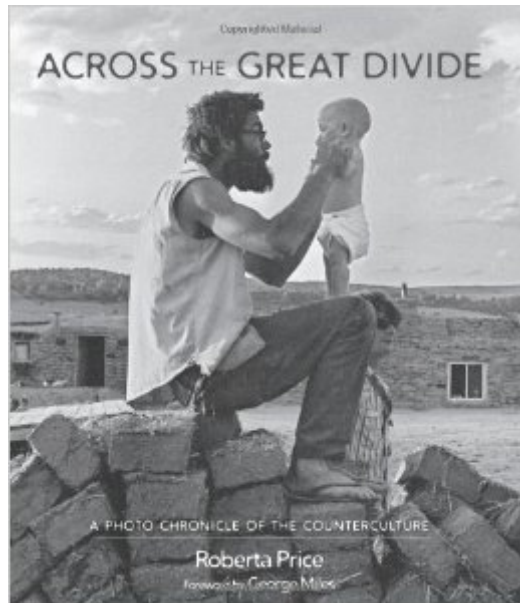


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# Across The Great Divide: A Photo Chronicle Of The Counterculture



## Synopsis

In 1969 Roberta Price came west with her camera to see for herself what was going on in the communes that had begun to spring up in New Mexico and Colorado. Over the next nine years she took more than three thousand photos of commune life, and now she has selected the most revealing of these images for publication in a visual memoir that reflects on her experiences and invites us to contemplate the rural counterculture of her youth. Unlike most photographers of the day, Price joined Libre, one of the Colorado communes, and lived there for seven years. Her photo documentation of her years at Libre provides a unique view of commune life through the eyes of a participant. We see the residents building homes, raising families, and celebrating community. Roberta Price's many photographs of Drop City, New Buffalo, Reality Construction Company, Libre, and other southwestern communes capture long-haired men, women in self-made peasant attire, psychedelic art, sheaves of marijuana, cast-iron stoves, and preindustrial agricultural practices visual evidence of the great divide that separated Price, her friends, and associates from the families and neighbors among whom they had grown up. The photos also reveal the presence of record players, amplifiers, and electric guitars, along with a staggering array of architectural and interior design, and visits by such iconoclasts as Ken Kesey, Peter Orlovsky, and Allen Ginsberg.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Roberta Price's lucid and luminous "photo chronicle" is like opening a time capsule. It is a rare, timely and ultimately up-lifting view of the counter-culture in pre-9/11 America, before the (apparent)

triumph of corporatism and the national security state. In the interest of full disclosure, I am still a resident on one of the communes that Price documented in the late 60s and early 70s. Her book is a tribute to her considerable charm and persistence in obtaining these riveting images. Price had to brave gale-force winds of hostility from the communards. At the time, one of our biggest fears was that "mass media" would sensationalize, marginalize and eventually crush our fledgling utopian dreams. We knew our venture was fragile and that publicity would inevitably bring hordes of energy-draining gawkers, thrill-seekers and dead-enders. Price has discreetly waited over 40 years to unleash these quietly incendiary photos. We all owe Price a debt of gratitude for having the foresight to recognize that the "back to the land" movement, for better or for worse, deserved to be part of the American historical record. Luckily she had the patience and resourcefulness to get the job done. Looking at some of her photos today, I'm struck by their eerie resonance with the current Occupy Wall Street movement. Her poignant photos of the Vietnam War protests, with all their rage and theatricality, are uncannily similar to the recent confrontations in Oakland and elsewhere. In the 1960s we weren't just protesting the war. For many of us, our attitude might have been more akin to Marlon Brando in the biker movie *The Wild One*. When asked what he was rebelling against, Brando's character replied: "Whatta ya got?"

In the 1960s I was a mild-mannered grad student in sociology at UW/Madison - until the life-changing events of 1968, culminating in the Chicago police riot at the Democratic National Convention. Like millions of other angry and alienated young Americans at the time (and millions now, for that matter), I desperately wanted to find a better way of living. I found myself drawn to the "back-to-the-land" movement, then in its counterculture infancy - though with deep roots in American history. I did some journalism about it (*Esquire*, September 1970) and a lot of "participation-observation" research for my Ph.D. dissertation, eventually published as *The Children of Prosperity: Thirteen Modern American Communes* (St. Martin's Press, 1977). Roberta Price's *Across the Great Divide* perfectly captures the spirit of the times in ways I was never able to do. I encountered many of the same people, places and events that Price documents, but paranoia struck deep then; the minute I brought out my camera, it was usually goodbye. Unlike Price, who lived the life herself for many years and was widely trusted, I was more like a tourist, only able to capture the joys and hardships of what I saw in words. Nothing in my personal photo archive of that period would make the cut of this book, which sets a new standard for understanding a very important but neglected - in fact suppressed - period of our national history. Price's luminous, authentic images show us what real freedom looked like for young Americans circa 1970. Today, the

whole world is crying out against military oppression, industrial pollution and corporate serfdom, and yearning for new paths to participatory democracy, cooperative communities, and economic self-sufficiency.

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