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Tulane Law School honors civil rights and the Answer to Racism

New Orleans — One of the great civil rights lawsuits in American history took center stage last week in a special event at Tulane University Law School (TLS) in New Orleans: “The People of Clarendon County”—A Play by Ossie Davis, & the Answer to Racism! The 1955 play by revered actor/activist Ossie Davis, enacted by law students, dramatized the lives of the brave black parents who risked everything for an “equal” school bus.

Their lawsuit, *Briggs v. Elliott*, was the first legal challenge to unequal education, paving the way to the US Supreme Court’s historic ruling, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed segregation in public schools. This event, a project of the not-for-profit Alliance of Ethics & Art (AEA), is based on the book by journalist Alice Bernstein and features speakers—black, white, Latino, Christian, and Jewish—who tell what they learned from Aesthetic Realism, the education founded in 1941 by the great American philosopher Eli Siegel, enabling prejudice in themselves to change!

That understanding is in principles stated by Eli Siegel, which explain the cause of racism and every injustice: contempt, the “disposition in every person to think we will be for ourselves by making less of the outside world”—and the answer: learning to criticize contempt, and to see another person’s feelings as being as real and as deep as our own. Aesthetic Realism states: “All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves.”

In his welcome, Dean David Meyer said TLS was privileged to host this event, and he thanked the Black Law Students Association and Alternative Dispute Resolution Law Society for sponsoring it. Law Professor Edward Sherman introduced the speakers by saying: this is a “very important event, presenting the interconnection between politics, ethics, art, and law, based on Aesthetic Realism,” with the focus on racism and “what we can do in terms of our own thought processes and education within our society to deal with it.”

A rapt audience heard Alice Bernstein tell of the research in 2004 leading her to “unearth” Ossie Davis’s almost forgotten 1955 manuscript, “The People of Clarendon

County.” Astonished and delighted, Ossie Davis wanted his play to impact the fight against racism today, and urged her to bring it to print with essays on what Aesthetic Realism explains is the cause and solution to all prejudice.

The play was stirringly performed by Tulane and Loyola students: Erin Sanders, Victor Jones, Erica Zacharie, and W.B. Whitted, with musical accompaniment by soloist Ebony Davis.

Speaking with Ms. Bernstein on the answer to racism were Dr. Jaime R. Torres, founder of Latinos for National Health Insurance; Allan Michael, the first African American maritime captain in New York harbor; and Dr. Arnold Perey, anthropologist and teacher educator on the faculty of the Aesthetic Realism Foundation. Elementary school educator Monique Michael (born in Haiti) gave an interactive first grade science lesson on diversity in birds and humans, illustrating the Aesthetic Realism Teaching Method’s power to bring out every child’s true intelligence and kindness.

Award-winning actor Ruby Dee, wife of Ossie Davis, wrote:

“It moved my husband to think that...school children might learn about history by reading or acting in his play. In addition, Alice’s book will also inform people about the success of the Aesthetic Realism Teaching Method in enabling children to learn every subject, and ending racism in the classroom.”

The Clarendon County/Answer to Racism event, now in its fourth year, has traveled across the country to schools, libraries, universities, and museums—free to the public—including in the U.S. Congressional Auditorium in Washington, DC. In each city, unsung heroes of civil rights in the community are introduced, showing history as alive!...

What audiences nationwide have expressed in comments following these events was confirmed at Tulane: the message of Aesthetic Realism resonates with people of all ages, and makes for new, wide, more just thinking about people different from oneself....

“My gratitude is immeasurable,” Alice Bernstein said,...for the knowledge that can finally defeat the filth and poison of racism and replace them with true respect and kindness!”