

COMMENTARY / CULTURE

“These Are the Times!” – Say Thomas, Charles & Sheila!



Now although what I’m about to say may be a bit on the macabre side, words of wisdom and perspective widening often arise from the tombs of writers whose messages can resonate long after they’re dead.

Hold that thought for now.

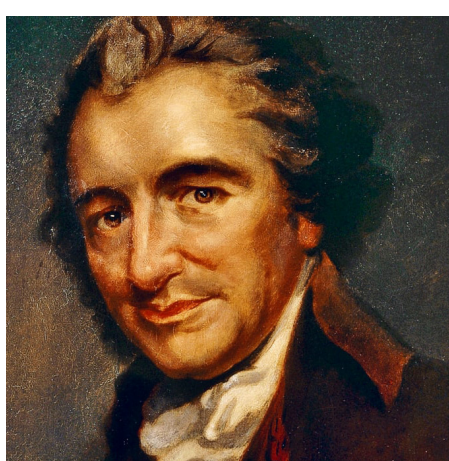
You see, no sooner than I was trying to recover from the horrific shootings of 10 African Americans in Buffalo, than I was punched in the gut with the news of 21 people, 19 of them kids, getting slaughtered by a sick gunman in an elementary school in Texas.

Before long, - c’mon we know the script - the carnage will repeat itself in shorter and shorter intervals of time as we again find ourselves in mental (and sometimes physical) lockdown grappling for solace and searching for answers to this growing uniquely American insanity.

Now all this got me thinking deeply about the word “times,” specifically how the word applies to today’s times and challenges. I thought about the words of Thomas Paine and Charles Dickens and what they wrote about the times they lived in over a century ago.

Wrote Paine in his 1776 *The American Crisis*, “These are the times that try men’s souls; the summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.”

Given what’s transpired in the world over the past few years, the



Thomas Paine

mass shootings, not only are our souls being tested, but our anger, patience, and stress levels are all teetering on irreversible collapse.

With that built up frustration, I turn to another famous author.

In his 1859 classic, *Tale of Two Cities*, novelist Charles Dickens started off with: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way--in short, the period was so far like the present period that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.”

Although for yours truly, these two often repeated quotes seemed to really apply to the times that we’re going through now, I was still left with a desire for something more, something that could possibly drive personal reflection, discomfort, accountability and behavioral change.

Now if on cue, I received, “Para-



Charles Dickens

dox of Our Time,” (author unknown) from a brilliant and talented author who I grew up with in Virginia, “Sheila.” Here’s how it reads:

“The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers. Wider freeways but narrower viewpoints. We spend more but have less. We buy more but enjoy less. We have bigger houses and smaller families. More conveniences but less time.

We have more degrees but less sense. More knowledge but less judgement. More experts yet more problems. More medicine but less wellness. We have multiplied our possessions but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom and hate too often.

We’ve learned how to make a living but not a life. We’ve added years to life but not life to years. We’ve been to the moon but have trouble crossing the street to meet new neighbors. We’ve conquered outer space but not inner space. We’ve cleaned up the air but polluted the soul. We’ve spilt the atom but not our prejudice. We have higher income but lower morals. We’ve become long in quantity but short on quality.

These are the times of tall men and short character, steep profits and shal-



Sheila

low relationships. These are the times of world peace but domestic warfare; more leisure but less fun; more food but less nutrition. These are the days of two incomes but more divorce; of fancier houses but broken homes. It is a time when there is much in the show window but nothing in the stockroom, a time when this message can call you to not accept the status quo and choose to make a difference or just ignore the timeliness of this message and continue to talk the talk and not walk the walk.”

So, once we mouth our usual humdrum “my thoughts and prayers” before kicking the can down the road to some higher being to deal with, take an honest look at the person in the mirror and ask him/her, “what will I do to make a difference, to interrupt the madness of these “worst of times?”

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This Week in African American History

CLIFFORD CHESTER SIMS
(MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT)

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LEARN
TO READ
READ
TO LEARN

Clifford Chester Sims (June 18, 1942 – February 21, 1968) was a United States Army soldier and a recipient of America’s highest military decoration—the Medal of Honor—for his actions in the Vietnam War.

Clifford Sims became an orphan at a young age; he lived in an abandoned school bus with relatives and was later adopted at the age of 13. He attended George Washington High School, where he met his wife Mary before joining the army. He later moved to Fort Bragg along with wife.

He was later sent to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to join Company D, 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. By 1968, he was serving as a Staff Sergeant. On February 21, 1968, he was engaged with enemy forces near Huế in the Republic of Vietnam. Sims’s squad was assaulting a heavily fortified position hidden within a densely wooded area when the soldiers were face-to-face with strong defensive fires.

Sims led his squad in a furious attack against an enemy force that had pinned down the 1st Platoon and threatened to completely overrun it. During the battle, he threw himself onto a triggered booby-trap device. He was killed in the subsequent explosion but was successful in protecting his fellow squad members from utter demise.

Staff Sergeant Sims was 25 at the time of his death. He made the ultimate sacrifice and was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

MEDAL OF HONOR CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. S/Sgt. Sims distinguished himself while serving as a squad

leader with Company D. Company D was assaulting a heavily fortified enemy position concealed within a dense wooded area when it encountered strong enemy defensive fire. Once within the woodline, S/Sgt. Sims led his squad in a furious attack against an enemy force which had pinned down the 1st Platoon and threatened to overrun it. His skillful leadership provided the platoon with freedom of movement and enabled it to regain the initiative. S/Sgt. Sims was then ordered to move his squad to a position where he could provide covering fire for the company command group and to link up with the 3d Platoon, which was under heavy enemy pressure. After moving no more than 30 meters S/Sgt. Sims noticed that a brick structure in which ammunition was stocked was on fire. Realizing the danger, S/Sgt. Sims took immediate action to move his squad from this position. Though in the process of leaving the area 2 members of his squad were injured by the subsequent explosion of the ammunition, S/Sgt. Sims’ prompt actions undoubtedly prevented more serious casualties from occurring. While continuing through the dense woods amidst heavy enemy fire, S/Sgt. Sims and his squad were approaching a bunker when they heard the unmistakable noise of a concealed booby trap being triggered immediately to their front. S/Sgt. Sims warned his comrades of the danger and unhesitatingly hurled himself upon the device as it exploded, taking the full impact of the blast. In so protecting his fellow soldiers, he willingly sacrificed his life. S/Sgt. Sims’ extraordinary heroism at the cost of his life is in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.



Sims’ wife, Mary, and the daughter he never held joined a 2016 Ceremony to dedicate Port St. Joe’s Clifford Sims Park. The Congressional Medal of Honor is being held by NJROTC cadet. Col. (Ret.) Cleo Hogan, Center, was Sims’s commanding officer 51 years ago today (Photo from Vietnam Veteran News.com).



Sims’ family members accept his Medal of Honor from Vice President Spiro Agnew