Vagrants and Loiterers

By Kwame Dawes

South Carolina, c.1950

You got that clean waistcoat, 
the bright white of a well-tailored 
shirt, you got those loose-as-sacks 
slacks and some spit-polished shoes, 
and you know, whether you are looking 
like money, or about to take a stroll, 
to tilt that hat like you own 
the world; yeah, smoke your pipe, 
roll your tobacco, and hold loose 
as authority, your muscles, lithe 
and hard; and every so often, when 
you feel the urge, you reach into the waist 
pocket and pull out that watch on its 
chain, then look in the sky and say 
Gonna be a cold one when it come, 
like God gave you that fancy clock 
to tell the future. These are the easy 
boys of the goodly South; waiting for 
what is out of frame to happen: 
the sheriff with his questions, the 
paddy wagon, the chain gang, the weight 
of the world. Waiting, with such delicate 
dignity, fickle as the seasonal sky.

Source: Poetry (April 2018)