

Unshuttered

Poems

An award-winning author presents a portrait of Black America in the nineteenth century. *Unshuttered: Poems* is the vessel for poetic personae and a selection of antique photographs of Black Americans, which Patricia Smith has collected over the course of twenty years. In these hard-to-find images, men, women, and children peer at us from the past, stripped of their lives and histories. Smith's language and searing lines ghost-story the unnamed forebears who daguerreotype-stare from the page while backdropping the poet's own losses: We ache for fiction etched in black and white. Our eyes never touch. These tragic grays and bustles, mourners' hats plopped high upon our tamed but tangled crowns, strain to disguise what yearning does with us. This masterful and haunting mosaic is a search for lost histories, both personal and inherited, from an incendiary era in human history. Bound in black and white, these faces, staring back, find a home and resting place in the words of one of American literature's finest wordsmiths. In return, the wordsmith uncovers her own unknown history.

An award-winning author presents a portrait of Black America in the nineteenth century

Over the course of two decades, award-winning poet Patricia Smith has amassed a collection of rare nineteenth-century photographs of Black men, women, and children who, in these pages, regard us from the staggering distance of time. *Unshuttered* is a vessel for the voices of their incendiary and critical era. Smith's searing stanzas and revelatory language imbue the subjects of the photos with dynamism and revived urgency while she explores how her own past of triumphs and losses is linked inextricably to their long-ago lives: We ache for fiction etched in black and white. Our eyes never touch. These tragic grays and bustles, mourners' hats plopped high upon our tamed but tangled crowns, strain to disguise what yearning does with us. The poet's unrivaled dexterity with dramatic monologue and poetic form reanimates these countenances, staring back from such yesterdays, and the stories they may have told. This is one of American literature's finest wordsmiths doing what she does best—unreeling history to find its fierce and formidable lyric.



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