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Traveling Exhibit depicts Ferris' Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia

BIG RAPIDS – A traveling exhibition depicting Ferris State University's Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia will visit five Michigan colleges over the next six months.

"Hateful Things," a sampling of the 4,000 pieces that represent nearly 150 years of anti-Black, racist objects and images, was created by David Pilgrim, Ferris professor of sociology and museum curator, and Carrie Weis-Taylor, coordinator of FSU's Rankin Center Art Gallery. The museum is located in Ferris' College of Arts and Sciences and addresses the relationship between Jim Crow segregation and everyday objects that belittle African-Americans. Some examples are varied Jim Crow memorabilia and caricatured images of Blacks on postcards, games, ashtrays and drinking glasses.

The exhibit will appear in November at Mott Community College in Flint, Jan. 24-28 at Delta College in University Center, Feb. 1-11 at Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Feb. 15-28 at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, and April 3-9 at Spring Arbor University.

Before departing, "Hateful Things" will debut at the Ferris Rankin Gallery with special viewing hours on Nov. 5 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Nov. 6 from noon to 3 p.m., and Nov. 8 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. A reception will be held on Nov. 5 from 4-6 p.m.

Dr. Pilgrim grew up in Mobile, AL, where he attended segregated schools. One day while shopping, he saw a small "Mammy" figurine for sale. "I bought it and destroyed it in front of the man who sold it to me," he said.

For years after that incident, young Pilgrim purchased and disposed of racially insulting items wherever he found them. The sheer volume of merchandise forced him, eventually, to change his tactic.

"I found them at flea markets and garage sales as a kid," said Pilgrim. "Items would offend me, and I'd buy them to destroy them. I got older and recognized the historical significance of these items. I stopped destroying them and started collecting them."

Pilgrim views the collection of images and artifacts not as a traditional museum, but as a learning and teaching laboratory. He seeks to use the images of intolerance to teach tolerance. "I have a goal to create a room that when people come into that room, it changes the way they talk about race," he said.

A visit to The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia can evoke strong emotional feelings and has stirred coverage in newspapers from Miami to Los Angeles. A documentary by Pilgrim and Ferris Professor Clayton Rye, "Jim Crow's Museum," was chosen in 2004 for Best Documentary at the Flint Film Festival, Best Professional Video and Best of the Show at the Grand Rapids Festival of the Arts, and Audience Choice Award at the Stony Brook (NY) Digital Video Festival.

Ferris is beginning a capital campaign to raise funds in support of moving the museum to a larger, permanent home on campus. The traveling exhibit will be used as part of this fundraising effort.

The museum's objectives are to:

- Collect, exhibit and preserve objects and collections related to racial segregation, civil rights and anti-Black caricatures.
- Promote the scholarly examination of historical and contemporary expressions of racism.
- Serve as a teaching resource for Ferris State University courses which deal, directly or indirectly, with the issues of race and ethnicity.
- Serve as an educational resource for scholars and teachers at the state, national and international levels.
- Promote racial understanding and healing.
- Serve as a resource for civil rights and human rights organizations.

