

Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia

The **Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia** at Ferris State University, Big Rapids, Michigan, displays a wide variety of everyday artifacts depicting the history of racist portrayals of African Americans in American popular culture.^[1] The mission of the Jim Crow Museum is to use objects of intolerance to teach tolerance and promote social justice.^[2]

The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia has a collection of over 10,000 objects, primarily created between the 1870s and the 1960s. It also includes contemporary objects. The museum is named after Jim Crow, a song-and-dance caricature of blacks that by 1838 had become a pejorative expression meaning "Negro". When at the end of the 19th century American legislatures passed laws of racial segregation directed against blacks, these statutes became known as the Jim Crow laws.^[3]

The museum demonstrates shows racist ideas and anti-black images within American culture during the Jim Crow era and contemporary forms of racism. Stories about African American achievements along with artifacts of the Civil Rights Movement, are also found within the museum.

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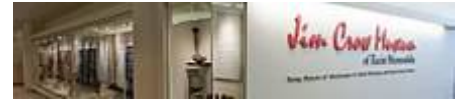
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History

David Pilgrim, a former professor of sociology, and now Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion at Ferris State University, started to collect racist memorabilia in flea markets across America in the 1970s. By 1996, the collection had grown to over 2,000 pieces, and Pilgrim decided to donate the collection to Ferris State because "it needed a real home."^[4] The collection was housed for 15 years in a small space, utilized as a teaching tool for university classes.^[4] In 2012 the Jim Crow Museum was opened to the public as a larger, brand new facility, located in the lower level of Ferris State University's FLITE Building.

Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia



Location within Michigan

Established	1996
Location	Big Rapids, Michigan
Coordinates	43.68748°N 85.48243°W﻿ / ﻿43.68748; -85.48243
Type	History museum
Collection size	10,000
Curator	David Pilgrim
Owner	Ferris State University
Website	www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/ (https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/)



Who and What was Jim Crow

Collection

The Jim Crow Museum houses over ten thousand artifacts; the majority of the objects were created between the 1870s and the 1960s. The largest portion of the museum's holdings is anti-black memorabilia, for example, mammy candles, Nellie fishing lures, picaninny ashtrays, sambo masks, and lawn jockeys. The museum also displays Jim Crow memorabilia—books, signs, tickets, brochures, and photographs—that promoted racial segregation.

Mission

The Jim Crow Museum at Ferris State University strives to become a leader in social activism and in the discussion of race and race relations. Many of today's students have only a vague understanding of the impact of Jim Crow laws and customs. More specifically, they lack a fundamental knowledge of restrictive covenants, literacy tests, poll taxes, and other oppressive features of the Jim Crow racial hierarchy. The Jim Crow Museum offers students an opportunity to learn about this period in the history of the United States.

Most of the objects displayed in the museum were created with the intent of belittling and humiliating African Americans. Nevertheless, the museum's staff believes that these objects can be used to fuel intelligent discussions about race, race relations, and racism.

Woodbridge N. Ferris, the founder of Ferris Institute (now Ferris State University), challenged faculty, staff, and students to "make the world a better place". The Jim Crow Museum is one attempt by the university to improve the world. This is seen in the museum's mission to "use objects of intolerance to teach tolerance and promote social justice".



Caricatures of stereotypes of African Americans.

Exhibitions

The Jim Crow Museum is open and is free to the public. The Museum features six exhibit areas:^[2]

1. Who and What was Jim Crow
2. Jim Crow Violence
3. Jim Crow and Anti-Black Imagery
4. Achieving Despite Resistance
5. The Battle Continues (contemporary forms of racism)
6. A New Wave of Egalitarianism (positive representations of African Americans)

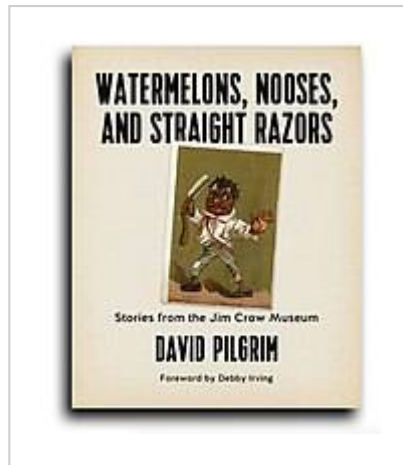
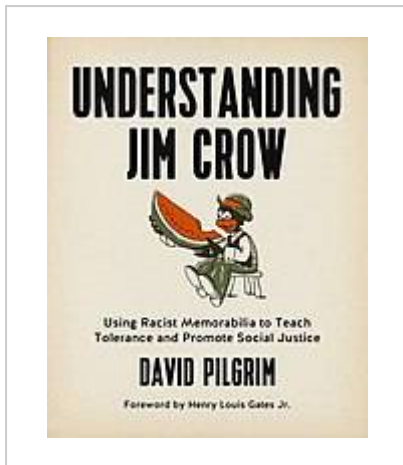
The Museum also offers a comprehensive timeline of the African American experience in the United States. The timeline is divided into six sections: Africa Before Slavery, Slavery in America, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, Civil Rights and Post Civil Rights.



Mammy figurines in the Jim Crow Museum.

Publications

David Pilgrim, the founder, and curator of the Jim Crow Museum, has published two books related to the museum's collection and mission. *Understanding Jim Crow* introduces readers to the Jim Crow Museum and how the museum uses racist memorabilia to teach tolerance and promote social justice. *Watermelons, Nooses, and Straight Razors* is a compilation of stories from the Jim Crow Museum.



See also

- [Jew with a coin](#)
- [Jim Crow laws](#)
- [Racial segregation in the United States](#)
- [Social justice](#)

References

1. Fox, Helen (2009). *When Race Breaks Out: Conversations about race and racism in college classrooms* (<https://books.google.com/?id=8viZoVR4moMC&pg=PA202&dq=Jim+Crow+Museum#v=onepage&q=Jim%20Crow%20Museum&f=false>) (Revised ed.). New York: Peter Lang Publishing. p. 202. ISBN 978-1-4331-0592-0.
2. "Jim Crow Museum - Ferris State University" (<https://ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/index.htm>). *ferris.edu*. Retrieved 2018-01-30.
3. Woodward, C. Vann and McFeely, William S. (2001), *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. p. 7
4. Householder, Mike (April 19, 2012). "Newest Michigan museum showcases racist artifacts" (<https://news.yahoo.com/newest-michigan-museum-showcases-racist-artifacts-070835385.html>). *Yahoo! News*. Associated Press. Retrieved June 6, 2012.

External links

- [Official website](https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/) (<https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/>)
- [Jim Crow Museum](https://www.facebook.com/JimCrowMuseum) (<https://www.facebook.com/JimCrowMuseum>) on [Facebook](#)
- [Jim Crow Museum channel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=channel/UCZT_fgDJ4NYvu70ZDTSm-Jg) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=channel/UCZT_fgDJ4NYvu70ZDTSm-Jg) on [YouTube](#)
- [Virtual Tour](https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=8miUGt2wCtB) (<https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=8miUGt2wCtB>)

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