

The Spirit of America Lives at

TICONDEROGA

By Harvey Spears

On September 11, while attending a re-enactment of a Revolutionary War encampment and battle held at Fort Ticonderoga, my wife Carol and I were very moved as we saw men, women and children in the attire of eighteenth century America, commemorating one of our country's most important events—our great American Revolution. What made this event even more meaningful to us is the relevance we saw it has to people's lives today.

As a photographer I was looking forward to shooting this event and had made the trip especially to do so. I was so impressed with the authenticity in dress, the warm, welcoming friendliness, and deep knowledge of the persons we spoke to. Everything we saw, including the way our ancestors prepared meals, used tools and implements, drilled troops, and held Sunday services moved us profoundly. During a commemoration service, the circuit preacher honored the meaning of the lives lost on September 11, 2001, and related this horrific tragedy to the hopes of persons early in our country's history. It had me see newly how urgent it is that people every-



where ask a question first articulated by Eli Siegel, founder of the education Aesthetic Realism: "What does a person deserve by being a person?" "I think that something of this hope was in the minds of persons who fought in our glorious American revolution as they risked their lives, not only for themselves and their families, but for the well-being of present and future Americans.

This is what our nation is really about—that every person needs to be seen with the dignity and justice they deserve. A way, I learned from Aesthetic Realism, to give another the fairness he deserves, is by seeing that person as real as oneself—as having similar feelings, hopes and depths. Unfortunately, this purpose, upon which our self-respect depends, is not had or encouraged by many in our government today. For instance, people in New Orleans would not be in such dire straits, would not have endured agonies, many dying, from the flooding that followed hurricane Katrina if they had been seen as having feelings as real as our own—as entitled to the assistance that a government, really interested in the well-being of its citizens would not hesitate to willingly provide. Nor would persons go unfed, or live with little or no healthcare, receive poor educations, have to worry about jobs, were our great nation true to the principles of the Founding Fathers, as stated so powerfully in the "Declaration of Independence":



"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."



The image of our nation today is not what our forefathers envisioned. Our country needs to get back on track, to what impelled early Americans to take such bold and yet practical steps to have a more just way of seeing people take root in a new nation. As Ellen Reiss, editor of the international periodical, *The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known* in an issue entitled: “The Urgent Beauty of Our Constitution” writes:

“At this time of worry in America, it is urgent that we be clear about what America’s government fundamentally is, what makes the structure of that government beautiful and right, respectful of people’s lives—of our lives. There has been, of course, terrific injustice in America; but the governmental structure of this land, outlined in our Constitution and Bill of Rights, is just and has made the countering of injustice possible.

Eli Siegel is the philosopher who showed that “all beauty is a making one of opposites.” This is so of the beauty of the US Constitution and it’s first ten amendments, the Bill of Rights. Our Constitution insists that America, in its treatment of people, honor simultaneously such opposites as agreement and disagreement, sameness and difference, oneness and manyness, freedom and security.

Aesthetic Realism is not political. It is about ethics and aesthetics....Aesthetic Realism shows that beauty is ethics, and is the one thing practical.”

Giving another person the ethical justice that he or she deserves, is, I’ve learned, the best way to truly take care of ourselves. And it is the only way to oppose contempt, the “lessening of what is different from oneself as a means of self-increase as one sees it,” that has made for injustice and cruelty throughout history. I love this country, and I believe the desire to take care of oneself while being fair to another, is, to a large degree, what impelled the American Revolution at its beginning, and it’s why I was very encouraged by the beautifully meaningful events at Fort Ticonderoga, as other people were. We were all trying to see more and honor the large meaning in our country’s history, and what our nation still hopes for.



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