

# AGATE

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## A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Dear Reader,

I'm writing to tell you about our lead title for the Spring 2012 season: ***FREEMAN*** (Agate Bolden, 978-1-932841-64-0, May 15, 2012, \$16), the powerful new novel from Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist **Leonard Pitts, Jr.** *Freeman* takes place in the first few months after the Confederate surrender and Abraham Lincoln's assassination, following the paths of three unforgettable characters as they grapple with the realities of a post-slavery Southern society. **This is a suspenseful, engrossing love story set against a wrenching historical backdrop that will give readers a profound new understanding of what the Civil War and its aftermath meant to African Americans.**

Upon hearing the news of Lee's surrender, escaped slave Sam Freeman decides to leave his safe haven in Philadelphia and travel on foot through the war-torn South. He's compelled to embark on this dangerous journey in order to return to the Mississippi plantation he left 15 years before, in an attempt to find his wife, Tilda, the mother of his dead son. For her part, the desperate and demoralized Tilda is being forced by her former owner to walk at gunpoint from the charred remains of his Mississippi plantation, in search of territories to the west that will still respect his entitlements as a slave owner and Confederate officer. Meanwhile, Prudence Kent, a rich, headstrong young widow, travels from her home in Boston to Buford, Mississippi, to start a school for freed slaves and fulfill her abolitionist father's dying wish.

At its heart, *Freeman* is an indelible love story—sweeping, brutal, generous, patient—about the feelings these people were determined to honor despite the enormous constraints of the time. It also illuminates the heartbreaking, bewildering struggle faced by a newly freed people who had spent generations indoctrinated in the belief that they were property. Meticulously researched, unflinchingly honest, *Freeman* evokes a world at once alien and yet disturbingly familiar in its exploration of race and class, and creates a rich portrait of a deeply divided country trying to piece itself back together after a long, brutal war.

I hope you will consider *Freeman* for review coverage, or an interview with author **Leonard Pitts, Jr.** As a veteran journalist himself (the 2004 Pulitzer winner for commentary), Mr. Pitts knows how to deliver a great interview. **This is an important and profound work about one of the most tumultuous times in our nation's history, from one of the most celebrated African-American voices of our generation.** Again, this is Agate's lead title for Spring 2012, and we are devoting significant resources to its promotion, including a major multi-city tour (details included below). If you have any questions, please contact me at [seibold@agatepublishing.com](mailto:seibold@agatepublishing.com) or at 847.475.4457.

Yours,

Doug Seibold

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## Advance Praise for *Freeman*

### June 2012 IndieNext List Pick from IndieBound

“Leonard Pitts has a passion for history and a gift for storytelling. Both shine in this story of love and redemption, which challenges everything we thought we knew about how our nation dealt with its most stubborn stain.”

*Gwen Ifill, PBS, author of The Breakthrough*

“Post-Civil War America is fertile ground for novelists, but few have tilled it with such grace and majesty as Leonard Pitts. In *Freeman*, Pitts weaves a beguiling, cinematic love story against a rich tapestry of American history, evoking unforgettable characters in a narrative that could easily replace a shelf of textbooks. What a splendid read!”

*Herb Boyd, co-editor of By Any Means Necessary—Malcolm X: Real, Not Reinvented*

“Leonard Pitts, Jr. crafts a novel as well as the great storytellers of our time. *Freeman* captured my attention from the very first sentence and my heart throughout. Sam and Tilda will stay with me for a very long time. I can't let them go.”

*Sybil Wilkes, “The Tom Joyner Radio Show”*

## Praise for Leonard Pitts, Jr.’s *Before I Forget*

“A powerful novel about regrets, second chances, forgiveness and responsibility.... This is a beautiful, tragic and riveting work. A compelling, moving novel about fathers and sons and what it means to be a man.”

*Marilyn Dahl, Shelf Awareness*

“In a seamless transition to fiction, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Pitts...delivers an unsettling, compelling first novel about secrets, illness, and the role of African-American men in society and family life.”

*Publishers Weekly, starred review*

“Syndicated columnists like Pitts write books. This we know. But those titles are rarely novels. In his fiction debut, the Pulitzer Prize winner tells a fresh story of a '70s soul star who is diagnosed with Alzheimer's and is prompted to reconnect with his own father and troubled son.”

*The Root*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## *Freeman*

by Leonard Pitts, Jr.

**Hook: Agate Bolden's lead title for Spring 2012 is a sweeping story of love and perseverance set against the backdrop of the post-Civil War South, from an acclaimed Pulitzer-winning voice.**

*Freeman* tells three stories of courage, hardship, and faith that slowly coalesce around the town of Buford, Mississippi. The title character is Sam Freeman, a former slave who travels on foot a thousand miles through the ravaged South to find the woman he left behind 15 years earlier. Sam leaves the safety of his life in Philadelphia with no assurance that his wife, Tilda, is even alive. Only his abiding love for her and the memory of their dead son keeps him going as he faces the worst that humanity can offer.

Tilda, meanwhile, is being marched at gunpoint from the wreckage of her former master's ruined plantation in search of land outside the reach of the Union. Along the way, she is forced to grapple with questions of ownership, freedom, and her own agency in an echo of the wider African-American community as it deals with the radically altered landscape of Southern society. The third story focuses on Prudence Kent, a wealthy young widow from Boston intent on starting a school for freed slaves deep in the heart of the former Confederacy. Prudence raises the ire of the local white population, who view her, a Yankee, as very nearly as alien to them as their former bondsmen.

This is a story of love, survival, and resilience, exquisitely told by Leonard Pitts, Jr. In *Freeman*, he has crafted a brilliant, intricate, heartbreaking work that is sure to move readers everywhere.



**Leonard Pitts, Jr.** is a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for the *Miami Herald*. He is the author of the novel *Before I Forget*, the memoir *Becoming Dad*, and *Forward From This Moment: Selected Columns, 1994-2009*. He is available for phone and online interviews everywhere, and will be promoting the book during a cross-country tour in May and June to more than 25 different cities.

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Trade Paperback Original, Fiction, May 15, 2012, \$16

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## Q&A with Leonard Pitts, Jr., author of *Freeman*

### **What was the genesis for *Freeman*? Where did the idea first come from?**

Years ago, I read the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Been In The Storm So Long*, by Leon F. Litwack, about the lives of the slaves during and immediately after the Civil War. One of the most poignant things I learned from that book was the ordeal freed slaves went through to find their lost and separated family members. Men and women wrote letters, haunted the offices of the Freedmen's Bureau, and walked hundreds of miles in search of their mothers and brothers and sisters and sons and husbands and wives. The quests were rarely successful; it was not uncommon, for example, for a man to find his wife only to discover that she had given him up for dead and taken up with another man. The idea that freed men and women would strive to be reunited that way, against such impossible odds, struck me as a profound and inspiring statement about the importance they attached to family and to loved ones. It also struck me that this is an aspect of history about which most of us have no clue. It's something I've always kept in the back of my mind. I always thought it would provide the framework for a compelling novel.

### **Why did you write *Freeman*? What were you hoping to accomplish with this story?**

Well, obviously, the first goal of any novel is to entertain. Beyond that, though, there were a number of things I was out to accomplish. I wanted to write a love story that I thought would have a particular resonance for African-American women. I think there is something inherently affirming in the idea that a man would walk a thousand miles in a nearly hopeless search for one particular woman. I wanted to question, albeit indirectly, the whole stereotype of African Americans as a people who are frivolous about family connections, particularly paternal connections. That was certainly not the case right after the Civil War. Finally, I wanted to deal with questions of identity. We tend to treat race as something obvious and immutable, a bright, hard line of separation that cannot be crossed. But from science's point of view, race does not exist—it's a myth—and if you look at the history of race, you find it's a lot more complicated and self-contradictory than we typically believe. I liked the idea of characters grappling with identity in the context of a country that was forced to do the same.

### **What kind of research did you do in working on the book? Did you learn anything that surprised you?**

Researching a historical novel is less about finding out what happened when than about trying to unearth the small details that will help you recreate the physical look of a given time and place, i.e., a grocery store in 1865. I spent a lot of time in the Library of Congress. I also toured a railroad museum and a place that uses horses to help rehabilitate the physically handicapped. I should mention, also, that some of the minor episodes in *Freeman*—for example, the woman who approaches Sam and Ben in the courthouse,

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looking for her long lost baby—are fictionalized renditions of things that I learned had actually happened.

**Your previous novel, *Before I Forget*, is set in the recent past. Was it difficult to write about the lives of characters from 150 years ago, who lived in such a different world?**

It was challenging, but frankly, that’s what made it fun, the whole idea of trying to keep true to the way things would have been said and done a century and a half ago.

*Freeman* juggles three quite different perspectives (four, including the character of Bonnie). It was challenging to switch between them, but it was also satisfying in the sense that it allowed me (and, I hope, the reader) to view the same action through different lenses. It was necessary, too, given that two of the four characters—Prudence and Sam—are so monumentally lacking in self awareness that the other two are required to serve as reality checks, both for Prudence and Sam themselves and for the reader.

**How do you feel that the events and characters you write about in *Freeman* reflect on relations among the races in the U.S. today?**

I think in *Freeman* you see the birth pangs of the harsh racial bitterness that made the civil rights movement necessary a century later and that, to some degree, haunts American racial politics to this day.

***Freeman* is, among other things, a very powerful love story. What has been the reaction to the love story from readers so far?**

It’s been very gratifying. One reader pronounced it “magnificent.” Others have been in tears over the fates of various characters—which means they were emotionally invested in those characters.

**What are you working on next?**

The next novel is called *Grant Park*. I hope to begin writing it later this year. It’s about a black columnist and his white editor, and it follows them in two pivotal eras: Memphis in the spring of 1968, just before the assassination of Martin Luther King, and Chicago on election day 2008, when Barack Obama made history. The columnist, “Chappie,” was just a few feet from Dr. King when he was shot—he actually saw the rifle poking out of the window but didn’t move fast enough and has been haunted by his failure ever since. Now he is racing against time to stop a bizarre assassination attempt against the president-elect. It’s a novel about racial disillusionment, friendship, and what I have taken to calling the “stupidification” of America.

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## **Leonard Pitts, Jr. *Freeman* Tour Itinerary—locations and additional dates TBD**

Leonard Pitts, Jr.'s tour in support of *Freeman* will start out by following the path taken by the book's main character, Sam Freeman, at the end of the Civil War, as he leaves his home in Philadelphia to return to his former plantation in Mississippi and the wife he left behind there. It will continue through the month of June.

Contact Zach Rudin, [rudin@agatepublishing.com](mailto:rudin@agatepublishing.com), to learn more about these tour appearances.

Washington, DC

scheduled for May 20, 2012

Philadelphia, PA

scheduled for May 26, 2012

Baltimore, MD

scheduled May 29, 2012

Richmond, VA

scheduled May 31, 2012

Pittsboro, NC

scheduled for June 2, 2012

Charlotte, NC

scheduled June 3, 2012

Asheville, NC

scheduled for June 4, 2012

Raleigh, NC

scheduled for June 5, 2012

Savannah, GA

scheduled for June 6, 2012

Jacksonville, FL

scheduled June 7, 2012

Orlando, FL

scheduled June 8, 2012

Miami, FL

scheduled June 9, 2012

Tampa, FL

scheduled June 11, 2012

Pensacola, FL

scheduled for June 12, 2012

Chattanooga, TN

scheduled June 13, 2012

Nashville, TN

scheduled for June 14, 2012

Memphis, TN

scheduled June 15, 2012

Jackson, MS

scheduled for June 16, 2012

Oxford, MS

scheduled for June 18, 2012

Biloxi, MS

scheduled for June 19, 2012

New Orleans, LA

scheduled for June 21, 2012

Atlanta, GA

scheduled June 25, 2012

Austin, TX

scheduled for June 26, 2012

Wichita, KS

scheduled for June 28, 2012

Lawrence, KS

scheduled for June 29, 2012

Detroit, MI

scheduled July 2, 2012