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Young People From the U.S. Travel to Cuba and Break the Siege

By Manolo De Los Santos and Kate Gonzales

Author Bio: This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).

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[Article Body:]

It's a hot and crowded Tuesday morning in the Yoruba Cultural Center in Havana, and the air sticks to the skin. You can hear the fluttering of paper as people fan themselves, and a surprise blackout takes out the sound system with a flicker of the lights. And yet, 150 young organizers from the U.S. sit shoulder to shoulder, listening attentively to two leaders of the cultural movement in Cuba. They line up and down the hall with the hope of squeezing in their question—on climate change, on housing, on fighting racism, about hope in the future—before time is up.

This energy permeates through and drives the 2023 May Day Brigade: a sharp sense of curiosity honed by the responsibility of this historic undertaking. The International Peoples' Assembly invited young grassroots activists from across the diversity of struggles in the U.S. to participate in a crucial exchange in Cuba, an experience deprived of them and their generation by the 60-year-old blockade. The largest group to travel in decades, this brigade is an intervention into the endless attempts of the United States to silence and strangle the successes of the Cuban socialist project. As Zuleica Romay, director of the Afro-American Studies program at Casa de las Américas, said in their morning panel, "Cuba is also a victim of its own success."

And yet, these successes are contagious and hard-earned. On their very first day, these young people spoke to leaders pioneering the very sectors they fight to build back at home. Tenant organizers learned about the housing situation, as over 80 percent of Cubans are homeowners (the rest are on a path to ownership), but also the difficulty of building enough for a growing population burdened by the blockade. Black leaders asked about anti-racism efforts after 500 years of colonialism sowed the seeds of segregation and violence on the island. Those fighting for queer liberation in the U.S. learned about the historic Families Code, passed and edited by six million Cubans who proposed hundreds of thousands of changes. The breakthrough code spans all issues of the family unit from same-sex marriage to elder care, to surrogacy, to non-normative family structures. Abel Prieto, president of Casa de las Américas, told us: "There is something the U.S. government has never understood which is that something was planted here in Cuba, this principle of social justice, of people's democracy, of equality, of people's participation in the political process. And this has not been weakened." Meanwhile, these young organizers repeatedly explain the current regression of trans rights in Florida as the state passes a broad ban on trans-affirming care—a ban that goes as far as stripping parental rights from those who support their trans children. Many in the crowd nod their heads in agreement.

Still, it is not lost on these young organizers that they have arrived in Cuba in a moment of profound economic crisis. As they admire the famous Cuban cars from the '50s roll through Old Havana, they know how precious fuel is at this very moment, prevented by the blockade. Biden shows no sign of lifting the sanctions, nor taking the country off the State Sponsors of Terrorism list that prevents it from accessing the global financial system. It is this system of unilateral coercive measures that makes it almost impossible for young people to witness the achievements of a socialist process. It is U.S. foreign policy at its most irrational and its most deadly, as it continues its siege on Cuba. It has never been more urgent to lift the blockade,

for the survival of the Cuban people, and for the future of the United States. These young organizers are fighting for a better world, and this first day is just a glimpse into a future with normal relations between the U.S. and this island just 90 miles away.