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Sidney Poitier's *A Piece of the Action*, in which the actor/director also stars, combines vaudevillian entertainment with urban topicality to produce a really entertaining picture. Unashamedly old-fashioned in its basic storytelling, performing and appeal, *A Piece of the Action* revitalizes the old formulas and, through teens who perform with heart and style, stands out as the best of the recent Poitier comedies.

With the kids, who are part of a community job program, *Piece* allows the streets to intrude upon the confines of Hollywood comedy. The result has more than energy; there's emotion as well. When Barbara (Sheryl Lee Ralph) harangues the uptight teacher about being a "middle class pushy assed poverty pimp," the effect is jolting. When Willy Magnum (Edward Love) pleads for a job to support a retarded little brother, the result is throat clutching. And when Sheila (Karole Selmo) spoofs her job application tryout with a Mae West vamp, it's more fun than Al Pacino's awkward attempt in *Bobby Deerfield*.

Written by Charles Blackwell from a Timothy March story, *Piece* maintains easy balance between cardboard villains and for-real kids. Bill Cosby, Denise Nicholas, James Earl Jones and Frances Foster (who support Poitier) are not ignored by this *Sting*-like plot involving con men and gangsters and the community improvement center. Their substantial contributions are overshadowed merely by the pleasure of seeing new faces (the kids) effectively spotlighted.