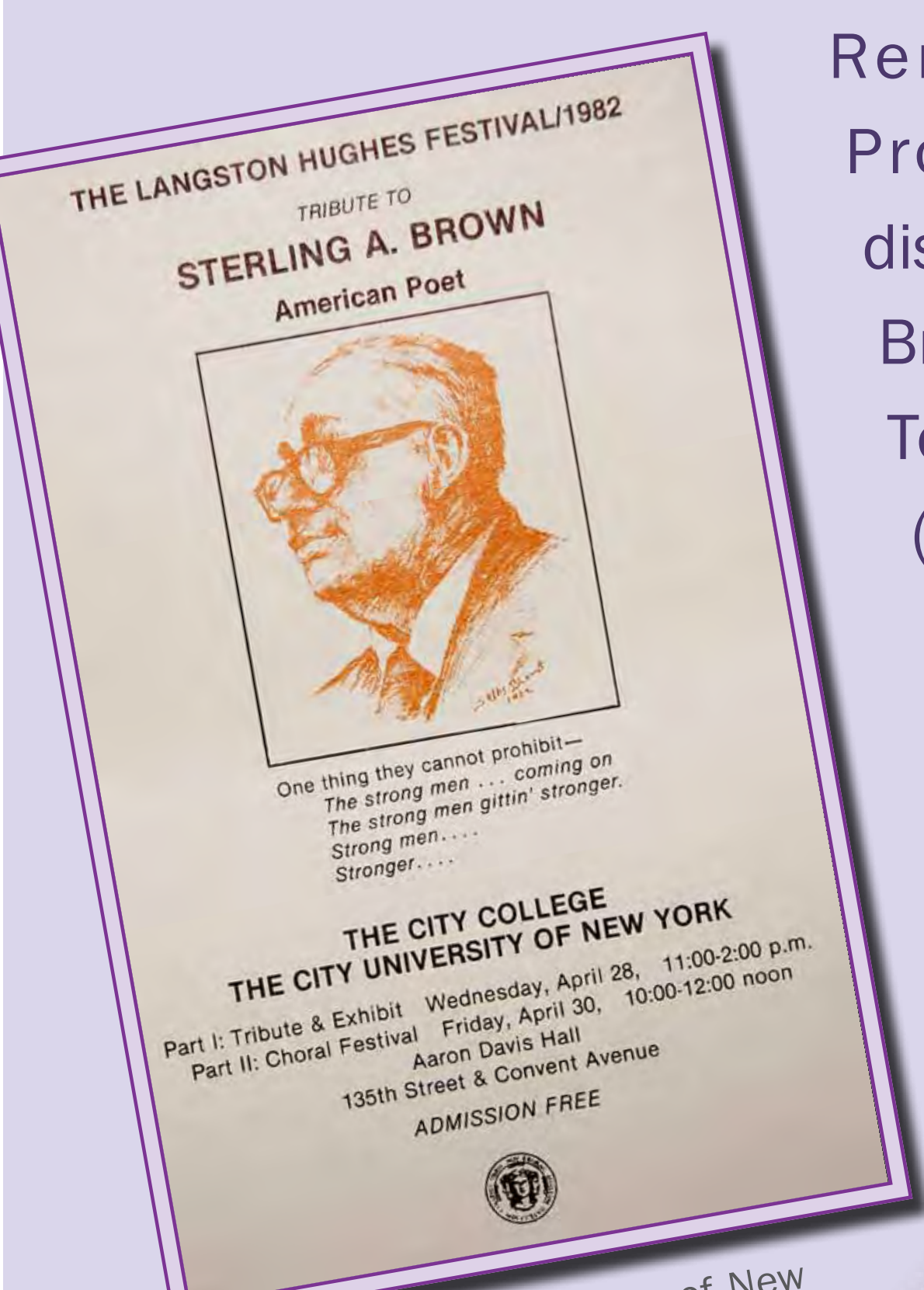




# THE LANGSTON HUGHES FESTIVAL HONOREES

*From Sterling Brown to Alice Walker 1982 – 1988*

## 1982 Sterling A. Brown

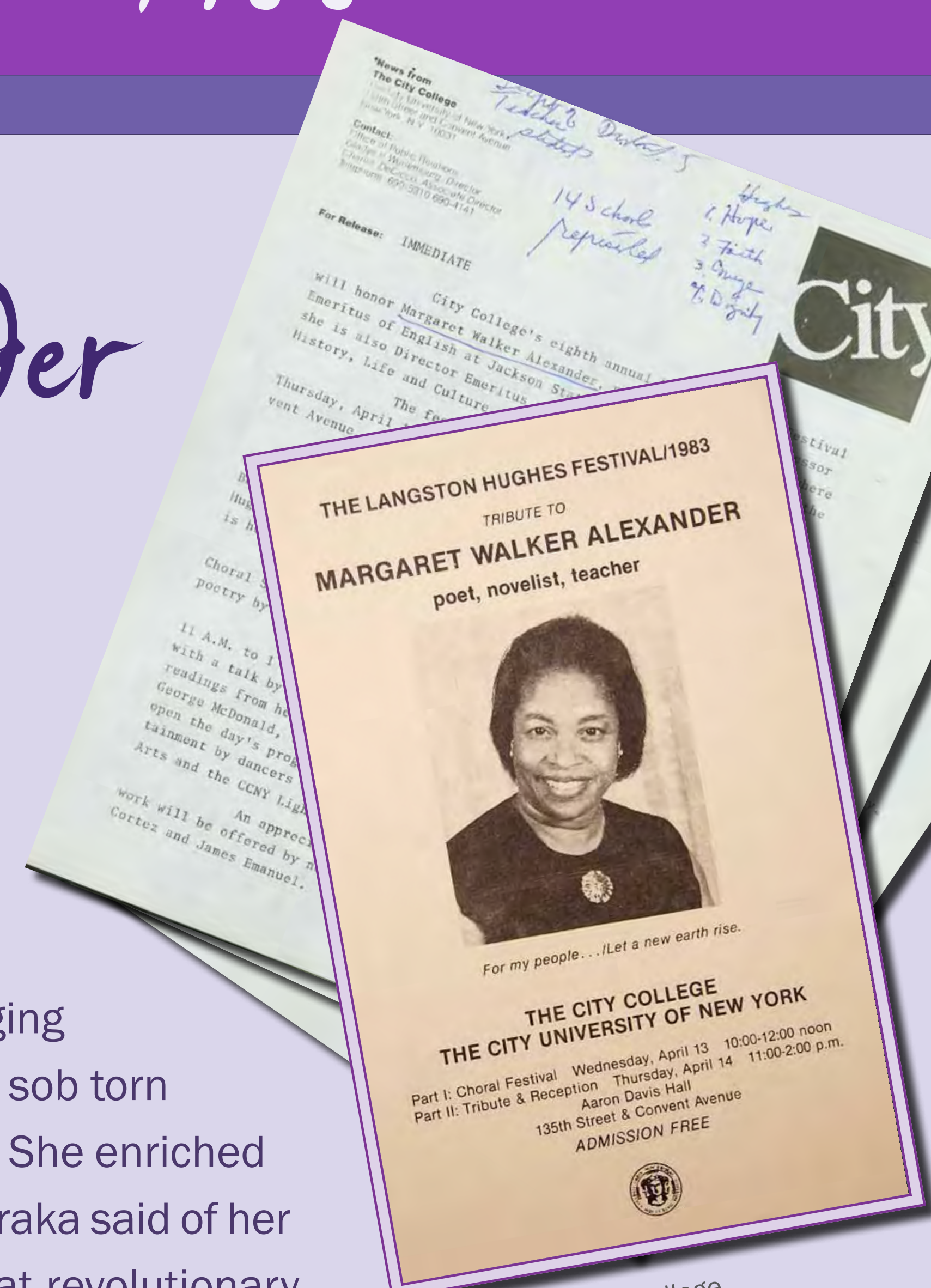


Source: The City College of New York Archives

Poet, scholar, critic, Harlem Renaissance participant, Professor Emeritus, and distinguished editor Sterling A. Brown guided such writers as Toni Morrison, Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael), Ossie Davis, and Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) to pursue their own artistic paths. He affirmed the soul-speech of black folk in their lives and lore, and gave dignity and pathos to rejected themes of the black

American experience. By linking his own poetry to the formal traditions in our literature, Brown created new forms. He was the storyteller, song maker, and voice of Black heroes and heroines. Brown said, “The sincere, sensitive artist, willing to go beneath the clichés of popular belief to get at an underlying reality, will be wary of confining a race’s entire characters to a half-dozen narrow grooves.”

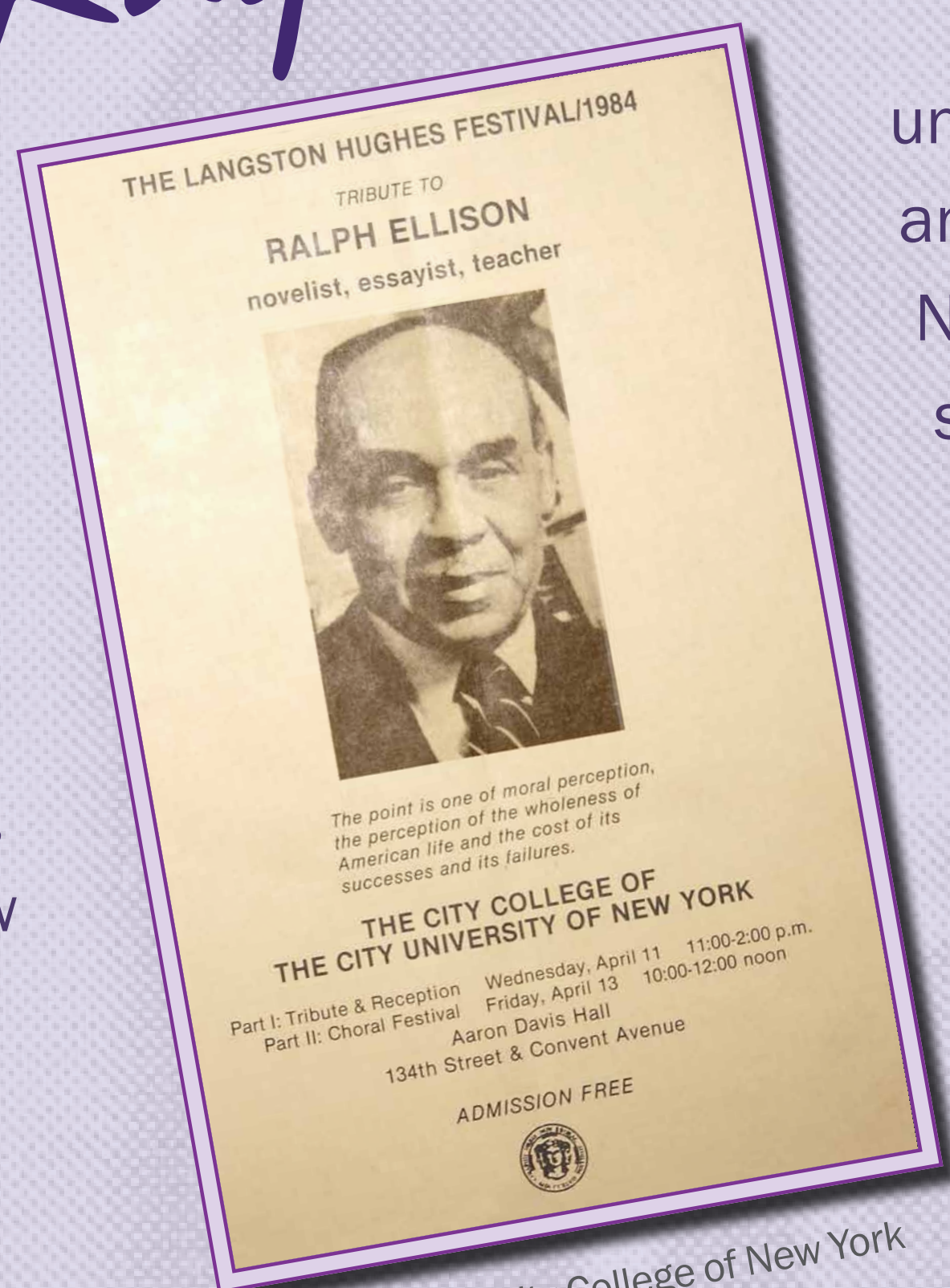
## 1983 Margaret Walker Alexander



Source: The City College of New York Archives

Poet, short story writer, biographer, distinguished teacher, and author of the immortal “For My People,” for half a century Margaret Walker Alexander was an eloquent and passionate voice, not only for her people, but for all people. In her first published work at the age of 19, she wrote, “I want to write / I want to write the songs of my people. / I want to hear them singing melodies in the dark. / I want to catch the last floating strains from their sob torn throats. / I want to frame their dreams into words; their souls into notes.” She enriched literature with the cadences, idiom, and wisdom of black folklore. Amiri Baraka said of her legacy, “Margaret Walker Alexander was the living continuum of the great revolutionary democratic arts culture that has sustained and inspired the Afro-American people since the middle passage.”

## 1984 Ralph Ellison

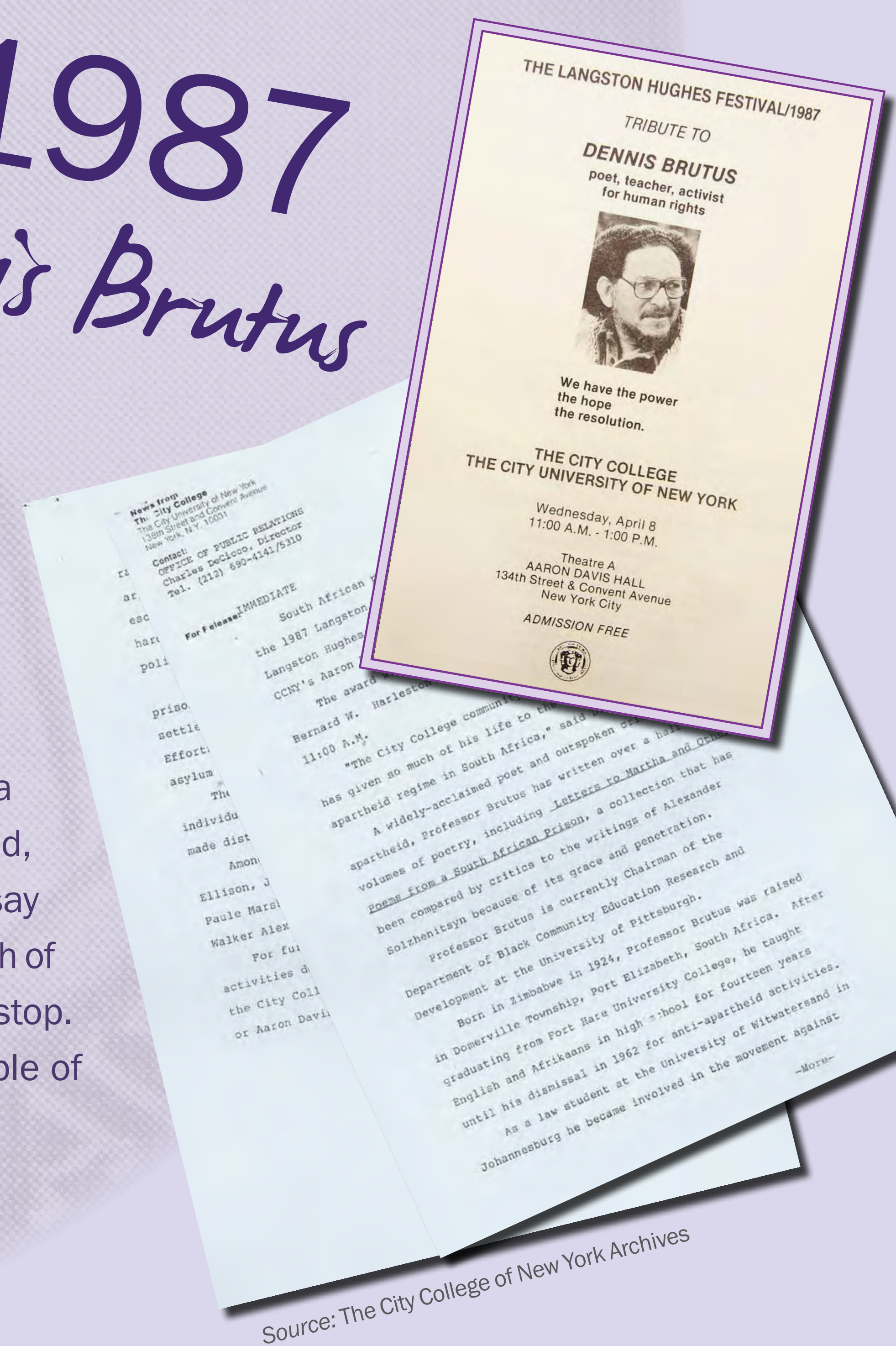


Source: The City College of New York Archives

Poet, teacher, activist, and author of such moving collections of poetry as *Sirens*, *Knuckles*, and *Boots*; *Letters to Martha and Other Poems from a South African Prison*; *A Simple Lust*; and *Stubborn Hope*, Dennis Brutus was

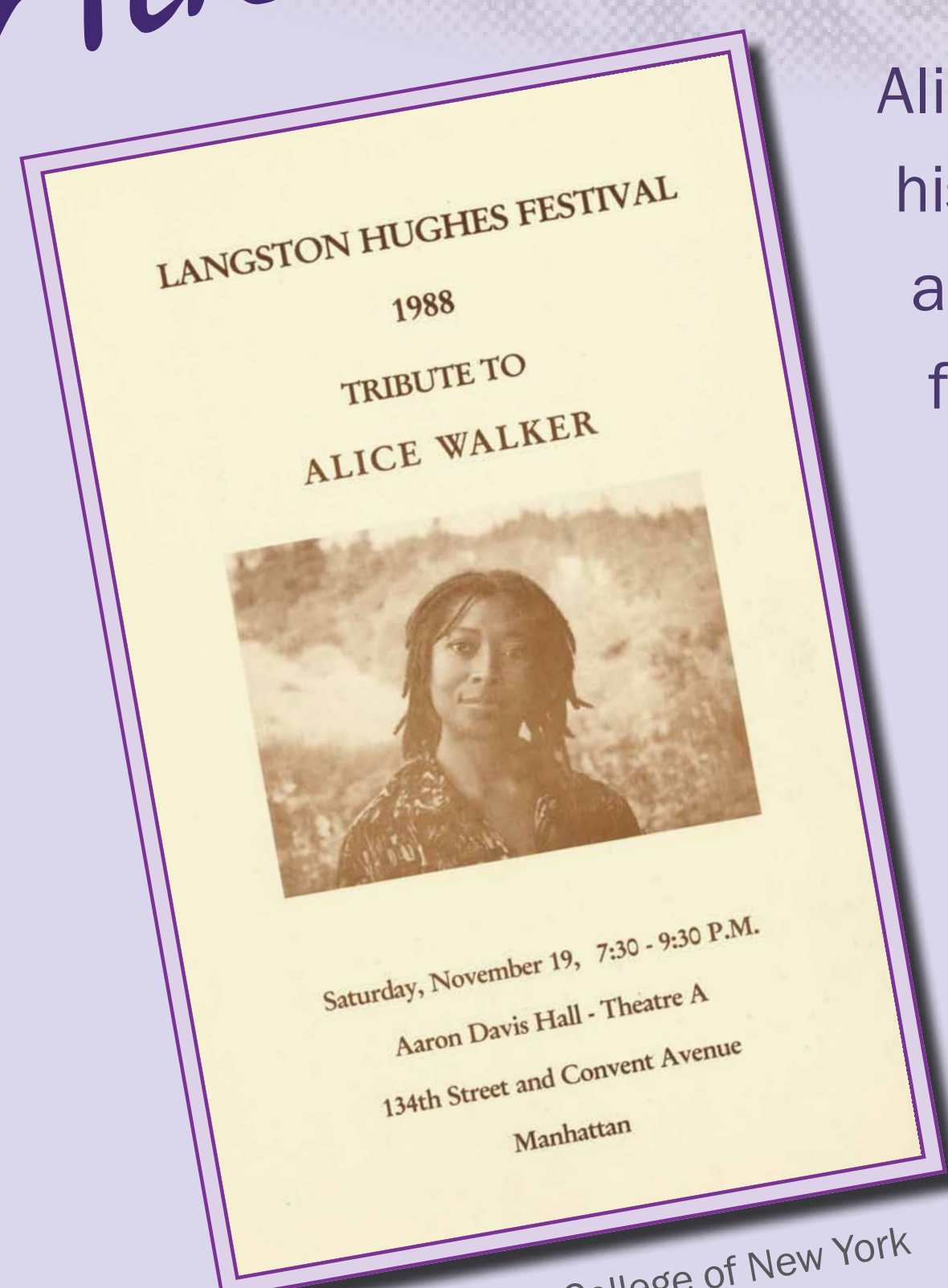
imprisoned next to Nelson Mandela in their homeland, South Africa. But Brutus knew, as John Donne, “No man is an island entire unto himself.” For his opposition to injustice, Brutus endured the violence of the state: imprisonment and torture on Robben Island, the terrors of house arrest, the enforced silence of banning, and the pain of exile. Out of these he forged his graceful and penetrating poems. “Still love survives,” Brutus said. Even a few weeks before his death in December 2009, Brutus proclaimed, “We are in serious difficulty all over the planet. We are going to say to the world: there’s too much of profit, too much of greed, too much of suffering by the poor. It must have to stop. The planet must be in action. The people of the planet must be in action.”

## 1987 Dennis Brutus



Source: The City College of New York Archives

## 1988 Alice Walker



Source: The City College of New York Archives

Alice Walker: poet, short story writer, novelist, essayist, publisher, student of late historian Howard Zinn, winner of the American Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, friend and benefactor to striving artists and struggling people everywhere. For more than four decades, from her first short story, “To Hell With Dying,” published in 1967 by Langston Hughes, to her 1988 essay collection, *Living By the Word*, Alice Walker’s life and art have been an affirmation of the virtue of struggle in a world beset by love and trouble. Unflinching in her assessment of what she sees around her, unwilling to excuse tyranny exercised in the name of love, Walker never once turns away from the world in the face of its troubles. From Eatonton, Georgia, where she was born; from her work in voter registration in Georgia and Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement; out of the earth and soul of the South; her poems and stories rise as naturally and fearlessly as “revolutionary petunias.”

## 1986 Raymond R. Patterson



Source: The City College of New York Archives

Poet, writer, biographer, and professor of English at CCNY, Raymond R. Patterson was the founding director of the Langston Hughes Festival and continued to serve in this capacity until 1993. In such collections of poetry as *26 Ways of Looking at a Black Man and Other Poems* and *Elemental Blues*, Patterson

drew on the poetic tradition of Wallace Stevens and others to construct a lyrical yet firmly ethical literary voice. His lyrical writing reshaped ordinary actions into profoundly meaningful moments: “We are told that the seeds / Of rainbows are not unlike / A blackman’s tear.” In his poetry, Patterson documented the social anguish of his time, as when he wrote about the assassination of Malcolm X, which devastated a generation suffering the “hungers of their living.” His work has enlightened generations of readers and students, and he will be remembered as an original commemorator of the ways Langston Hughes transformed the written word and the society around it.

