

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Azira Gonzalez Sanchez Hill

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Hill, Azira Gonzalez Sanchez, 1923-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Azira Gonzalez Sanchez Hill,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 4, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:55:27).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civil rights activist and registered nurse Azira Gonzalez Sanchez Hill (1923 - ) has had a long and prolific career in Atlanta in the areas of school health care and civil rights. After her retirement, Hill became involved in various philanthropic endeavors, most notably her involvement with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, for which she was named a lifetime director in 2008. Hill was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 4, 2005, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_184
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Azira Gonzalez Hill, referred to as Atlanta's Angel for her works as a civil rights activist and nurse, was born in Holguin, Cuba, on October 28, 1923, to a large working class family of eight siblings. As a young woman, Hill worked diligently as a student to provide opportunities that would enable her to flourish outside of Cuba; because of her academic achievements, she was finally afforded the opportunity to come to the United States to study through her church. Hill

attended Bethune Cookman, Morris Brown, and Georgia State University, ultimately becoming a registered nurse. Hill married Jesse Hill, a prominent civil rights figure, with whom she had two daughters.

Hill worked as a nurse at Grady Hospital Educational Department, Price High School, and Ralph Bunche Middle School, before her retirement. After her retirement, Hill remained an active member of Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church; the Azalea Links, Inc.; the Inquirer Literary Club; the Circlelets; and the Quettes. Hill also founded the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Talent Development Program at the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, which named its scholarship fund in her honor. Hill has been involved with the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Center's Board of Directors; the Board of Directors of the Center for Puppetry Arts; the Southeastern Flower Show; the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra; and St. Joseph's Mercy Care. In 2008, Hill was named a life director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, an honor which at the time only belonged to five other individuals.

Hill has received awards from the Association of the National Negro Musicians for promoting Black music and musicians, and the Martin Luther King Federal Commission for her service. Hill also received the Golden Rule Award for community service from J.C. Penney; the Ralph Bunche Middle School Medal; the School Nurses Association for Merit and Distinction; the Lexus Leader of the Arts Award; and a Mercy Care Award for Service.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Azira Gonzalez Sanchez Hill was conducted by Jodi Merriday on August 4, 2005, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and registered nurse Azira Gonzalez Sanchez Hill (1923 - ) has had a long and prolific career in Atlanta in the areas of school health care and civil rights. After her retirement, Hill became involved in various philanthropic endeavors, most notably her involvement with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, for which she was named a lifetime director in 2008.

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## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

## **Restrictions on Use**

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## **Related Material**

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## **Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### **Persons:**

Hill, Azira Gonzalez Sanchez, 1923-

Merriday, Jodi (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Hill, Azira Gonzalez Sanchez, 1923---Interviews

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African American nurses--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews

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African American women civic leaders--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews

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African American philanthropists--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Civil Rights Activist

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Registered Nurse

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers|MedicalMakers

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## **Administrative Information**

### **Custodial History**

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### **Preferred Citation**

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Azira Gonzalez Sanchez Hill, August 4, 2005. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Azira Gonzalez Sanchez Hill, Section A2005\_184\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:25 2005/08/04

Azira Gonzalez Sanchez Hill was born on October 28, 1923 in Holguin in the Oriente Province of Cuba. Her mother, Dominga Sanchez, grew up in Holguin, where she worked in her step-father's restaurant. Hill's father, Jose Gonzalez, was raised in a close-knit family that lived by a sugar mill near Holguin. Hill's eight siblings often played music in their large home. After Hill's father passed away around the time of the 1933 revolution in Cuba, her mother supported the family by tailoring men's suits, and her eldest brother left school to work. With her mother often tired due to long work hours and having no older sisters, Hill confided in a cousin that lived with them. When Hill's mother could no longer afford to send her to school, their Methodist pastor invited Hill to move to the United States to finish her education. She accepted and, despite her lack of English or experience abroad, graduated high school in Jacksonville, Florida. Hill also narrates her photographs.

African American nurses--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews.  
African American women civic leaders--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews.

African American philanthropists--Georgia--Atlanta--  
Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Azira Gonzalez Sanchez Hill, Section  
A2005\_184\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:57 2005/08/04

Azira Gonzelaz Sanchez Hill grew up in an ethnically diverse neighborhood of Holguin, Cuba. As a young student, she was supported by a kind teacher and her brothers. Upon moving to the U.S., Hill attended Boylan-Haven School, a boarding school in Jacksonville, Florida, with Johnnetta Cole and her sister, HistoryMaker MaVynee “Beach Lady” Betsch. Hill was able to communicate with only one person, a teacher from Mexico. Her Methodist pastor put her in touch with a white couple who became her surrogate family, but she was unwelcome at their church. Hill also experienced discrimination from peers who bullied her because of her accent and hair. Despite these obstacles, Hill graduated and enrolled at Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida. After struggling with school costs and lack of academic support, Hill transferred to Grady Memorial Hospital School of Nursing in Atlanta, Georgia, where she met her future husband, Jesse Hill. The year after her graduation in 1954, the two were married in Holguin.

Video Oral History Interview with Azira Gonzalez Sanchez Hill, Section  
A2005\_184\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:05 2005/08/04

Azira Gonzalez Sanchez Hill met Jesse Hill at Big Bethel A.M.E. Church in Atlanta, Georgia. He convinced her to go on a date with him, despite the strict social regulations at her nursing school. After they married, she worked as a nurse at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta and had two daughters. Unable to obtain day shifts due to racial discrimination, Hill became a school nurse at Luther Judson Price High School. After a hiatus to care for her family, she returned to work as a nurse at Ralph J. Bunche Middle School when her oldest daughter graduated high school. Hill was a stalwart supporter of her husband’s civil rights activism. Although she never marched or allowed herself to be arrested due to risk of deportation, she was one of many women who participated in sit-ins. Hill explains how her Cuban identity relates to her civil rights

activism and how the United States' embargo of Cuba harms impoverished Cuban citizens. She also reflects on Latino immigrants' experience of exclusion in the United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Azira Gonzalez Sanchez Hill, Section A2005\_184\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:00 2005/08/04

Azira Sanchez Gonzalez Hill has been a member of Big Bethel A.M.E. Church in Atlanta, Georgia for over fifty years. Butler Street was renamed Jesse Hill Jr. Drive in honor of her husband, pleasing Hill since the street ran by her church. Bethel Church, a significant gathering spot during the Civil Rights Movement, has also sponsored many youth programs and helped revitalize Auburn Avenue. Noting a dearth of black audience members, Hill convinced the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Board to establish the Talent Development Program to provide music classes for African American and Latino students. She has also been involved with the Atlanta Botanical Gardens' Southeastern Flower Show and the Center for Puppetry Arts. Hill describes her husband's civil rights achievements, her grandchildren's educational accomplishments and her concerns for the African American and Latino communities. She talks about her friendships, values and the importance of history. She reflects upon her life, legacy and the rewards of nursing.