

PUBLIC LETTER TO OAKLIN SPRINGS CEMETERY ASS'N.

January 29, 2021

H. Creig Vizena
President
Oaklin Springs Baptist Cemetery Association
8134 Highway 26
Oberlin, LA 70655

Sir,

We write to condemn the Oaklin Springs Cemetery Board of Director's decision to deny a burial plot to Allen Parish Sheriff's Deputy Darrell Semien because of his race. We understand from media reports that your aunt is the individual who denied the Semien family's request, and that she has been "relieved of her duties." We also understand that you apologized to the family and offered one of your own plots.

Aside from your attempts to remediate the obvious damage caused by the Cemetery's rejection, we urge you to immediately revise the governing body's bylaws to eradicate any "whites only" provision, language, or references. It is unconscionable and unacceptable that the Semien family—or anyone else—should face such blatant racial discrimination, especially during a time of mourning and grief.

As you may know, the United States Constitution forbids such discrimination, and the United States Supreme Court established clear precedent more than 70 years ago in *Shelly v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948). Although that case involved racially restrictive housing covenants, the same principles apply here to burial plots. "It cannot be doubted that among the civil rights intended to be protected from discriminatory state action by the Fourteenth Amendment are the rights to acquire, enjoy, own, and dispose of property," the Court said. "Equality in the enjoyment of property rights was regarded by the framers of that Amendment as an essential pre-condition to the realization of other basic civil rights and liberties which the Amendment was intended to guarantee." *Id.* at 10 (citing the Slaughter-House Cases, 83 U.S. (16. Wall.) (1873)).

Please confirm that your bylaws have been revised to eradicate unconstitutional restrictions. We look forward to your response. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Bruce Hamilton
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