

Keynote Speech: Raven Lecture on Access to Justice

Dr. Mustafa Santiago Ali

SAVALA TREPCZYNSKI: Thank you, Candice, for that introduction and for inviting the Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice¹ to be part of this day. It is my privilege to tell you a bit about our first keynote speaker, Dr. Mustafa Santiago Ali, who will deliver the Robert D. and Leslie K. Raven Lecture on Access to Justice.

Dr. Ali is celebrated internationally as a thought leader, policy maker, and community liaison, who has been fighting for community-driven environmental justice for nearly three decades. Today, he is the Senior Vice President of Climate Environmental Justice and Community Revitalization for the Hip Hop Caucus,² a national nonprofit and nonpartisan organization that connects the hip hop community to the civic process.

Before joining the Hip Hop Caucus, Dr. Ali spent twenty-four years at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) where he successfully built policies, programs, and initiatives that focused on environmental justice and community revitalization. He is a founding member of EPA's office of environmental justice as well. Dr. Ali believes that shielding poor and minority neighborhoods from the effects of pollution is a crucial function of EPA and that community voices must be the foundation of solutions.

He shared this message as an acclaimed guest speaker at Yale, Georgetown, Spellman, Howard University, and more. He has conducted thousands of presentations and trainings and has worked with over five hundred domestic and international communities to secure environmental health and economic justice, always following the community's lead.

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1. *Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice*, BERKELEY LAW, <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/research/thelton-e-henderson-center-for-social-justice/> (last visited Feb. 3, 2020).

2. HIP HOP CAUCUS, <http://hiphopcaucus.org> (last visited Feb. 3, 2020). Mustafa is currently the Vice President of Environmental Justice, Climate, and Community Revitalization at the National Wildlife Federation. NAT'L WILDLIFE FED'N, <https://www.nwf.org/> (last visited Mar. 6, 2020); *see also* MUSTAFA SANTIAGO ALI, <https://www.mustafasantiago.com/> (last visited Mar. 6, 2020).

We are thrilled that Dr. Ali has joined the Berkeley community for today's conversation about community-first environmental justice. Please help me welcome our keynote speaker, Dr. Mustafa Santiago Ali.

DR. MUSTAFA SANTIAGO ALI: In many instances, we have some extremely intelligent scientists, attorneys, engineers—a whole bunch of folks. I have been really blessed to be surrounded by and work with those individuals. Sometimes we forget about the intelligence, the innovation, the ability for communities to not only engage in a process, but to lead a process.

Sometimes we also forget about how important culture is in helping us to make change happen. You are seeing, every time you turn on the television, culture in motion. Our parents saw a culture making change in the environment, civil rights, and a number of other things. It is important that we utilize culture to begin our conversation, but then make sure that we anchor it in the expertise and the innovation. As I said, that exists inside of communities.

How many folks remember The Black Eyed Peas? How many folks remember Taboo? Taboo is one of the original members of The Black Eyed Peas, but Taboo is also of Mexican descent, and he is also of Native American or indigenous descent. We partnered with them and won an MTV music award about a year and a half ago on the issue of Standing Rock. I think that it is important that we share work from our indigenous brothers and sisters, whose land we are standing on.

[*Music – Taboo & Magnificent Seven ft. Shailene Woodley, “Stand Up/Stand N Rock #NoDAPL”*]³

When we are talking about environmental justice, environmental injustice, and environmental racism, we need to really go back to the root of where all of this started.

We are going to talk about Warren County, North Carolina. I want you to also pay attention to the faces of the individuals you see in this photo of Warren County, because many of the folks who have been engaged in this fight for environmental justice actually look like you, are in the same age group as many of you, and also come from some other communities as well.

Let us go back to the root of what is really going on, and then we will talk about how it actually connects to where we are in the climate fight. If we are going to have real talk about environmental injustice, then we need to go back to when the first African slaves came to this country. They were taken away from their traditional homelands. They were brought here. They were placed on plantations. They were given some of the most dangerous jobs to do, a recurring theme that we still hear and see today for many low-income communities and communities of color.

3. Taboo, *Stand Up / Stand N Rock #NoDAPL (Official Video)*, YOUTUBE (Dec. 4, 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Onyk7guvHK8>.

They were also taken away from their traditional foods, so for those of you who focus on food justice issues, there is a connection that happens in that space. We also know with our indigenous brothers and sisters, there was a similar dynamic that was going on even though they were here first, being moved away from traditional lands, taken away from traditional foods, and exposed to public health concerns and diseases that they did not have resistance to.

We can look at our Asian and Pacific Islander brothers and sisters. Let us look at our Chinese brothers and sisters who helped to build the infrastructure in our country, especially our railroad systems. Once again, people who were taken away from cultural practices, and given some extremely dangerous jobs. If you actually know the history of our railroad systems and who had to handle many of the explosives and many of the other things that were in that space, then, you can look at a number of other folks who have come.

You can look at our Hispanic brothers and sisters and some of the very dangerous situations they have been placed in, whether dealing as workers in the fields or a number of other spaces and places. This dynamic of this injustice is a part of the foundation of our country. It is a part of the economics of how this country has been able to be blessed to be in a position that it is in, but a dynamic that has to change.

I should have shared with everybody that I was raised in a family of Baptist and Pentecostal ministers. In the thousands of presentations I have given—in each and every one of those—I always give honor to my mother and my grandmother who are the rocks that I stand on and who also helped to prepare me because my mom shared—maybe your parents shared something very similar with you—my mom said, son—or *mijo*—she said, “You are going to have some tough days.”

How many folks in the room ever had a tough day? Raise your hand if you ever had a tough day. Everybody, look, keep your hand up if you ever had a tough day. I do not know how you are in law school and never had a tough day. I just want somebody to run over and touch you if you never had a tough day. Get that magic or whatever they got going on.

So, my mom said, “You better find a way to surround yourself with positive energy.” People hear me talk about this all over the place. When you work on social justice issues, when you work on civil rights issues, when you work on many of these issues that many of you will go into, you have got to find a way to surround yourself with that energy to be able to deal with the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. All those things that they often talk about because if you do not, you will never get to the self-care that is necessary if you are going to be truly effective in a social justice set of work.

Every morning since I was sixteen years old when I first started working on social justice issues, I get up, I look in the mirror, I get up, and I say, “I am blessed and highly favored.”

Now, I know I am in a room full of attorneys, and I know you guys know a whole lot about that, but I will let you try it. Everybody say, “I am blessed and highly favored.” Everybody say, “I am blessed.”

AUDIENCE: I am blessed.

DR. MUSTAFA SANTIAGO ALI: “And highly favored.”

AUDIENCE: And highly favored.

DR. MUSTAFA SANTIAGO ALI: You are blessed and highly favored because you have an opportunity to make real change happen at a time when change has got to happen. Before, many of the issues that we were working on were extremely important: getting people the right to vote and getting people to have the right to have access to places, all of that was super critical. But now we are at a time when we are literally fighting for our own existence.

I want you to think about that because sometimes we sugarcoat things, water stuff down so that we can wrap our arms around the enormity of the problem. One of the first things you will learn if you are serious about environmental justice is Warren County, North Carolina—those first sets of pictures you were seeing. When you had folks who are actually willing to lay down in the road to stop those trucks from coming in, bringing those PCBs, those cancer-causing chemicals, into that community. That fight went on for weeks and weeks and weeks.

They invited someone by the name of Walter Fauntroy. He was the Congressional Delegate from Washington D.C., but the folks in Warren County, North Carolina, said, “Walter, come on down. Because we have been protesting, because we are trying to stop the impacts that we know are coming into our community from these chemicals.”

Let me back up and tell you that the state of North Carolina had seven locations that they could have placed those chemicals. Why do you think they chose to place them in a lower income, and some working class, African American community? Because they thought they could.

That fight was going on so they told Walter to come down. Walter came down, and they marched, and protested, and what do you think happened? The chemical landfill got built. Yes, but they arrested him, and they arrested a whole bunch of other people. The difference in that dynamic at that time was that Walter had access. Fauntroy had the ability that some of the local residents did not have, he was able to raise the profile and get some information so that folks could have a better leg to stand on.

Fauntroy went back to Washington D.C., and that is when that set of scientific studies began that everybody should know about. Charles Lee had one of the first landmark studies when he was with the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice. Ben Chavis was also there at that time. They,

along with the General Accountability Office (GAO), had that set of studies that began in the late 1980s and early 1990s that are critical to helping people be able to prove some of the impacts that they have said.

How many of you all appreciate if you see something and somebody tells you that you never saw it, right? Or you tasted something, it tasted bad, but somebody told you it is probably not that bad. Or you smelled something, and folks are like, “You are crazy.” That is what was going on at that time.

I want to give you a bit of history as we begin to make this journey from environmental injustice to environmental justice.

Let me ask you this question. I ran track, and in my head, everything moves in seconds. By a show of hands, in the last sixty seconds, how many folks in the room have taken a breath of air. Raise your hand if you have taken a breath of air in the last sixty seconds.

I want you to think about something. Sounds like a silly question. “Mustafa, why would you ask me if I have taken a breath of air?” We all know it is an autonomic response. It is just something we naturally do. We breathe in, we breathe out. Everybody, do me a favor. Take a deep breath, hold it just for a second—savor it. Let it out, nobody pass out.

Think about this: How many people in our country cannot take a breath of fresh air? Here is the crazy dynamic that we have going on. I am not going to get too political. Right now, in our country, some people label it as the greatest country on earth, depending on sort of what your analysis is. Two hundred thousand people die each year, prematurely, from air pollution. Two hundred thousand.

More people die every year in our country from air pollution than died from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Vietnam, and the Korean War combined. Think about that for a second.

We put a huge amount of resources into defense, and I am not saying there is a debate there for those expenditures. Does it not make sense for us to also make sure that we are investing in protecting people’s lives from air pollution? You all took that breath of air.

If you know somebody who has asthma, raise your hand. Twenty-five million folks—seven million kids in our country have asthma. And disproportionately, it is African American and Latino children that are the ones who are going to the emergency room and the ones who are losing their lives prematurely.

You know some of these impacts that are happening from air pollution if you just walk off this campus and do not go too far. But, right up the road in Wilmington, have you been up there? Have you seen the refineries and some of the other polluting facilities that are there? And have you also seen the community that is right there dealing with these issues 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year? And we have a President who is trying to roll back the Clean Power Plan?

So, you are attorneys. I want to explore something with you. If someone intentionally moves forward on an act that causes someone harm, do they have culpability in that? You do not have to answer. I want you to think about it.

We know two hundred thousand people are dying. If we are enacting a policy or weakening a policy that is going to put more people at harm, maybe there is some culpability there. Maybe we need to strengthen something to make sure that if you are responsible for that, then you have to pay for that in whatever form or fashion the law dictates, right?

There is a place called the Manchester community in Houston, Texas. How many folks have been to Houston? How many people have been to the shipyard in Houston? Not as many people hanging out at the shipyard, I see. If you are blessed to go to Houston, Texas, I want you to go to the Manchester community.

There is an organization there called TEJAS.⁴ Juan Parras, Brian Parras, and some of the others have been a part of founding that. Why do I want you to go there? When you go to this community—you'll see piping and flaring in the background of César Chávez High School. I want you to think about where you went to school. Can you imagine if you had to learn in that situation? Well, you are like, "Mustafa, I do not yet have enough information about what that situation looks like."

In the Manchester community, you can go there and stand on people's front porch or back porch, reach out your hand if your arms are long enough, and literally touch the piping that exists in these facilities. If you go to César Chávez High School, you can take a rock, and you can throw it and hit the industries, and you do not even have to have that strong of an arm.

You have folks who have cancers—numerous different cancers. You have liver and kidney disease. You have all kinds of bronchial-related conditions that are going on. This is in the Manchester community in Houston, Texas. You might also remember the Manchester community, not just because there are football-sized fields of these facilities that are there, but also because when Hurricane Harvey came through, there was major flooding that happened there.

You probably also heard about the Superfund sites that are there that breached when all this flooding came through. This community, and many other communities like it—in Wilmington and so many other locations, in southwest Detroit—when you saw the statistics of how people cannot breathe in these communities, they are getting the double and triple whammy.

"Mustafa, what is the double and triple whammy?" Folks are super concerned, and we are going to talk about climate change. For at least forty years, and probably even before then, our most vulnerable communities—communities of color, low-income communities, indigenous populations—talked about the siting of fossil fuel facilities inside of their communities, and no one paid attention. Or at least very few people paid attention.

4. TEXAS ENVTL. JUSTICE ADVOCACY SERVS., <http://tejasbarrios.org/> (last visited Feb. 3, 2020).

They did not pay attention because of one of the things that the gentleman over there shared was that one, people felt they probably did not have any power. Two, in many instances, we want folks to be unseen and unheard if they do not come from where we come from. They do not look like us, they do not go to the schools that we go to.

The first whammy is the exposure to pollution that comes out of stacks, comes out of pipes, comes out of the fossil fuel infrastructure, comes from transportation routes. The second whammy is the climate change—these storms that are now coming, these extreme weather events. If you want to get really good with it, the third whammy is after these types of things happen, that people cannot even return home. Those are your three whammies. I do not think any professors are going to put that on your test, but that is okay.

You find in southwest Detroit, there is a Marathon refinery. Imagine when you were growing up: You are waking up, you are back home. Hopefully, mom or dad is making whatever your favorite breakfast is. I want you to go back to that moment. Now, I want you to come out of bed, I want you to go to your window, I want you to pull back the curtains. What do you see? Hopefully, you are seeing trees, you are seeing birds, you are seeing some beautiful things. That is what everyone should hope to be able to aspire to.

But if you are in the community there in southwest Detroit, when you open up your windows, what you are seeing are industrial facilities. You are seeing some of the dirtiest facilities inside of our country. That is what, as a young child, you get to look forward to. Or you get to be one of those twenty-five million folks or seven million kids who cannot go outside because the air is not in a position for you to be able to breathe it without getting sick and having an asthma attack. Does that make sense to everybody?

By show of hands, how many folks in the last twenty-four hours have taken a drink of water or a beverage? Raise your hand. Everybody, look around. It is an interesting dynamic that we have that in our country, once again, when we turn the tap on, what do we expect to happen? What kind of water? Safe water, right? That is what the whole Safe Drinking Water Act is about—our Clean Water Acts, making sure that everything is copacetic.

But, let us just speed this up a little bit. If I say Flint, Michigan, what does that elicit inside of you? There are a number of different dynamics there, which I am sure you are studying from various different sorts of directions, from the lack of opportunity to govern yourself, to the public health impacts, to the extraction of wealth.

Sometimes people do not talk about the extraction of wealth. We will talk a little bit about that in relationship to some of these impacts that are going on. But in Flint, unfortunately, folks decided to switch the water supplies. They decided also to make a conscious decision not to place some of the proper chemicals to keep some of the pipe leaching from happening, and many children were then impacted from lead. We all know the dynamics there of the neurological disorders, the issues with kidneys.

But sometimes we forget, and we forget the blessings that we have in the sense of being here at this institution. Can you imagine how difficult it is right now to be able to compete and to learn? Some of the brightest folks in the country come here, right?

Imagine if you were impacted from lead as a child, and now you have lowered your IQ points and your ability to learn. How does that limit your opportunities to be able to fully engage and participate in our process, right? That is what continues to happen.

Here is the scary thing. Everybody, or almost everybody except for three people in the room, knew about Flint. There are over three thousand locations across our country that have higher levels of lead in their water than Flint. 1.1 million children in our country currently have lead poisoning. If that does not get your attention, I am not sure what will.

We spend billions of dollars trying to remediate. But, there is also an educational component if we are going to help children who have been impacted do the best they can to get back up to speed. There are the medical costs.

All these things go into the mix, and when we do not get ahead of these problems, we do not do the right thing. We know that in many instances, again, it is low-income children and children of color who are dealing with these issues, but they are not the only ones. Sometimes I hear people talk about environmental justice, and we do a disservice by not also talking about white brothers and sisters who are equally impacted.

I grew up for a while in Appalachia. In West Virginia, since we are talking about water, there are a number of different dynamics that are going on throughout Appalachia. We all know—or at least when I was there and when I was going to school—the state had less than one percent folks of color, and that was whether you are African American, or you were from the Caribbean, or if you were Latino, or even if you had just a really good tan, it was very few folks.

I share that in all seriousness because it also places the spotlight on folks who sometimes folks forget. There are great organizations like Kentuckians for the Commonwealth and others who are in this space.

You have mountaintop mining, the chemical spill that happened in the Elk River. Those were mostly white brothers and sisters who were being impacted, although there were some African American folks and others who also lived in that part of the state.

In many towns, folks will talk about “Cancer Alley.” Cancer Alley runs from Baton Rouge to New Orleans. Many of these communities are founded by freed slaves. But in West Virginia, you have an area called Institute down in the Kanawha Valley.

You have in this area a corridor through the hills, which has become a cancer corridor, where you have emissions coming out of these plants. The emissions get stuck between the hills, especially in the summertime, and people are continually breathing this stuff in.

I lived in the northern part of the state, and my friends were from the southern part of the state. They invited me one summer to come down. When I went down—my friends' parents and others who are working in that area, they had these crazy amounts of cancer that were happening. They have these cancer clusters. They were not folks of color, primarily. Sometimes folks lose that in our conversation of how do we build solidarity and make sure that everybody understands that we are kind of in this together. Does that make sense to everybody?

Silicon Valley, Love Canal, fracking fields. There are a number of different places where these dynamics are going on. In many instances, those are in some other areas that had not traditionally dealt with some of these issues. But it is still going on, and these impacts are real, and we have got to figure out how do we navigate these types of things together?

I want to go back to Flint, because in Flint, in Detroit, and a whole bunch of places, and some places here in California, we have this other dynamic in relation to water. Everybody in the room raised their hand, and everybody has utilized some form of water or libation in the last twenty-four hours.

I want you to think about something. Imagine if you are one of those residents who is living in a place where there has been a water crisis, a water scare, and you are being asked to pay for this water, and you make a decision not to.

There is another crazy set of dynamics that have been going on, and there is definitely a legal component that needs to be looked at where people are literally losing their homes because folks are refusing to pay for the water or making a decision not to.

People are losing their children. Let that sink in for a second—that because you have made a decision that you do not want to participate with water that you are afraid is poisoning your body, that you might lose your child because Health and Human Services comes in and they say this is an unsafe living situation for your child.

Now, some folks in the room are probably saying, “Well, why do you not just go buy bottled water?” Well, not everybody has the same amount of disposable income. Or if you are more conscious and you are making some decisions, where do you think most of the landfills are?

That was a landfill case in Warren County, North Carolina. The majority of landfills in our country are located in low-income communities, communities of color.

So, where are those water bottles going to go if they are not recycled, if you live in an area that does not have recycling? Exactly. We have got these dynamics that are going on that sometimes we have to think deeper about what is really going on in this space.

Now, the triple whammy comes in, and that is climate change. How many folks have heard of a place called Princeville, North Carolina? Princeville, North

Carolina is one of those communities that was founded by freed slaves, and they have now had five-hundred-year floods hit them back-to-back.

Imagine the dynamic of trying to strengthen a community, and now you have got this overlay. You guys have recently had these incredible wildfires that are just devastating areas. When you look at the aerial photos, it actually looks like something on another planet.

We have had these hurricanes where we lost over three thousand lives in Puerto Rico, right? Houston—devastated. How many folks have heard of Port Arthur, Texas? You should check out a gentleman who is there, former Goldman Prize winner, who actually leads an organization called CIDA Inc.⁵

The reason that Port Arthur is so important is that, once again, it was a community that was founded by people who had escaped slavery. But these pipeline fights that we continue to see, the pipelines that are running from Canada, they end up in Port Arthur, they end up in the Manchester community in Houston, Texas.

Guess how many miles of fossil fuel pipeline we have in our country? 2.4 million miles. When you hear these folks saying that we need more pipeline, how does that possibly make sense?

There is a huge pipeline fight. There is a community in Virginia called Union Hill. Union Hill is in Buckingham County. It is, once again, a community that was founded by freed slaves, and Governor Northam has been trying to approve a natural gas compressor in this community—a community that is pristine. And then there is a big pipeline fight—the Bayou Bridge in Louisiana. All of this is moving across our country. We have to get engaged to help to make real change happen.

The reason is if you look at the storms and these other climate events that are going on—we are spending hundreds of billions of dollars to deal with the impacts. We do not have to. Consider the Green New Deal, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Sunrise Movement, all the folks who have been pushing on that trying to move us in a new direction.

I just want to also add that this type of work has been going on in communities for decades now. Here in California and across the country, there have been green zones. There have been a number of incredible organizations who have been moving forward on revitalizing communities.

The beauty of the moment is that technology has now gotten to a place where we can begin to utilize renewables in a very effective way and a cost-efficient way. We spend twenty billion dollars, on the conservative side, in subsidies for the fossil fuel industry. Should we not be doing the same thing for industries that do not impact our health, like wind and solar?

We have the opportunity right now to create about five million new jobs that will give folks more than just a living wage. We have to create new opportunities in that space but make sure that equity is a part of that, so that we

5. CMTY. IN- POWER AND DEV. ASS'N INC., <https://www.cidainc.org/> (last visited Mar. 6, 2020).

are not taking an old fossil fuel paradigm or twentieth century and before paradigm, and then placing it in this clean, green economy.

Take a look at how many folks of color actually own their own businesses in the clean energy space. I am pretty sure that if you looked on one finger, as a percentage, you would find out how many folks actually own their own businesses in that space.

We cannot operate from this old paradigm and expect that there is going to be solidarity and an opportunity to make change happen if we just take that and just make it green. Does that make sense to everybody? We also have to utilize worker training programs to make real change happen and give people an opportunity. I am one who believes, yes, we train folks up, but we also prepare them to own their own businesses so that they can be anchors in their communities and become that institution that not only brings back hope, but brings back financial stability as well.

The ReGenesis Project in Spartanburg, South Carolina is an example of real change actually happening.⁶ The ReGenesis Project is super important, along with the work that is happening with the Environmental Health Coalition in San Diego by Diane Takvorian, the work that is happening by Margaret May in Kansas City, the work that is happening by Reverend Floyd Flake in Jamaica, Queens, the work that is happening by Reverend Buster Soaries in Jersey City, the work that is happening by Bethel New Life in Chicago.

You see a theme there that there are a bunch of projects out there that are changing the game, but let us go back to the ReGenesis Project.

I left EPA because I had a responsibility to leave because I was blessed that I was raised by the leaders in the environmental justice movement, and my grandmother used to say, “When you know better, do better.” Maya Angelou and some other great writers and poets and poetesses once also said that “When someone shows you who they are, believe them.” When this administration showed us who they were by saying we are going to eliminate a number of these different programs, and some saying we have been trying to eliminate some agencies, I knew the impacts that were going to happen in our communities from the negative side, but also from the positive side.

The ReGenesis Project was one of those that we needed to make the linkages with. They got a \$20,000 Environmental Justice Small Grant. The EPA Office of Environmental Justice actually came out of a set of recommendations from stakeholders across the country. Please do not ever get it twisted and think that there were just these incredible government officials who said, we want to do what is right for environmental justice. That is just not the case.

There are two sides of our environmental justice and injustice fight. One is dealing with these impacts; the other one is revitalizing our communities, moving them from surviving to thriving. ReGenesis took a \$20,000 Environmental Justice Small Grant and leveraged it into \$300 million in changes.

6. REGENESIS, <http://redec.us/> (last visited Mar. 6, 2020).

Folks in South Carolina were spending \$300 to \$400 a month on their electricity costs—not a lot of energy efficiency in shotgun-style housing. The transportation routes in this community were ones that could have been very deadly; there was one way in and one way out of the community. There was a railroad track that used to come across, so sometimes a train would come in it and it would idle.

You are thinking, well, folks could just wait until the train leaves. But there was also a chemical plant, so if there was an explosion, people are trapped. What did they tell people to do? Shut your windows, close your doors until the release is over. That is just real talk. That is what folks were saying.

There were also food desert issues in Spartanburg. People had to travel, especially seniors, a great distance to be able to get fresh food. They also had a lack of access to jobs.

With that \$20,000 grant they began to do charrettes and visioning sessions. People talked about, not only the impacts that were happening, but also what they wanted in their community. They now have five hundred new green homes. Those green homes have taken their electricity cost from \$300 to \$400 a month down to \$67 a month. That is a big deal for some folks because it is more disposable income in their pockets.

They also did not have access to healthcare. Folks had to travel a distance. They now have a number of healthcare centers, and they have a mobile healthcare unit that actually goes out to the schools. They work to clean up brownfields and Superfund sites that were inside of their community.

They also got a supermarket and some other new buildings. They utilized worker training programs to actually rebuild their community. The communities were getting benefits and were the ones who were doing the rebuilding. Some grant projects, when the cameras go and the money starts to shrink, then the action stops. But when communities are the driver in a process, they are there. They are vested. They want to see change happen. They have got one hundred—

[Audio recording failed briefly while Mustafa Santiago Ali continued describing the ways in which the ReGenesis Project brought revitalization and change to Spartanburg, South Carolina.]

—Center as well, which will create more economic opportunity and help with the fresh food and those type of things. That is just one example of how real change can happen. That is a part of the environmental justice paradigm of being able to address these impacts, but also make real change happen.

I want you to think about how, unfortunately, in our country, sometimes we are so focused on separating people. We see that more and more today from leaders, not so much necessarily from folks who are just living their lives. We all know this is real talk. Think about how many times you grab your cell phone when you are walking down the street—it might not even be charged, and you act like you are talking to somebody just so you do not have to say anything.

How many of us have gotten on an elevator, and we look at those numbers, and we are like, “Lord, please do not let anybody say anything to me.” We just

stand there until we get to our floor. We are ingrained sometimes to separate ourselves and to not touch each other, whether mentally, or spiritually, or physically, and once we do, dynamics change.

We realize that we are all pretty much the same. We might come from different places, we might eat slightly different foods, we may pray in a slightly different way, but everybody pretty much wants the same things. Communities who are dealing with environmental justice concerns are the same. They are those communities that far too often we drive by, that we pretend do not exist, that we do not invest in. So, therefore, we can say, they are somewhat less than the other communities.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said that we came to these shores on different ships, but we are all in the same boat now. Think about that and this moment that we are currently living in, and why the work that you do and will continue to do is so critical.

The impacts from climate change, elections, and all these different things, we have to make a decision about who we are as a people. We have to look in the mirror, as a country, and the reflection that comes back should be one that we are proud of. If it is not, then we have to make change happen.

That is why the Hip Hop Caucus has the Respect My Vote campaign.⁷ We have registered over six hundred thousand people to participate in the civic process. We have artists and entertainers who are utilizing their platforms to talk about change in a way that resonates with folks because music and the arts connect people in many, many instances—helps us to lower some of the walls and build bridges. Knock over walls—

[The audio recording failed briefly while Mustafa Santiago Ali described how the Respect My Vote campaign is breaking down barriers to civic participation, and empowering millions of people through elections to reclaim their power and bring the change we need.]

—Have power.

How many folks remember the Women’s March a couple of years ago? A whole bunch of men said, “A million women are never coming together.” Sisters said, “Oh yeah? I got something for you.” Not only did they come and they marched, but they took that energy back home and you see it playing out now in Washington D.C. because now we have so many incredible ladies who are leading on Capitol Hill, right? How many folks remember the Science March?

We have all this incredible energy that is happening with youth leading the way in relationship to climate change and environmental issues. Everybody from the Sunrise Movement to This is Zero Hour, to the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Climate Change Initiative. That is power. It is power that is changing the culture of our country in a positive direction. Everybody do me a favor. Everybody say, “Power.”

7. *Respect My Vote*, HIP HOP CAUCUS, <http://hiphopcaucus.org/respectmyvote-mfol/> (last visited Feb. 3, 2020).

AUDIENCE: Power.

DR. MUSTAFA SANTIAGO ALI: That was just pitiful. Let us try it again. Everybody say, "Power".

AUDIENCE: Power.

DR. MUSTAFA SANTIAGO ALI: Oh, it is getting good to you now, is it not? Everybody do me a favor. Put your right hand in the air like it is 1968 at the Olympics. Power to the people—exactly. Everybody say, "Power to the people."

AUDIENCE: Power to the people.

DR. MUSTAFA SANTIAGO ALI: Say, "Power to the people."

AUDIENCE: Power to the people.

DR. MUSTAFA SANTIAGO ALI: Say, "Power to the people."

AUDIENCE: Power to the people.