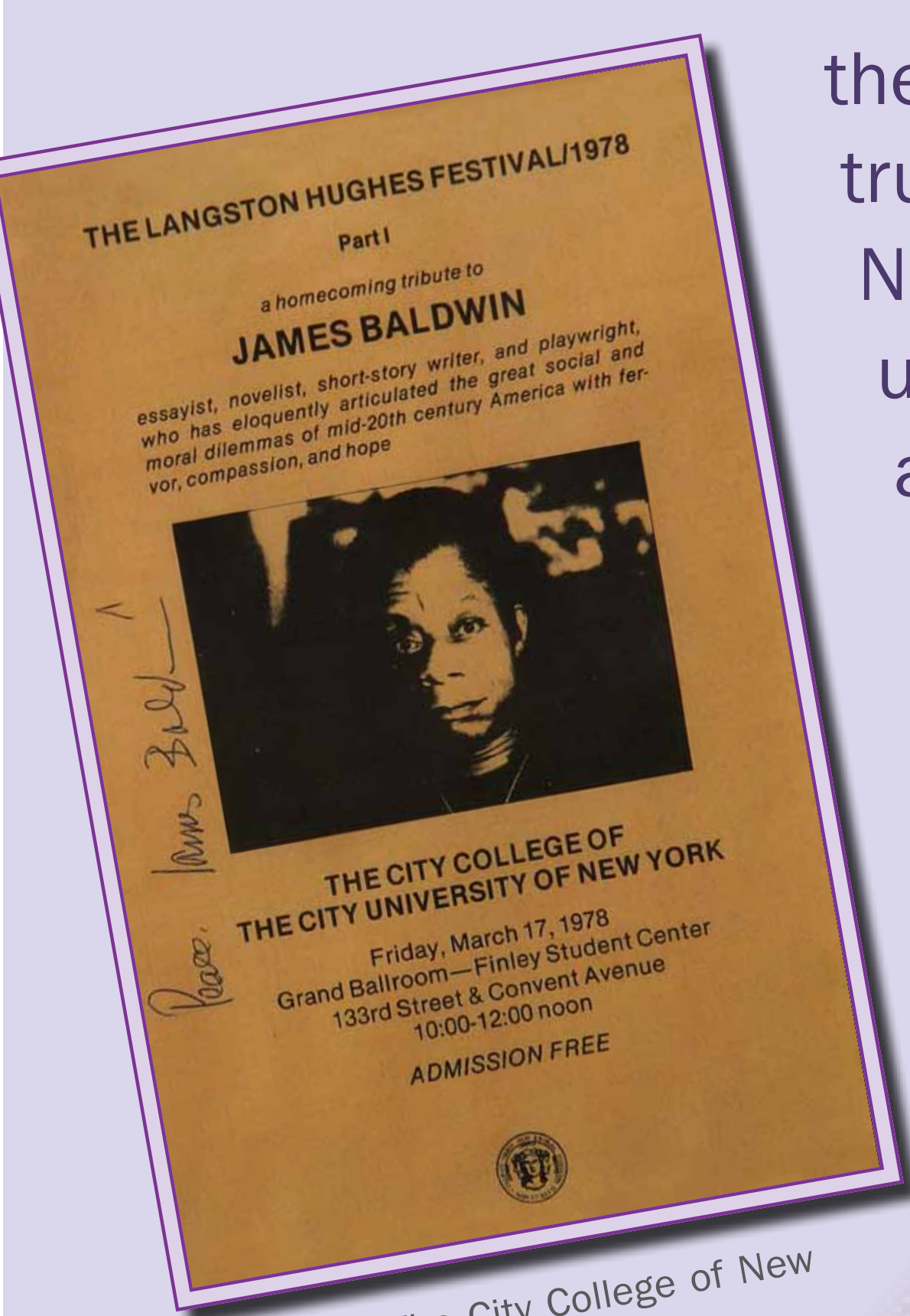


THE LANGSTON HUGHES FESTIVAL HONOREES

From Baldwin to Morrison 1978-1981

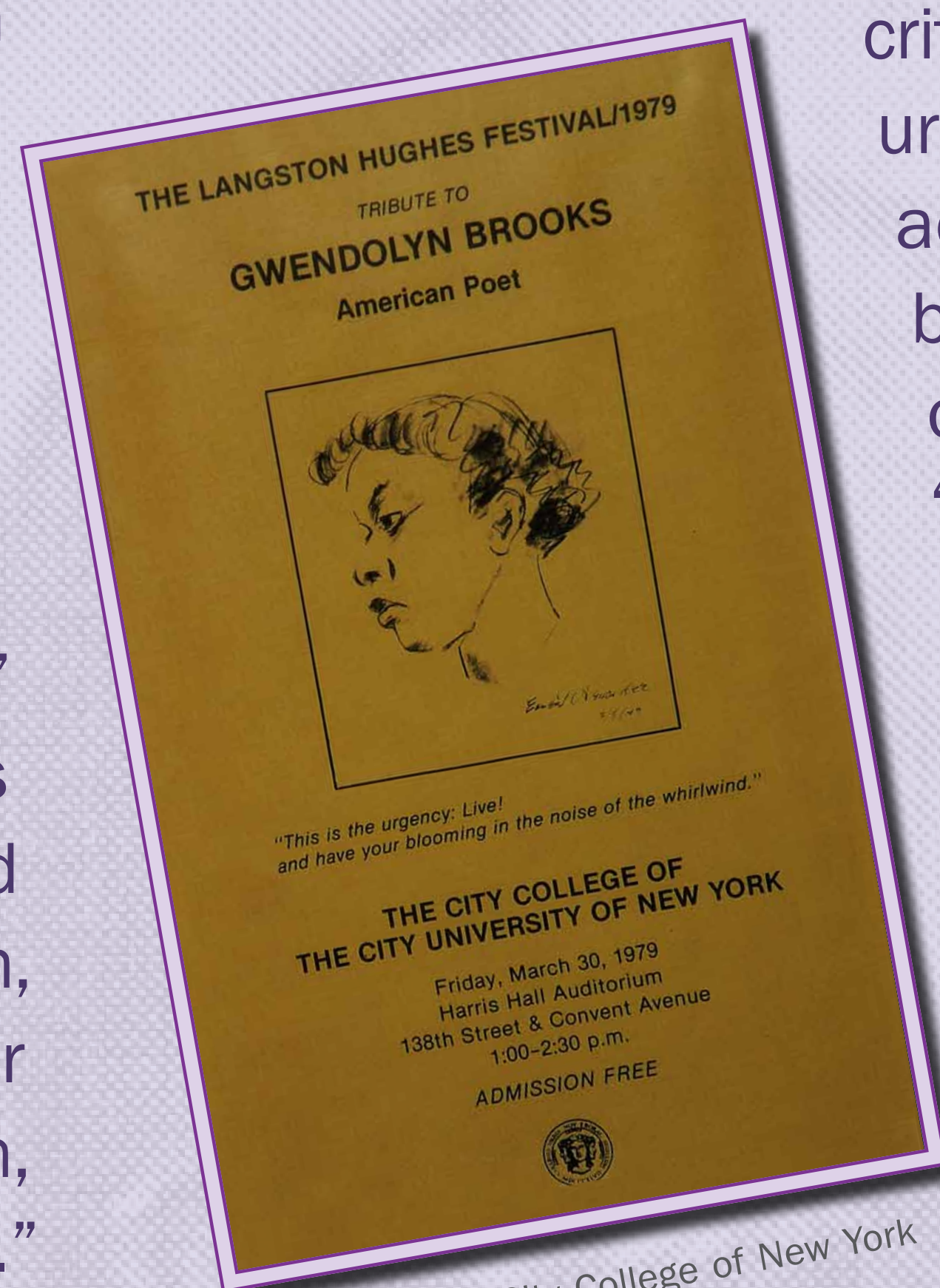
1978 James Baldwin



Source: The City College of New York Archives

James Baldwin explored the painful complexities of truth. His self-exploration, *Notes of a Native Son*, tells us that the fight against all injustice begins in the heart. Nobody Knows My Name reminds us that “one cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one’s own.” Baldwin warned us of The Fire Next Time by asking a bold question on behalf of generations of African Americans persistently denied inclusion in U.S. society: “Why would I want to integrate into a burning house?” Baldwin’s novella *Giovanni’s Room* explores the complexities of Black homosexuality and interracial love. He fashioned a critical patriotism, writing, “I love America more than any other country in this world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.”

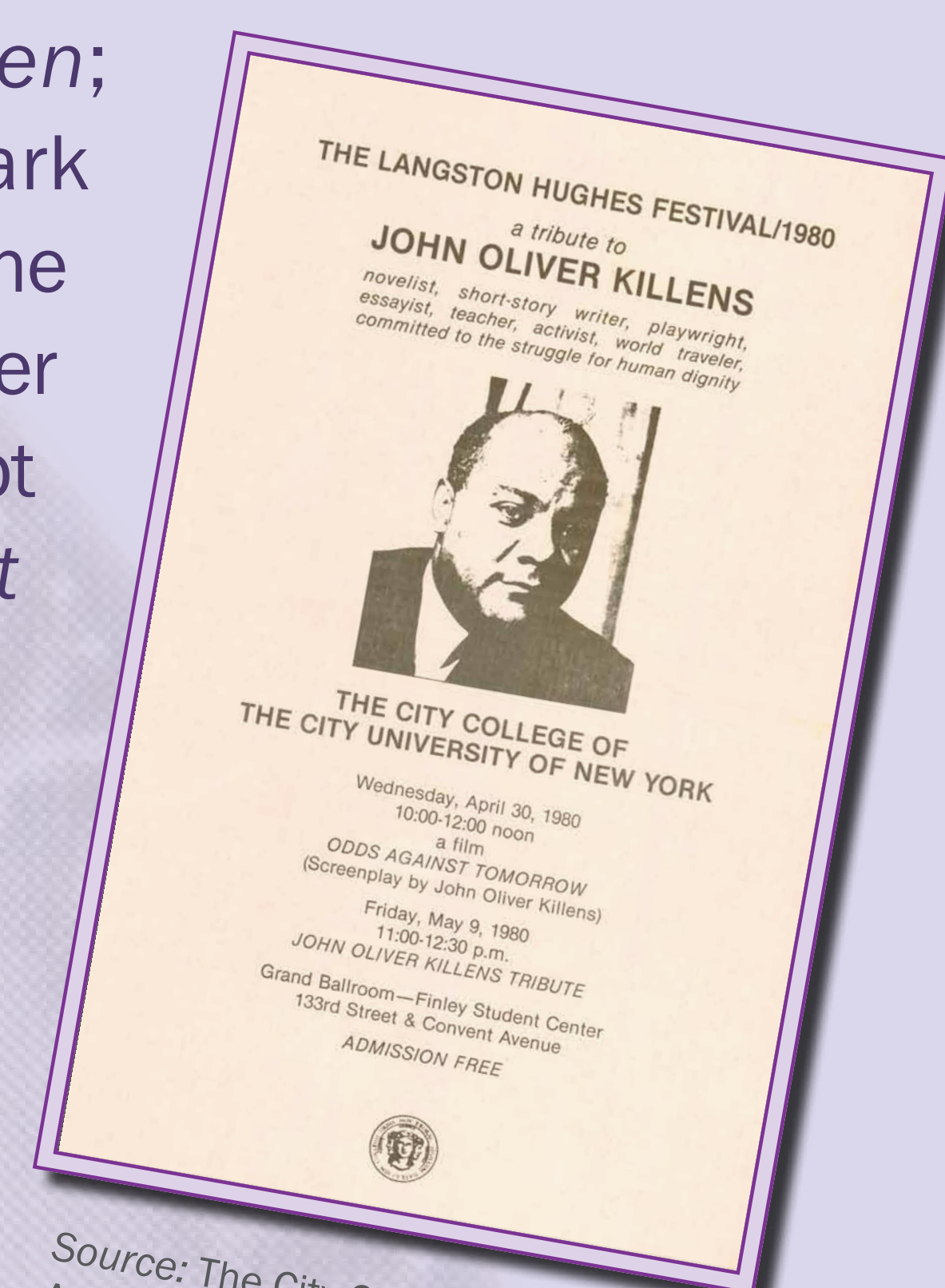
1979 Gwendolyn Brooks



Source: The City College of New York Archives

From the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Annie Allen* to the new Black poetry of *To Disembark*, Brooks’ works have caught the nuances of the people’s words and their thoughts, the sights and sounds of their streets and homes, the breadth of their intelligence and imagination. Indeed, Brooks was an emphatic “People’s Poet,” asserting that she wrote words to “take into a tavern, into the street, into the halls of a housing project.” And yet, Brooks held up a critical mirror to her time, urging significant social action rather than just being “real cool”... only to potentially “die soon.” Having studied us well, she teaches us to live, and if need be, to have our “blooming in the noise of the whirlwind.”

1980 John Oliver Killens



Source: The City College of New York Archives

Novelist, playwright, essayist, teacher, activist, and world traveler John Oliver Killens’ life, in its commitment to principles and its dedication to the writer’s craft, has been an inspiration to a generation of creative artists. “Life is a short walk,” he mused, “There is so little time and so much living to achieve.” His publications—the novels *Youngblood*, *And Then We Heard the Thunder*, *The Cotillion*; essays in *Black Man’s Burden*; a biography of Denmark Vesey; a novelization of the Russian novelist Alexander Pushkin’s life; and a script for the film *Odds Against Tomorrow*—indicate Killens’ breadth and his grasp of the importance of history to a vision of the future.

Toni Cade Bambara



Source: The City College of New York Archives

Short story writer and novelist Toni Cade Bambara won the National Book Award for *The Salt Eaters* and a City College alumnus. Bambara’s two collections of short stories, *Gorilla, My Love* and *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive*, acclaimed for their “contemporaneity... their variety, and their daring to examine previously unexplored aspects of Black women’s lives,” reflect her personal commitment to confronting society’s ills. Bambara asserted that “the job of the writer is to make revolution irresistible,” and her decades of activism reflected this aim. Bambara helped shape the Black Arts and Black feminist literary scenes, and addressed such tragedies as the Philadelphia police bombing of the community justice group MOVE’s headquarters, which she eulogized in *The Bombing of Osage Avenue*.

From the classic *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, through the short story collection *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* to the epic novel *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, to the acclaimed *Praisesong for the Widow*, Paule Marshall’s work shows that lasting literature can be at once symbolic and sharply focused, local and universal, and passionate without being strident. She argues that memory can maim as well as heal the victims of oppression, writing, “Once a great wrong has been done, it never dies. People speak the words of peace, but their hearts do not forgive. Generations perform ceremonies of reconciliation but there is no end.” Marshall has consistently created characters that capture the culture that gives them their being. Dorothy L. Denniston explains, “Marshall offers no easy solutions in her fiction, but she does suggest models for change and possibility. Because she develops those possibilities through the characterization of black women, she celebrates female agency and empowerment.”

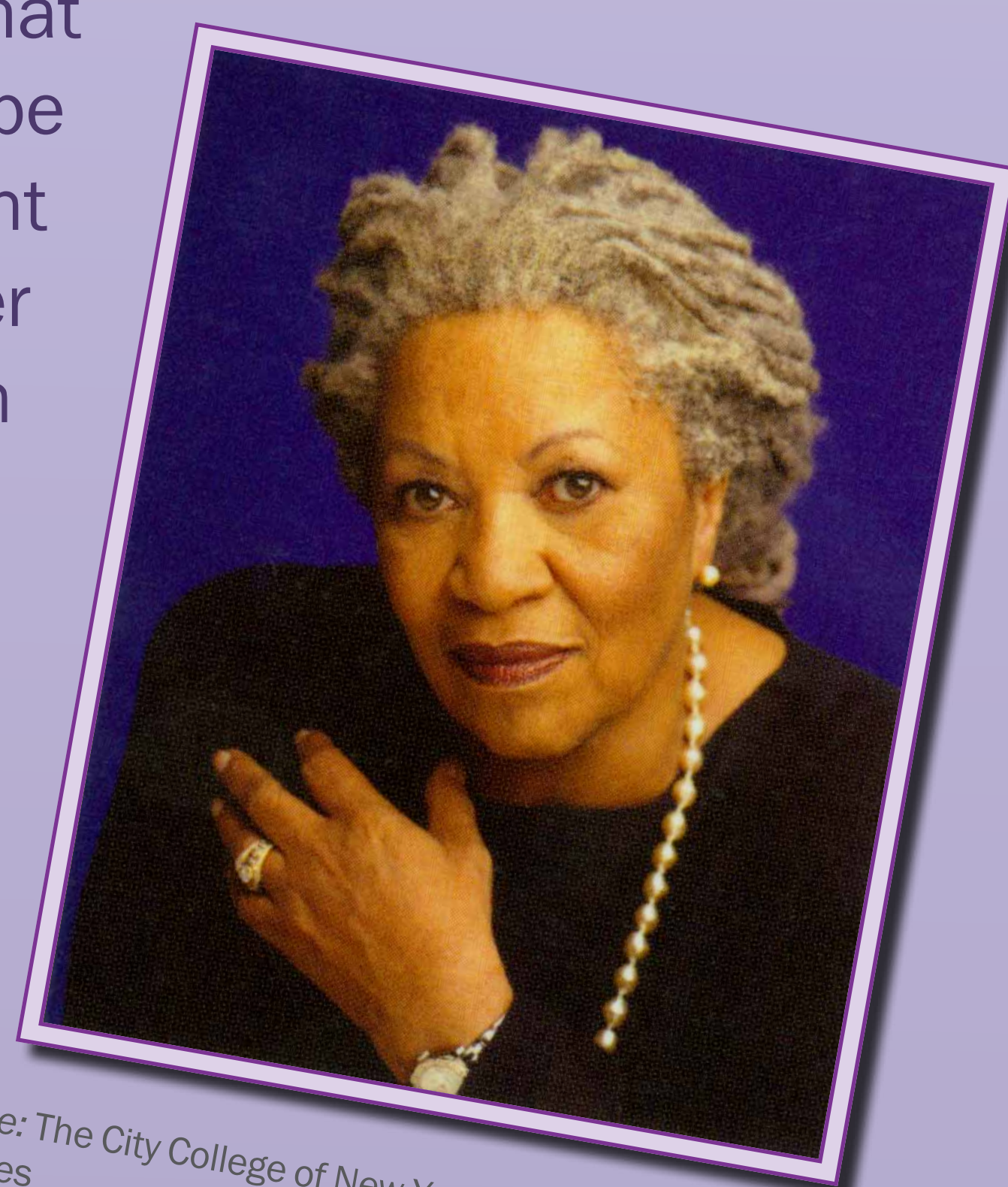
Toni Morrison is a Nobel Prize and Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, editor, and playwright. Her sense of writing’s spectacular power is evident in her statement, “We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.” Morrison’s precise and exuberant language has swept her audience into pain and wonder as her vivid characters search for love, beauty, and identity: Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, Macon Dead’s odyssey into self-discovery in *Song of Solomon*; Sula, Nel, and Wright locked in a complex friendship in *Sula*. Rooted in fable, mythology, realism, and family history, Morrison’s novels reveal timeless truths told as if for the first time. Her work “familiarizes the strange and mystifies the familiar.”

Paule Marshall



Source: The City College of New York Archives

Toni Morrison



Source: The City College of New York Archives