

## Ageless Time

*By Sheila Johnson*

As a teenager, I immediately came to the conclusion that people were old if they said, "Things are not like they used to be." I would instinctively listen for the judgment and criticism that would consistently flow from their mouths. I heard things such as, "The young women these days are wearing their skirts much too short." Or, "Their parents shouldn't let them wear all that makeup." "You need to get a haircut, young man, and turn your hat around the right way!" The old, old people encouraged parents of girls who became pregnant out of wedlock to send their single, precious daughters away to live with relatives or to live at a girls' school and consequently give their babies up for adoption. Old men made it clear that young men should sign up for the draft and go to war with pride – even if they didn't understand why we were fighting. Living to become a member of the "old" group seemed less and less attractive to me.

I came into this world during the eve of a Renaissance in our nation. Birthed in 1951, the mid-60s found me in the crux of the Civil Rights Movement, Women's Liberation, the Voting Rights Act of 1965; Armstrong and Aldrin making global history by landing on the moon; a sky rocketing demand for drugs; Black Olympian medalists raising their fists in social protest; and assassinations of four prophetic men: President John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and presidential hopeful Robert Kennedy.

People had long been fed up with traditions that served injustice and personal greed on gold-lined platters. Women were tired of iron-clad chastity and glass ceilings. Pop love songs morphed into not-so-lyrical notes about social consciousness and political statements. Female music groups such as the Supremes, the Shangrilas, the Dixie Cups, and a host of others sang and danced their way into a male dominated culture. Negroes and Colored People demanded to be called Black People. The Renaissance arrived and changed the face of America forever.

Post 1960 Renaissance and beyond have moved us into an age of information and intelligence that defies antiquated social traditions, provides paths to longer and healthier living, points to ways and means of positive economic movement, and yet dauntingly tests our morality. Unlike the Renaissance, we have not arrived. We have to keep working for humanitarian causes; keep toiling for social justice for every human; and continue to labor to eradicate all of the -isms.

My birth certificate and my granddaughter tell me that I am old now. I'm okay with that. Things are *not* the way they used to be. I will make some of the same judgmental statements as my elders, and I ask forgiveness now. I have lived to see many "firsts," among them the first Black President of the United States, the first Hispanic Judge of the Supreme Court, the first man on the moon, and I'm the first member of my family to earn a Master's Degree. I have witnessed many changes of dark hearts, heavy souls, and twisted minds for the better. Although we have not yet arrived, I am proud to be a living member of the "old" group—we are quite attractive!