

Racist memorabilia now on display at university museum

By: Staff Reports

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How does cultural intolerance get discussed without pointing out the intolerance, and how does discussion happen without examining examples?

The touchy subject of racism is the focus of the new exhibition opening Monday, April 23 in the University Museum, sponsored with the cooperation from the UTM Division of Student Affairs and the Minority Affairs Office. The implicit and explicit messages exhibited in material culture reflect social norms, expectations, and roles as recent as the 1990s. Not everything racist was produced in the South, and intolerance was not limited to or for white communities. "Hateful Things" from the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia is a travelling exhibition curated by a collector and faculty member at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Mich.

The objects in this exhibit should be viewed as offensive, but the exhibit was created and circulates to confront negative stereotypes, foster individual awareness, and encourage commitment to eliminating both overt and careless indifference. The Jim Crow Museum itself represents one of the largest publicly available collections of such material and is dedicated to confronting and countering negative stereotypes. "Our mission is to promote racial tolerance," reads its museum's mission statement "by helping people understand the historical and contemporary expressions of intolerance."

Because the exhibit contents can be interpreted as negative and confrontational, viewers are encouraged to do one of two things: visit the collection Web site at www.jimcrow.museum, or watch the documentary about the museum and its mission, before coming to see the exhibit.

Collector/curator Dr. David Pilgrim explains who Jim Crow was, presents a discussion and interpretation of stereotyping, and explains the rationale and message behind his collection. The film was featured this past February as part of the UTM Civil Rights Conference and has been seen by a number of student groups on campus since then. During the run of this exhibition the DVD "Jim Crow's Museum" is available publicly as DVD 586 and can be seen on the equipment in Media Services.

So, do we live in a racist society?

Perhaps, but it doesn't have to remain that way.