

Race in Prague

Written by Anonymous Contributor, CET Film Production at FAMU | Fall 2018

I'm a Korean immigrant who grew up in a suburb of Ohio then Tennessee, and finally escaped to the West coast for college. As such, I felt prepared for experiences of racism while abroad, but I must admit that I spent a significant amount of time wondering how I might come to better like myself, or not, during my time in Europe.

I've dealt with more encounters of racism and discrimination than I can remember, and these experiences are sprinkled across the amount of times I've moved (25+) in my 21 years. I can attribute a large part of my gradual self-hatred to what kinds of media I consumed while growing up. I rarely saw people like me on screen – I only ever looked up to masculine white heroes; the very few Asians on-screen were never represented accurately, but rather perpetuated of harmful tropes and stereotypes; I worshipped European standards of beauty, tried to assimilate, and in the process, came to seriously hate who I was, what I looked like, where I came from.

I wanted to use film to learn more about myself, to unlearn negative messages that I internalized, and disrupt harmful representations that Hollywood creates – to show the world the real versions of myself and people like me.

Surprisingly, I never once dealt with an overt racist interaction during my time in Prague, unlike my friends who were brown or black women. I assumed this was because of the growing "soft power" influence of Korean culture, in which the Western world is paying much more attention to Korean music, food, style, etc. Also, a large Vietnamese population lives and works in the Czech Republic, making the atmosphere more friendly toward people who appear as such (I was asked if I was Vietnamese pretty often).

I had prepared myself to diffuse such encounters and walk away, but I found that people were genuinely curious about who I was. They wanted to learn about me and my history, and although my appearance enabled such conversations initially, I found myself making Czech friends as I quickly grew comfortable with talking about myself and where I come from. I felt a lot more comfortable in Prague over my childhood experiences in White-dominated areas of the United States. A lot more.

If you're reading this, I sincerely hope that race is not something that creates apprehension for your experience. And if it is, that's okay. Race is something to be seen fully; we don't live in a color-blind world. I promise you are so much stronger, smarter, and more prepared than you may feel. Get out there!