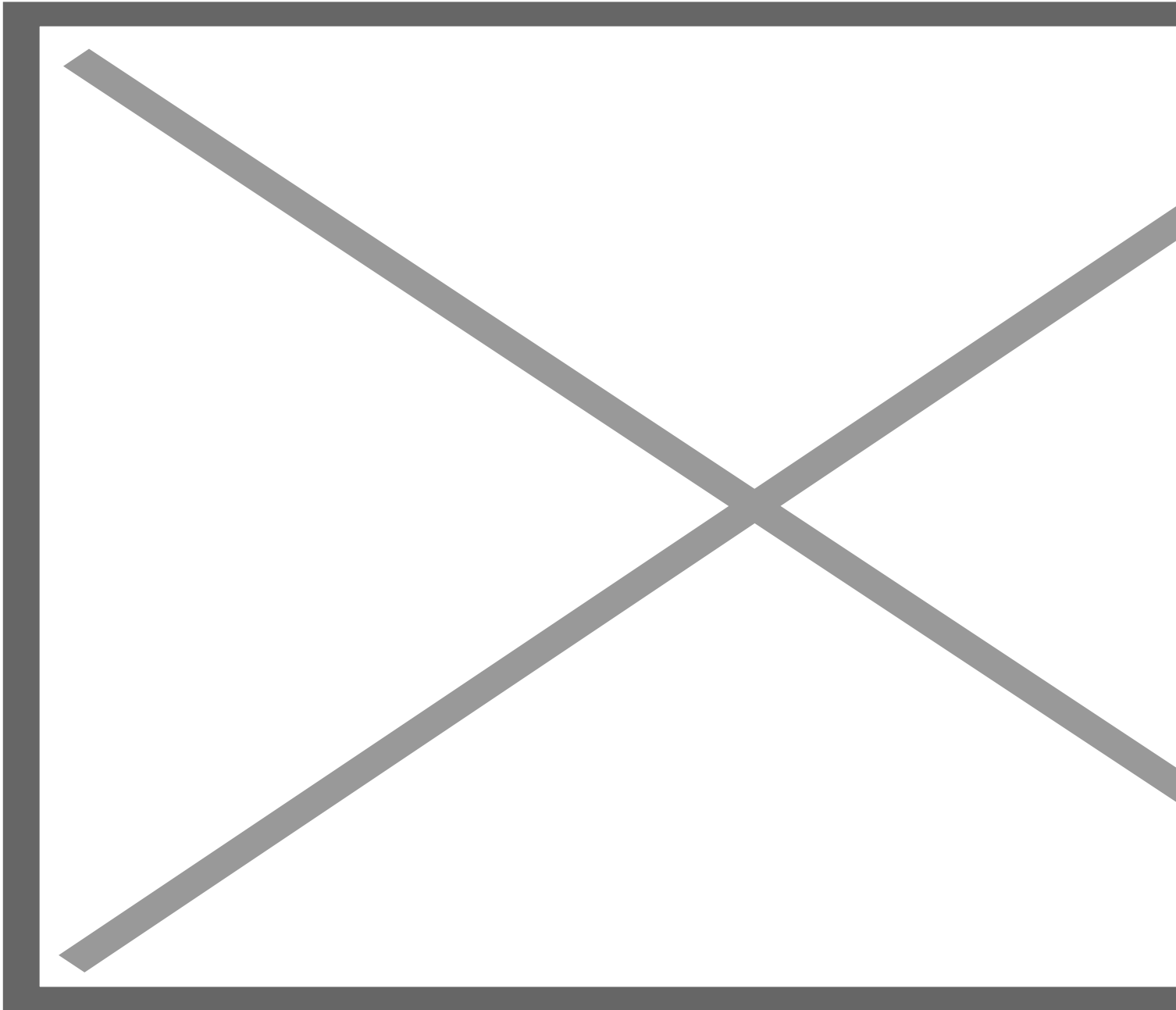


What history are we making?

I remember when my son first asked me what history is. I told him it's the story we write with our lives.

by [Kelly Brown Douglas](#) in the [December 2025](#) issue

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The Greensboro, NC, Woolworth's lunch counter—site of 1960 student protest against racial segregation—now at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History (Photo by Eric Chan / Creative Commons)

“We made the world we’re living in,” writes James Baldwin, “and we have to make it over.” Today these words ring truer than ever as we confront a deep moral crisis, one that threatens the very foundations of our democracy and the future we are shaping for generations to come.

We live in a time when standing for truth is labeled divisive, while embracing dehumanizing ideologies is praised as “viewpoint diversity.” Indifference is mistaken for neutrality, and silence for civility. This signals a time defined by moral compromise, if not outright moral disregard. Such a disquieting moral landscape allows harmful beliefs to become normal and false narratives to take hold. Most significantly, it undermines our moral imaginary—the vital capacity to envision and pursue a just and equitable future. Such a fraught moral reality poses one of the gravest threats to our democracy and to the world we hope to leave behind.

This moral decline plays out in laws, policies, and the militarized policing of our cities. It also plays out in battles over how history is told—in classrooms, in museums, and in the public square. Distorting or erasing uncomfortable truths about racial injustice, inequality, and resistance is not benign; it inflicts real moral harm. It denies the next generation the full story—the pain endured, the resilience displayed, and examples of moral courage from those who fought for justice. In so doing, it deprives them of the historical guides, tools, and resources to navigate an uncertain moral present and to foster a moral future. Those who would distort and erase the stories of the past recognize the power history can play—not only in defining the present but in shaping the future. They recognize that history matters.

I remember when my son first asked me what history is. I told him it’s the story we write with our lives. I would say the same today: history is not merely what happened but what we make of the present. It is how we live the time we are given. We are not innocent spectators but participants, even if we participate passively, in history’s unfolding.

So the question is clear: What history will we make, not only in the stories we tell but in those we live? What history will we leave behind?

To counter our fraught moral present, we need to cultivate a collective moral imaginary—the capacity to see beyond what is and aspire toward what could be. This means teaching truth even when it unsettles us, embracing accountability, and acting with moral courage in our various communities. Essentially, it means planting seeds of justice and truth in the stories we live and tell our children, as well as in public life. These are not naive gestures to get us through a despairing present. Rather, they are the foundation for a moral and just future. As Jesus might say, it’s about planting the mustard seeds of faith in what can be.

Faith and religious communities bear a unique responsibility in this work. They are rooted in teachings of justice, compassion, and human dignity, and they must stand unwavering in the aspiration of what could be. Their task is nothing less than to inspire courage, foster hope, and mobilize collective action toward a world that reflects our highest moral ideals—without moral compromise.

Just as systems and ideologies of untruth are constructed to sustain demoralizing injustice, we have the power—and the duty—to build systems and narratives of truth that dismantle it. The future is not fixed; it is shaped by the moral choices we make today, by the stories we decide to live and tell. We have to own the world we have made—and take responsibility for the world we make over.

I know this truth intimately. The freedoms I enjoy are rooted in the stories and struggles of my ancestors who were enslaved. They fought for a justice they knew they would never see, in hope for those who would follow. Their stories are stories of courage, truth, and moral resilience amid unspeakable terror and dehumanization. They refused to accept the lies of White supremacy or the distorted faith that claimed God sanctioned their

bondage. Instead they offered a counternarrative: a vision of human dignity and the fight for freedom. It's a vision that summons us to continue to make the world as it is over. This history they made with their lives is the history we must carry forward with ours.

"We made the world we're living in, and we have to make it over." In this moment of moral reckoning, Baldwin's words take on renewed urgency. The world we have made is shaped by both the courage of our moral imaginary but also by its failures. To make it over means confronting not only the injustices we inherit but also the indifference that sustains them. It means rebuilding the moral foundations of democracy with courage, truth, and justice as our tools.

We cannot undo what has been made, but we can choose how to make it over. Every act of truth telling, every refusal of silence, every step toward justice makes history—and moves us closer to a more moral future.