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Majority Whip James Clyburn Opens Capitol Hill Event Featuring Play by Ossie Davis & the Answer to Racism

(Washington, DC) - House Majority Whip James E. Clyburn gave opening remarks at an historic event on Capitol Hill in Washington, October 21st: "The People of Clarendon County"—A Play by Ossie Davis, & the Answer to Racism!

Staged in the Congressional Auditorium of the US Capitol Visitor Center, the event was based on the book edited by journalist and Aesthetic Realism Associate Alice Bernstein. Mr. Clyburn, who is also Congressman of South Carolina's 6th District, recalled the sacrifices made for equality in education by heroic people in Clarendon County, SC, whose 1950 lawsuit, *Briggs v Elliott*, led to the landmark Supreme Court ruling, *Brown v Board of Education*. "All of these people mean so much to me," he said, "and those who have visited my Congressional office have seen their pictures there to greet you as you walk in the door. I want to thank Alice Bernstein for making sure their sacrifices will be in a form that generations will forever understand, recognize, and hopefully pay homage to."

The large audience, representing the diversity of America—elected officials, staffers, educators, civil rights workers, public servants, historians, community activists—saw a stirring performance of Ossie Davis's 1955 Civil Rights play which, as Mr. Davis had noted, was unearthed by Mrs. Bernstein, and heard the cause and answer to racism explained by Aesthetic Realism, the education founded by the great philosopher Eli Siegel. Racism, and every injustice, he taught, arises from the human desire for *contempt*: "the addition to self, through the lessening of something else." "When people learn," said Mrs. Bernstein, "to criticize contempt—including in oneself—and to see that the feelings of others are as deep and as real as one's own, racism will end."

Joining her in telling the story of Clarendon County, the play, and the book, were Dr. Jaime R. Torres, founder of Latinos for National Health Insurance, and Shenandoah Titus, Senior Policy Advisor in the Office of Civil Rights and Liberties of the Department of Homeland Security.

Featured guests and supporters included Congressmen John Conyers (MI), Elijah Cummings (MD), José E. Serrano (NY), and Barbara Lee (CA), Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus. This event was hosted by the not-for-profit Alliance of Ethics & Art.

The cast of "The People of Clarendon County": Perry Wallace as Narrator, Mugga as Mary Ragin, Allan Michael as William Ragin, and Glenn Mariano as Rev. Joseph DeLaine, gave a powerful performance, bringing history to life. "The play captured the atmosphere of the Jim Crow era perfectly," historian and former diplomat, Benjamin Justesen, said later. "Anyone born since 1970 cannot imagine what it was like," he continued. "It was amazing to have contempt described. I used to work everywhere in the world, and I saw it in so many countries. If I had studied Aesthetic Realism then, I would have understood things better. The contempt Mr. Siegel explained breeds contempt too, in others. This was an eye-opener."

The play was accompanied by a stand-out choral ensemble from Bishopville, South Carolina comprised of the Lee Central High School Chorus and Thelma Slater Singers directed by Thomas "Terry" Slater. Educator Monique Michael presented an interactive first grade science lesson based on the Aesthetic Realism Teaching Method. The audience was thrilled as Mrs. Michael illustrated why this method has succeeded for over 35 years, enabling children, including in the most hard-hit economic circumstances, to learn eagerly the subjects of the curriculum and to become kinder.

"I was in awe," said civil rights worker Brenda Gilchrist. "I went to school in Louisiana and experienced racism. But I had not heard about

Clarendon County or Aesthetic Realism until Alice Bernstein came into my world. I think our children need to see this program because it can facilitate needed dialogue about racism and inspire everyone to do more."

Internationally recognized civil rights leader Carmen Delgado said, "I learned a lot. Organizations need to work together to educate people about what racism comes from. Aesthetic Realism particularly illuminates the subject and how it should be taught to young people."

Charles Staunton, an educator from Virginia, said: "It is a rare thing to see what we saw on that stage. Aesthetic Realism is just great! They were people who are *real*, and the teacher—Monique Michael—was wonderful! Alice Bernstein's work has made many people's lives joyful."

The program opened with soloist Carrie Wilson's soul-stirring singing of "The Star Spangled Banner," accompanied by Edward Green (piano), and included Dr. Arnold Perey introducing the Aesthetic Realism Teaching Method; Rev. T. Anthony Spearman of Hickory, NC, with the invocation; Rev. Wayne Jack Plumstead of Bloomfield, NJ, who gave the benediction; and Joey Morant (jazz trumpeter) joined by Dr. Green, with a medley of freedom songs.

A rousing standing ovation by the audience was confirmation of what a staff member in the office of the Majority Whip described as "a wonderfully successful program."

The next day, a celebration of the event was held on the steps of the Abraham Lincoln Memorial. The Lee Central High School Chorus and Thelma Slater Chorus, with Thomas Slater directing, magnificently reprised their repertoire of spirituals—with many encores.

There, by the reflecting pool, with international visitors in attendance and the mighty sculpture of our nation's 16th president looking on, Alice Bernstein described the event at the Capitol the night before. One could see tears in the eyes of spectators as she concluded by reciting this poem:

Something Else Should Die: A Poem with Rhymes

By Eli Siegel

In April 1865

Abraham Lincoln died.

In April 1968

Martin Luther King died.

Their purpose was to have us say, some day:

Injustice died.

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Photo caption: Majority Whip James E. Clyburn and Alice Bernstein at US Capitol Visitor Center event: "The People of Clarendon County"—A Play by Ossie Davis, & the Answer to Racism! Photo credit: Robert Murphy

