

A Sense of Urgency By Ellen Brown (continued)

Soon after joining OLLI, Steve started offering courses based on his long career teaching leadership and career development. Recently he tried offering a different sort of class, about contemporary issues, partnering with Richard Fireman to offer “Climate Change: Through Our Grandchildren’s Eyes.” This was a workshop designed to offer participants a better understanding of the causes of global warming followed by exercises to consider possible solutions to the crisis. As a determined optimist, instead of letting the enormity of problems defeat him, he insists that “elders have time” and that even “one individual voice can be powerful.”

Not long after teaching this class, Steve traveled back to his alma mater, Williams College, in Massachusetts, and helped sponsor a workshop about climate change. Never one to avoid controversy, he followed up the successful workshop with a dramatic and symbolic gesture. In October, 2015, he made national news, by delivering back to the Williams College President and Board of Trustees his honorary degree, in protest over the college’s unwillingness to divest its portfolio of investments in fossil fuels.

This past fall he launched a special interest group at OLLI called “Elders Fierce for Justice (EFFJ),” as a way to explore issues of racial justice, diversity and inclusion, and to consider specific problems that confront us today, in Asheville. This group brings together elders, both black and white, to have a dialogue and try to reach mutual understanding. By partnering with existing local groups, such as Black Lives Matter, Christians for United Community, the Center for Diversity Education at UNC-A, and the YWCA, EFFJ hopes to find ways to make Asheville (and the Reuter Center) more inclusive. Brimming with other projects and ideas, Steve sees the Reuter Center as “a sort of staging area, offering opportunities for engagement and social change.”