

## Progress has produced 'mining of the spirit' that we must work individually, collectively to reclaim, Trudell says

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Native American leader John Trudell was the first speaker in the Martin Luther King Day Symposium.

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The spirit of The People was invoked by a ceremonial drum and a blessing before a powerful presentation by Native American leader John Trudell in Lydia Mendelssohn Theater Jan. 17. Some 300 people gathered to hear Trudell, one of the founders of the American Indian Movement, as part of the 11th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Symposium.

A traditional honor song by the locally based, nationally renowned TreeTown singers and a blessing in the Ojibwa language by Hap McCue, lecturer in American culture, set an appropriate tone for Trudell, an accomplished poet, musician, and cultural leader, who began by reading his poem, "Magic Valley," including these lines:

*Earth DNA pulls  
genetic memory  
ancient spirit  
sky father sky  
the magic valley  
earth mother earth  
childhood distances  
hard to remember  
what was never to be forgotten*

Trudell focused throughout his presentation on the idea that each person has a responsibility for using her or his own human ability to think in re-creating a world of harmony and justice. He



Photo by Bob Kalmbach

exhorted each person “to use your mind, to speak your own truth as coherently as possible, and repeat that truth over and over. It’s all one person can really do,” Trudell said, to change today’s predominant collective perception of reality—a technological reality that he sees as grounded in death, as opposed to the life-giving perception of reality derived from nature, “the DNA of the earth,” as he put it.

“We are all descendants of tribes,” Trudell said. “We all carry the collective experience of ‘before’ when we understood that life was about spirit—the ‘being part,’ who we are,” he said. The further civilization has progressed, “the further away we have gotten from who we are.” Along with mining of minerals from the earth there’s been a “mining of the spirit” that has led, Trudell said, to the pollution of racism, sexism, economic exploitation and, ultimately, death for countless millions.

Taking individual and collective responsibility for reclaiming our “being part” is John Trudell’s antidote for this dark reality, but he’s not sure whether we can act in time to save humanity. “We need to think more and [blindly] believe less,” he said, and rely more on prayer than on false hopes if we are to balance the destructive effects of civilization’s technological perception of reality.

And we need to talk and listen to each other, Trudell said, but to do that we must look at the language we use to ensure we can communicate, something we don’t do well at all, he added.