

Reaction to Local Hateful Exhibit



Jan. 17, 2006 -- A controversial exhibit opened to the public in Howell. Titled "hateful things," the exhibit features racist items from the Jim Crow era. It's the kind of memorabilia that has stirred up problems in the Howell community before.

You may recall the Ole Gray Nash auction house held a number of events last year featuring KKK items up for bid, and some people came to protest. People walked through in silence, looking at items hung on the walls from the Jim Crow era.

Clyde Riley, Howell: "I remember that meaning, when I was a kid, that he was a chef."

Clyde Riley grew up in Alabama during the 1930s and 40s. He's lived in Howell now for the past 30 years, but still the objects reminded him of a reality he once witnessed firsthand.

Clyde Riley: "I remember a song about Little Black Joe, "way down upon the Swanee River, far, far away, it was racist."

From pictures of Little Black Joe and Aunt Jemima to signs that depicted segregation, the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia at Ferris State University came to Howell, a city many people say is plagued with a stigma of racism, but Riley says that reputation doesn't exist anymore.

Clyde Riley: "I see no evidence of bigotry here today."

And others who live in the area agree, the city of Howell is no longer defined by its past.

Nancy Brehm, Howell: "I've lived here for 26 years, and the history you speak about is old news."

So Nancy Brehm used the exhibit as a tool. She's a teacher, and even though she says the exhibit can be hard to look at, she encouraged her students to go and walk through.

Nancy Brehm: "It's disturbing and impressive at the same time."

Her hope is that if the kids come, they'll better understand the history behind some of the topics she's teaching in class right now.

Nancy Brehm: "I remember Little Black Sambo."

A period of time Riley says people must learn from in order to move forward.