Burl Cain, 73, will retire Friday after 21 years as warden of Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, the state's largest lockup.

Advocate file photos

STORIED CAREER

Cain bolsters celebrity status with tale of transformation, but some claims murky

BY MAYA LAU
mlau@theadvocate.com

Burl Cain says he turned around the wild Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola after he reluctantly became its warden in 1995.

There was “blood everywhere” in the fabled penitentiary when he arrived, he told a crowd at Michigan's Calvin College in 2010. In remarks honored for a lecture circuit that brought him to places as distant as the United Arab Emirates, Cain recounted how each of the previous wardens was so overwhelmed by the murders, suicides and escapes that they were fired after just a few years on the job.

Cain has repeated similar claims in a series of televised farewell speeches he’s given as he prepares to retire Jan. 1 after 21 years reigning over the state's largest lockup — an exit he made clear he wasn’t ready to make, though he is 73. His departure follows revelations in The Advocate that he had apparently violated state correctional rules by getting involved in business deals with relatives and friends of inmates.

Cain's stump speech, versions of which he has given in innumerable inspirational talks around the world, largely credits the long-serving warden's aggressive promotion of spirituality inside Angola with the maximum-security prison's transformation. But a review of the historical record and interviews with several experts on the prison make clear that Cain misrepresented the facts — and at times lied outright — in his telling of the Angola story.

A couple of examples: Only one of the five wardens preceding him was fired; and the Angola Museum is not the most-visited museum in Louisiana, as he told WBRZ-TV. But his boldest claim has to do with the prison's bloody
Cain

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reputable. Counting, perhaps, on the public's fury, Cain had broadcast the timeline of Angela's violence and the manacled in the late 1970s and took advantage of its hysterics and a temporary lapse of jurisdiction in a decade before.

In the talk, Cain says that when he was released on bail, he was placed "on house arrest" and barely got permission to go to play frisbee or out for a dip in the pool. Cain did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

America's most famous jester

Cain may be the nation's most well-known political cartoonist. In the world of political cartooning, he's published on more than 1,200 newspapers, including virtually every major national newspaper, and is syndicated in more than 120 countries.

Levin says what makes Cain funny is the way he uses his free speech in the political world to comment on the way politicians behave. His work has been published in more than 1,200 newspapers worldwide, and is syndicated in more than 120 countries.

Cain's work is well known for its use of political humor, and he is often cited as one of the most influential cartoonists in the world. His work has been published in more than 1,200 newspapers worldwide, and is syndicated in more than 120 countries.

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in front of the entrance to the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, Warden Burt Cain was cargaed with the task of housing the black blues that were cut out during the escape of four death-row inmates in 1979. Cain was in a state of escape sometimes taking place at that moment.

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