

# The Brigadistas Speak!

"I have been on the Venceremos Brigade three times now, and wish I could go back every year. The first time, I went to see Cuba for myself. While I already had firm beliefs about the political system in this country, I had never put those ideas to any test for I had not seen another system in action, a revolution still happening. Every time I go, I find out something different about race, about gender, about political theory vs. practice, about work and labor, about what healthcare should be, and what education could be...With everything going on in this country, it's amazing to see the possibilities of another system, to experience a truly international and humane perspective in government, and to see for myself more and more just why our government doesn't want us to see Cuba. When you live in the U.S., it's nearly impossible to find out that Cubans fought against apartheid in South Africa, or started up a free medical school for all of Latin America during their worst economic times! It's hard to imagine free healthcare. It's amazing to see their intense focus on education, and youth. I can only imagine what they will be capable of when we get this unjust and cruel embargo lifted. I travel to Cuba to exercise my right to travel, to fight the embargo, and to bring what I have learned about struggle back home. And the Brigade is amazing because it provides a way to protest the restrictions and the embargo, and really talk with many Cubans- students, people in healthcare, farm workers, women's groups, children, etc., while working with them in solidarity.

-Kendra Guild, 27th, 31st, and 34th Brigades,  
and planning on the 35th



"There really is no way for me to fully describe with words my experience in Cuba this summer. Suffice it to say that the experience has had a profound impact on my worldview—nothing looks the same about the world I knew pre-Cuba. Cuba has become the standard by which I measure my own country's government. I can see now why the U.S. government is so concerned about its citizens exercising their Constitutional right to travel to Cuba. Materially poor Cuba is a living indictment against the negligence of the U.S. government to its own people. The richest nation that has ever existed in history—lags far behind this little island 90 miles off its coast, economically handicapped by an immorally imposed blockade. By going to Cuba I learned a great deal about myself, and the society from which I came. I strongly recommend that anyone who has the chance take a trip with the Venceremos Brigade to Cuba, personal growth is almost guaranteed. Don't take my word for it though, find out for yourself and just go!"

-Jashaun Sadler, 34th Brigade





“I spoke with the man about his experiences in the war. He told me his stories about fighting for another country’s freedom. Then I passed him a piece of corn off the stalk and he put it in the sack. See, we were both working together on a farm harvesting corn. We, the brigadistas, were staying at an agricultural school in Bayamo, and on this day a group of veterans had come to speak with us. They were a group of veterans of the Cuban foreign wars who had fought in other countries and were scheduled to come speak with us for three hours that afternoon about their experiences. During our days at the school, we worked in the farm and in the fields, and on this day we were harvesting corn. But they showed up early at 8 in the morning and worked in the fields with us. We picked corn, ate, and spoke with them through lunch. Then we still met and had our group discussion. So we were able to work and walk and talk with them and have personal conversations with them. Oh yeah, then the next day we climbed up the Sierra Maestra and walked through the footsteps of the Cuban Revolutionaries...”

For me the brigade gave me an opportunity to see history with my own eyes. On my first Brigade (2001) I saw the creation of the Cuban Revolution and it’s lasting monuments; both in stone and in the people. Then we went to Carnival! On my second Brigade (2003) I walked the streets of the Malecon in Havana and spoke with people on the street about their lives in Cuba. Then we went to Carnival! We were able to get a first-hand experience of how present-day Cuban@s live and the thus-far results of that Revolution. The brigade gave me an opportunity to see life with my own eyes. To see the possibility of another way of life. The American Government is afraid of letting people see this possibility, let alone how successful this society has become – and could be. I go on the Brigade because I recognize that possibility exists, and the Brigade lets me see it for myself.”

- Isaac Weiler, 32<sup>nd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Brigades

“It was a wonderful learning experience for me. I was able to go back to my community and answer many questions to my conservative/democratic/liberal friends. I am making it a point to share information with my circle of friends. Everyone, I believe, should be encouraged to participate and travel to Cuba on such trips...”

I visited a family of friends and another friend brought a friend who was a medical student and I asked about their medical programs and how they encouraged them to serve in the most underrepresented areas of Cuba and the world. Max told a story about giving peanuts to a girl who shared them with all her little friends. That was valuable to me. We all gather stories and sometimes it is those small details that help put the big picture together... I found the trip to be one that enriches my whole concept of the world and I already am involved and aware of the imperial dilemma.”

- Australia Fernandez, 34<sup>th</sup> Brigade

