

## Ferris State University professor David Pilgrim addresses racism in a presentation at Kalamazoo Valley Community College

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Courtesy of Ferris State University. David Pilgrim.

**TEXAS TOWNSHIP** -- In an address at a diversity conference here Friday, [David Pilgrim](#), chief diversity officer at Ferris State University, likened racism to a boil that needs to be lanced, opened and cleansed to be eliminated.

Pilgrim's way of opening the boil was to show images of T-shirts, buttons and television and magazine advertisements that carried negative stereotypes of African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Arab-Americans, Native-Americans, women, gays and lesbians and discuss them.

The presentation resonated with the capacity audience of 450 people -- guests stood and applauded Pilgrim for a full minute.

That's not always the reaction Pilgrim gets -- sometimes people "who don't think this is a problem, that racism is over," walk out or don't show up, he said after the presentation. "That's where the real work needs to be done."

"In too many parts of the country, whites don't want to talk about race because they don't want to be judged, to be perceived as racist, but they talk about it anyway -- in their cars, in corridors," Pilgrim said, explaining that there is a need for everyone to talk about race openly, a need to listen and understand the views of others.

Objects Pilgrim showed in a slide presentation ranged from a box of Rough on Rats, a rat poison from 1900 that had an image of a Chinese person eating a rat, to an iron-on patch created last year with an image then-Sen. Hillary Clinton and the words, "Even Bill doesn't want me."

Pilgrim talked about a wide variety of negative stereotypes because the traveling "Hateful Things" exhibition from Ferris State University's [Jim Crow Museum](#), which was on display at Kalamazoo Valley Community College through Friday, already did an effective job of showing racial stereotypes of blacks.

Blackface still persists in the United States, Pilgrim said, in the form of "pimping whore parties," among college students and "almost all the young people have heard of them." He showed an image from the racial commentary blog, [MoIsDeadSerious.com](#), of a white college student in black face wearing a yellow hat and dancing with a white female student. In the scene, a woman wore sweat pants with a University of Michigan logo.

White people often miss images of negative racial stereotypes because, "with blinders of white privilege, they don't see it," said Jane Tallim co-executive director of the [Media Awareness Network, of Canada](#), after her presentation at the conference. Her address was about negative stereotypes in media.

In order to eradicate the negative images and improve race relations, people have to have a desire to empathize and understand others and be committed to creating change, Tallim said.

"Change happens when enough people insist on it," she said.

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