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YOU HAVEN'T LIVED HERE UNTIL ...

You've seen the Jim Crow Museum at Ferris State

The what? It's a museum at Ferris State University in Big Rapids dedicated to the hateful images that have been used to sell things from soap to pancake mix, but really just fostered stereotypes and racism. There are thousands of artifacts, from postcards to cookie jars donated by sociology professor David Pilgrim.

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Who is Jim Crow? Jim Crow started out as a character in a show in the 1830s -- a white man in blackface creating a stereotype for other white people to laugh at. Later, Jim Crow was a period of legal segregation that started just after the Civil War and lasted into the 1960s.

And what are the images? The smiling mammy. The rambunctious pickaninny. The subservient Uncle Tom. Others grossly exaggerate black people's features. All are meant to dehumanize, and even today, they are seen and recognized throughout society.

If they're so bad, why save them? The museum's Web site, http://jimcrow.museum, says, "The museum was founded on the idea that everyday racist items can be used to teach visitors how to recognize and confront racism."

How do I go? It's open only by appointment. Contact it through the site. It's raising money to move to a bigger space with regular hours.

By Free Press staff

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