

## **What the Gettysburg Address Means to Me by Niomi Sterling**

During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln's primary goals came to include the end of the South's refusal to abolish slavery and the freedom of all African-American slaves. One hundred and forty-five years later it brings joy to my heart to see our nation free and united. This was the product of our 16<sup>th</sup> president, Abraham Lincoln, and the message he left us in his infamous Gettysburg Address. The Gettysburg Address and the Civil War hold a personal space in my heart as an American child born to a family with Caribbean roots (my father being born in Jamaica and my mother born in New York City but of Puerto Rican ethnicity). Without the Gettysburg Address there would only be room for my family on the bottom of the economic pyramid.

For a moment think about what President Lincoln said in the Address. "It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have so nobly advanced." In my opinion, this is the most influential statement in the address. Here Lincoln tells the nation that the fallen soldiers were just the beginning of change in society, and that it was up to the people and generations to come to carry on the fight for justice for all Americans. Even today there are still racial and social injustices that plague our society. A recent example would be the Federal Emergency Management Administration's response to the people of Hurricane Katrina. Although it's not a fact that the delayed response FEMA had was the product of racial or social discrimination, one can infer that since the 9<sup>th</sup> ward, a part of Louisiana that was destroyed, was mainly populated by low income African Americans it appeared as though the government had less concern for those people. If you compare the reaction to 9/11 to that of Hurricane Katrina it is painfully obvious that the victims and families of 9/11, who were of higher income and mostly Caucasian, were given immediate attention and

compensation for their loss while victims of Katrina still live in FEMA trailers. The government's response warrants questioning whether the government is dedicated to the unfinished work that Lincoln started.

In conclusion, Lincoln stated that we should not let the soldiers die in vain. Essentially if we allow discrimination to continue then they would have died in vain. The Civil War gave me life. In a sense, without it, my parents may have never gotten the chance to conceive me. But the Gettysburg Address saved my future because it influenced people to believe that freedom needs to be what America stands for and it motivated them to fight for that belief. That fight gave me the chance to reap the benefits of being a free American and as long as I have that those soldiers will not have died in vain. So what does the Gettysburg Address mean to me? "Justice and Life" – the chance to live and let live.