

## **Aisha Brown**

Upon my first trip to Cuba, I had no idea what to expect. For my entire life the image of Cuba was presented to me as a dichotomy: land of oppression versus the Western hemisphere's only free state. Would I encounter an island of a people living under the thumb of an authoritarian regime or would I find a nation liberated from the world's -isms?

Neoliberalism, imperialism, racism, sexism: these are all the -isms I have personally lived through, spent countless hours studying, and as a social entrepreneur have dedicated my life to eradicate. I came to Cuba as an activist for communities of color, a professional, a scholar, and an Afro-Latina to see what a revolution for liberation from the -isms looks like. What I found was a country that admittedly claimed itself imperfect, but one poised to willingly and proactively address the problems in its society. The government is taking proactive steps through laws, education, media, special task forces and committees encouraging Cubans to be more inclusive of LGBTQ communities and to strive for gender and racially equality.

As someone who has worked with movements and communities that have struggled so long to receive state recognition and even acknowledgement, the concept of an entire nation built upon social organizing was beautiful to behold. The Literary Museum, Latin American School of Medicine, and the school for art instructors in Matanzas took my breath away. Coming from a nation where classrooms are getting larger, art programs are the first to be cut, schools are shut down for inefficiency, and the supreme irony of a comprehensive health care planned being debated during my stay in Cuba, made it more impressive that this nation classified as a Third World country would collect its limited resources to uplift its culture, education, and health of its citizens.

Cuba is not perfect and I believe Cubans will be the first to tell you this. But I believe them to be unmatched in their willingness to make their society better.