

Karen D. Taylor

Executive Director, While We Are Still Here



Karen is driven by her passion to bring the cultural history of Harlem to the forefront of now, and to keep it relevant for generations to come. Inspired by the national discussion on “gentrification,” she is moved to steward the creation of programming that wraps the arts and humanities in a package that is a gift to the future. She consults as the director of public history for Columbia University/Teachers College’s Harlem Education History Project.

Karen has served as interim director for the Roundtable of Institutions of Color, housed at the Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service, New York University, a research arm of the school that was devoted to assessing the state of African American and Latino communities.

Karen has also served as managing editor for Scholastic Books and Amistad Press. As a fundraising development professional, she worked for the Bronx Museum of the Arts, the Feminist Press at the City University of New York (CUNY), and the Brecht Forum.

She has also conceptualized and produced academic conferences, concerts, and workshops for institutions that include the Apollo; Teachers College; Barnard; the CUNY Graduate Center’s Office of Continuing Education and Public Programming; New York University; and the Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College. These events ranged from Women of Color: The Forgotten Members of the City, to Pops: Celebrating the Centennial of Louis Armstrong, to If You Live In Harlem, Please Don’t Breathe Deeply, regarding air pollution in urban environments. While at the Feminist Press, she conceptualized and developed a fully funded educational program that used the Press’s publications to develop curriculum for incarcerated women at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility.

She has also curated art exhibits, including “Kamoinge’s Harlem: Then and Now,” “After the Flypaper: Harlem In Words and Images (1955-2018),” “The Harrises of Harlem: Eight Generations—The Mildred Harris Collection” and “Jazz Notes: A Tribute to an African-American Art Form.”

She is also a multi-genre artist, who has appeared as a vocalist and poet at the Schomburg’s Women In Jazz series; and at Transart’s Jazz In the Valley, she premiered a spoken-word/music tribute to Jayne Cortez, “A Jazz Fan Looks Back.” Ms. Taylor has also performed as a playwright in the New York International Fringe Festival. She received a commission from Harlem Stage’s Fund for New Work; and grant support from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council.

She also worked in various editorial capacities for the Smithsonian, University of North Carolina, Audubon Magazine, and Taylor & Francis—an academic and scientific publisher, as well as others. As an adjunct professor of English at the College of New Rochelle, she taught writing and composition, and American literature. Her essay, “Still Occupied: My Report on the Safety of My Sons,” published in Transition Magazine, was cited in the Notable Essays and Literary Nonfiction Category, in 2016 Best American Essays, edited by Jonathon Franzen. A lyrical essay, “The Adult Movie,” also appeared in Transition.

She holds an MFA in Writing (Creative Nonfiction) from Vermont College of Fine Arts, and a BS in African-American Literature from the State University of New York, Empire State College.

She has been a Harlem resident for more than thirty-five years.