacles he has to overcome are predictable: the jeers of white soldiers (which, of course, turn into cheers by film's end), the unwillingness of a narrow-minded supply officer to provide his men with shoes, the disinclination of the War Department to send black troops into battle.

There is, moreover, an oddly mechanical, low-voltage quality to the way the film's writer, Kevin Jarre, and its director, Edward Zwick, set up and resolve these conflicts. Indeed, if it weren't for the wonderfully staged and highly charged battle sequences, one might confuse *Glory* with one of those solemn, plodding biographical dramas, with titles like "Galileo: A Man and His Telescope," that you run across now and then on educational TV. Certainly the film's worst failing is that Shaw—thanks, largely, to Broderick's lack of range, presence, and moral weight—never grows as a character; and the film itself, excessively mindful of its Good Intentions, too often shares his empty earnestness.

The film's other major roles, by contrast, are remarkably well served by



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