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Revolutionary Activism

My great-great grandfather was Francisco Manuel Gonzalez born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic on June 6, 1901. He lived a long life, dying at 101 years old. Throughout his life he helped others and was a part of many impactful decisions especially during the civil rights movement. Learning about his story has helped me understand the part of time in history when there was a lot of segregation and struggles for African-Americans and their civil rights. Through my research I learned it took a lot of effort and time to help with racial injustice. Knowing that my ancestors were a part of positive changes, it encourages me to continue the same purpose of helping others.

To begin my research to find out more details about how he made a difference, I interviewed his daughter, Lucy Gonzalez, who is my great-grandmother. She shared that he moved from Santo Domingo when he was 19 years old to New York City. He began working in hotels as a waiter. He worked his way up to head waiter at the St. Regis New York, a very prestigious hotel. My great grandmother explained that, "During those days the black men and women were not allowed to serve the guests, they were only allowed to clean and be in the kitchen." She went on to say that, "He wanted fairness! My father didn't like that the black men couldn't serve like him. So he organized a sit-in. His efforts led to positive changes for the black

staff and were recognized by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.” She said, “He received a letter from Martin Luther King Jr. thanking him for his actions.”

After interviewing my great-grandmother I continued my research to find articles and evidence to explain more about these events. I discovered that my great-great grandfather was part of an international union called the Local 6. The union is part of the Hotel and Gaming Traders Council which helps hotel employees have workers rights. From the union’s website, hotelworkers.org, I found an article titled, “Remembering Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 's 1957 address to our Union.” The facts matched those that my great- grandmother shared with me. The article explains that the Local 6 Union befriended Martin Luther King Jr. even though huge parts of the country did not. The article highlights a special event that took place on May 21, 1957. My family has a photograph from this day that shows the St. Regis hotel owners, Local 6 members, including my great-great grandfather, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The event was for the Local 6 to recognize Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. ’s efforts by awarding him the Better Race Relations Award along with a \$500 check. The support from the Local 6 Union meant a lot to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and he gave a speech to the union by sharing a powerful message. He said, “Those of us who stand amid the bleak and desolate midnight of man’s inhumanity to man are given new hope for the emerging daybreak of freedom and justice when we know such organizations exist and there are such persons of good will. I am very happy to know of the great record of this Local, of this trade Union, to know what you have done already in the area of civil rights and what you will do in the future. It gives us a great deal of courage, it makes me feel deeply encouraged.”

In conclusion, I've learned that my ancestor Francisco Manuel Gonzalez was part of a Union that made an important impact in our history and the civil rights movement. His efforts along with other hotel workers in the union went through a lot of hard times to make positive changes possible. His story and the history I've learned more about has made an impact on me, making me want to help people through tough times. I will always remember his kindness and what his generosity towards African-Americans did to make a difference.



