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An excerpt from

No Page Unturned

Five essential books for understanding New Mexico
by Laura Paskus | Santa Fe Reporter

The Orphaned Land: New Mexico's Environment Since the Manhattan Project

By V.B. Price

Writer VB Price has a nice way about him. He's easygoing and soft-spoken. Waving to people at the coffee shop where he's a regular customer, he's quick to shake his head and laugh, oftentimes at himself. Whether he's talking about other writers, former students—he teaches at the University of New Mexico—or Nell Farrell, the photographer for his latest book, *The Orphaned Land: New Mexico's Environment Since the Manhattan Project*, Price has a way of praising others when asked about himself.

That's why it's kind of awesome to watch him become increasingly animated at a November reading of his book. In *The Orphaned Land*, he explores the impacts of contaminated dust from Los Alamos National Laboratory and Superfund sites in Albuquerque's South Valley, the poisonous legacy of uranium on the Navajo reservation, and cattle ranching and oil and gas development on the eastern plains of New Mexico. "I don't want you to get depressed," he says to the audience. "This is fighting stuff."

Speaking about corporate irresponsibility and anti-regulation sentiment, Price says that if companies earn profits producing something—whether natural gas or computer chips—they should be

responsible for the waste and pollution they create. "If you can't run a business without taking care of your excrement, you should fail," he says.

Later, he explains that the great, hidden benefit of capitalism is that corporations aren't required to take care of their waste, and politicians are glad to jump on the anti-regulation bandwagon.

"We need to stop these people who are coming in and saying, 'regulation is thwarting business,'" he says. "What regulation is doing is thwarting the way business has always been done, which is to dump your shit anywhere you want."

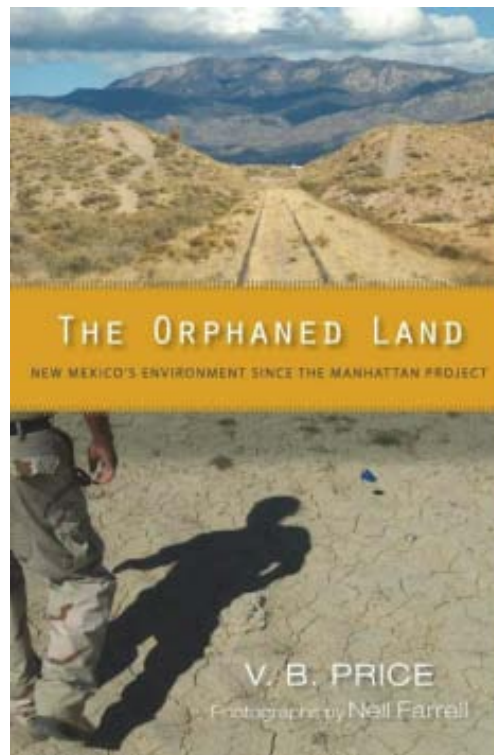
Anti-regulation fervor has waxed and waned over the course of Price's career as a writer. He got his start as a reporter for *The Albuquerque Tribune* in 1966; worked briefly as editor of *New Mexico Magazine*; reported for the online *New Mexico*

Independent; and has written, edited and contributed to more than 30 books. It took him eight years to research and write *The Orphaned Land*, and its many stories began as hooks that wouldn't lose hold of him—newspaper clippings he had saved and filed away over the years.

"What happened was I ended up literally wiping a little bit of the dust off the top of the table," he says, adding that, time and again, he came across examples of military pollution, industrial pollution and poor or ineffective technology. "Then I just became obsessed, really,"

he says, chuckling and putting his head down to his hands on the table. "I couldn't stop!"

Animated again, Price mourns New Mexico's lost opportunities. For decades, the state was considered a health center, a place of curative waters and a healing climate. In the wake of the Manhattan Project, New Mexico could have



become a hub for studying the medical impacts of nuclear technology. Starting in the 1950s and '60s, scientists could have been researching the long-term impacts of radiation. "But no, we stonewalled it; we denied it; we did nothing; and, as a matter of fact, we contributed more and more and more of it."

Just before gracefully changing the subject—he's done talking about himself—he laughs again: "Then I just started getting pissed off."

The Orphaned Land: New Mexico's Environment Since the Manhattan Project
by **V.B. Price**
www.vbprice.com

Photographs by **Nell Farrell**
University of New Mexico Press, 2011
6x9 paperback | 384 pages | 65 photographs

Photos from *The Orphaned Land* can be viewed on photographer Nell Farrell's website:
nellfarrell.com

Five stories that Price says demand more coverage:

► **Air pollution in the Four Corners:**

"Consider the specter of 30,000-40,000 pump jacks in the San Juan basin—combined with the smokestacks (from coal-fired power plants), combined with coal mining, coal dust, coal tailings, plus the water you need to do all that."

► **Los Alamos National Laboratory:**

"I think everybody should be spending tremendous amounts of time looking at LANL and not being corn swaddled into not looking at them. They are so vast. Their waste dumping has been so incredibly huge, and there's a lot about them that nobody's really written."

► **The leaking of 8 million gallons of jet fuel**

from Kirtland Air Force Base into the groundwater beneath an Albuquerque neighborhood—and how Air Force bases nationwide impact community water supplies.

► **Rio Rancho's Intel plant:** Suffering from health problems, residents downwind of the chip maker's plant asked that the federal and state governments require the company to cut its chemical emissions. But the state of New Mexico sided with the company against residents. "It's a big, big, big, hidden problem," Price says.

► **The proposed Tres Amigas project,** which would unite three huge power grids: If it becomes possible to mix electricity from different sources—coal, wind, solar, natural gas—within the systems, the intermittency of wind- and solar-generated electricity will no longer count against alternative energy.