

'Grave' history raises concerns

By Kevin J. Shay
Special to Sentinel-Voice
DALLAS (NNPA)—Oakland Cemetery, a 51-acre private graveyard occupied by mostly white men and women on Malcolm X Boulevard near Fair Park in South Dallas, is among those that suffer from less-than-adequate maintenance.

But Oakland, which dates back to the 1890s, is maintained better than some neighboring cemeteries bearing primarily Blacks occupants like the Butler Nelson Cemetery.

Dating back to 1870, Butler Nelson is maintained by the Dallas Parks Department and occasionally the Boy Scouts from as far as Coppel.

Oakland contains many prominent names whose families have commissioned

monuments sculpted from places as far away as Italy. Some sculptures include a 20-foot-high Washington Monument replica for electricity company owner J.F. Strickland and a 15-foot-high rotunda with six marble columns for insurance firm owner Louis Pires.

Other well-heeled names include the Caruth family members, who once owned much of the land that became Southern Methodist University and North Dallas shopping centers; John Armstrong, developer of Highland Park whose marble angel work was imported from Venice; and relatives of the infamous billionaire Howard Hughes. Annie Lawther, the legendary white-gown-clad "Lady of the Lake" that some say has

haunted White Rock Lake for decades, is buried at Oakland.

It's also the resting grounds of Santos Rodriguez, the 12-year-old Hispanic boy shot to death in 1973 by a Dallas police officer who put a gun to the boy's head demanding the boy "tell the truth" about a petty burglary, and then the cop fired.

The officer claimed he didn't think his gun was loaded.

Some 15 African-Americans are here, including a former slave who was 102 years old when she died in 1914.

By contrast, former Ku Klux Klansmen and Confederate officers rest in peace surrounded by mostly African-American homes on Malcolm X Boulevard, an

odd place, to say the least, though some would call it poetic justice.

When Oakland Avenue was renamed for Malcolm X in 1997, former City Council member W.C. "Dub" Miller, who chaired the Oakland Cemetery Association, told the council that the Whites buried there will "roll over in their graves if the name is changed."

Having former Klansmen buried in a neighborhood cemetery hasn't sparked a lot of opposition among Black residents, said Rev. L.V. Alexander, pastor of St. Matthew Baptist Church, which is near Oakland Cemetery. "It's not like people are talking about it over lunch and at community events," said Alexander.

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have said in unprecedented fashion, recently, the nation cannot afford to try to halt the racial progress that's been made.

To pretend that affirmative action has not been a vital cause of that progress is just that — pretense.

I sought to become head of the National Urban League for the same reasons I entered politics in Louisiana: Because I believe we can make life better for all Americans. I believe we must make life better for all Americans.

That belief hardly originated with me, or with my parents. Indeed, the original slogan the founders of the Urban League devised in 1910 — "Not Alms, but Opportunity" — spoke volumes.

It declared that a *hand up*, not a hand-out was what African-American migrants then flooding the cities from the rural South needed in order to adapt to the ways of modern urban life and contribute their fair share to America's greatness.

The founders of the National Urban League had the foresight, and the faith in their fellow human beings, to see that that was the route to progress. And they understood what the great scientist Albert Einstein once noted — that in every crisis there is opportunity. They were confident then that African-Americans could overcome the profound barriers that held them from full participation in American life; they were determined that they would.

Now, as then, the National Urban League will be part of the mosaic of people and organizations that will improve the quality of life in the United States.

We are as confident as our predecessors were of America's ability to overcome the multiple challenges that confront us today, and we fully intend to use our energies to help corral the expertise that exists within America and revive the characteristic American spirit of optimism to reinvigorate for the 21st century the national commitment to expanding opportunity.

Fletcher

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U.S. casualties. The war was wrong because it broke international law. There is no legal justification for invading a country when there is no imminent threat.

The other problem is that the issue of human rights within Iraq was only raised in the 11th hour as a justification for an invasion, and then repeated after the collapse of the Hussein regime.

There is a reason for that. The Bush administration knew that there are U.S. allies that regularly carry out human rights

abuses yet are not threatened with a possible invasion.

The dismissal of the issue of weapons of mass destruction—when they could not find them—and raising the issue of human rights was a cynical way to appeal for U.S. popular support.

The question that we have to ask ourselves, our friends and our neighbors, is whether their game worked.

Bill Fletcher Jr. is president of TransAfrica Forum, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit educational and organizing center.

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