

VSU exhibit has Jim Crow memorabilia

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A clear view of an ugly past begins a two-week run on the Virginia State University campus today.

The art exhibit "Hateful Things," featuring 39 pieces of Jim Crow-era racist memorabilia, will be on display at the Meredith Art Gallery in Harris Hall. From "whites only" signs to imagery politely described as hateful, it's not a show for the politically correct of mind or spirit.

"It's not a pleasant part of history," said Renée Hill, an associate professor in the history and philosophy department. "But to continue to heal wounds, we can't continue to pretend things didn't happen.

"The idea is not to make anyone feel guilty," she said, "but rather to talk about history to understand what went on."

The show, on loan from the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia at Ferris State University, is at VSU thanks to graduate student Jaime Flores.

He read about the show more than a year ago while researching a paper on the negative imaging of blacks. After exchanging a series of e-mails with the museum director, he was able to set in motion the show's appearance at VSU.

"Some folks from all sides wanted to know why we would rehash the past," he said. "As an historian, I know it's important, that you have to study the past. People today who grew up after the civil-rights struggle, they've forgotten it's a continuing struggle."

Hill said reminders exist, and you don't have to look further than campus to see them.

She said she has heard several students saying they wish Barack Obama would drop out of the race for president for fear of him getting shot.

"No one's worried Hillary [Rodham Clinton] will get shot. It's that fear from the Jim Crow era," she said. "We're still afraid.

"At the end of the day, we're all Americans. We need to keep the lines of communication open."

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VSU history professors Wesley Hogan, Paul Alkebulan and Olwyn Blouet will be on hand from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. today to sign copies of books they have recently written.

William Strickland, a W.E.B. Dubois scholar from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, will deliver the keynote address at 6 p.m. in the Virginia Hall Auditorium.

The show will then be open in the Meredith Art Gallery in Harris Hall. It will run through Feb. 22. All events are free and open to the public.

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