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Editors' Note

Barry Holstun Lopez

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Maps of Reconciliation

In the opening years of a new century who wishes to think of the final years? And yet, the old ways—war, the colonies—are worn out. What once served, or, truly, what once served only a few, is no longer feasible. The siren song of technology, to be sure, still courts an audience, the dazzle and promise of its solutions continue to make a plausible case, and its acolytes, with just a flicker of condescension, ask us for more time, more leeway.

The old ways, the path of the pirate and the conquistador, are worn out but, still, we acquiesce. Who will say no when effective new drugs are guaranteed, just there in the wings? When the elected and successful say it's time to move forward, who will say the game is over? With so many bets on the table, who wishes to say no to another roll of the dice?

The elders. As if with one voice, eerie as a solar eclipse, from Tibet to Tierra del Fuego, these historians of the workable now speak the same words. What are the words? What are their prescriptions? Without a book, a program, a charismatic—at the very least a crude map—how are we to know?

The neurologists and paleoarchaeologists tell us something happened fifty thousand years ago in Africa—perhaps it was the dawn of imagination—and hunter-gatherers became, overnight, something else. Us. We then moved swiftly, more swiftly than any driven animal before us, toward our destiny—the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, T'ang dynasty literature, the Constitution of the United States of America, Birkenau, the artificial heart. Then there were too many of us, and there was too much stuff—though, horribly, not enough for everyone. And those who said there was not enough, not enough of whatever it might take to make even more for anybody, were asking to be stoned by those who saw themselves as our enlightenment, who cursed the doubting.

And then the climate changed. And in the protracted and preternatural silence that followed, as if the unexpected slumping of a road had pitched a busload of children into the steep walls of a deep canyon, it was time to



Salt crystals on lava
Ka Lae, Ka'ū, Hawai'i
Photograph by
Franco Salmoiraghi, 1991

think through our destiny all over again, this time without words like *profit, conquer, or killing fields*.

Someone will have to make an outline, draw a map and pass it around, with a pencil and an eraser and no thought of ownership. The voices of individual authorship and the duly elected will need to give way to the repositories of community wisdom. For the first time in centuries, wisdom will need to be seated beside intelligence, a second light to cut the deep and unknowable dark.

Where once we might have begun the pursuit of another destiny with more (justifiable) war and additional (reluctant) enforcements of will, with vetted doctrines and the ruthlessness of reason, we might now begin with reconciliation. And with a capacity for reverence. In place of direct confrontation, the humility and unfamiliar courtesy of reconciliation. In place of a single belligerent epistemology and the self-assurance of its promoters, reverence for all that lies beyond human control. In place of indifference, compassion. In place of a brave army, courageous people.

The true test of usefulness for the human imagination now is in the invention of a life never before lived. The creation of a way in the world to which no one now, anywhere, is privy. We begin with the scraps of what seems right, and with the hope that what is now invisible is in fact possible, even if not likely in our lifetime.

We start with our instinct for reconciliation, to address the war in ourselves, the war in our kitchens, the war in Sudan.—Barry Lopez

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Hōnaunau, Hawai'i
Photograph by
Franco Salmoiraghi, 1991