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Review of *Hidden Treasures of the American West: Muriel H. Wright, Angie Debo, and Alice Marriott* By Patricia Loughlin

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Hidden Treasures of the American West: Muriel H. Wright, Angie Debo, and Alice Marriott. By Patricia Loughlin. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005. xxi + 234 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$32.50 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Patricia Loughlin has written an excellent work about three female scholars specializing in Native studies on the frontier, more specifically Oklahoma. Loughlin couches her analysis of Muriel H. Wright, Angie Debo, and Alice Marriott in terms of Nancy Parezo's concept of "hidden scholars." They comprised scores of early twentieth-century women who wrote for scholarly and popular audiences about Native people. Ironically, the three subjects in Loughlin's book were conceptually part of this larger movement but often worked in isolation. Although Debo did teach at West Texas State College, and Wright was editor of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, especially Debo and Marriott labored on the outskirts of academe in history and in anthropology or ethnology, respectively. In recent years some contemporary writers have focused on these women, but Loughlin's contribution is in presenting an analysis that weaves together the personal stories of three emergent female scholars, their

political agendas, and the actual work they produced.

Wright, Debo, and Marriott were part of the complex skein of people who eventually populated what became Oklahoma in 1907. Cultural clashes pitted Debo, a white woman from a struggling farm background, and Wright, a prominent Choctaw, against each other. In books such as *And Still the Waters Run* (1940), Debo brought to light the horrible injustices that wrecked havoc on the Five Tribes of Indian Territory and later Oklahoma. In doing so she offended Wright whose agenda as editor of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* and author of other works was to emphasize those Native people who had maintained an ethnic identity but also learned to master the dominant culture's concepts of success through education and professionalism. In Wright's mind, highlighting dispossessed, uneducated Indians, as Debo often did, tended to reinforce white stereotypes of the "poor," unsuccessful Native. Marriott, also a white woman, immersed herself within Kiowa culture, primarily one family, writing about what she observed in works such as *Ten Grandmothers* (1945). Some Native people also criticized Marriott for publicly exposing sacred traditions, while certain scholars faulted her work for being drawn from only a handful of Kiowa voices, one family in particular.

Nevertheless, these three female trailblazers were indomitable in their intentions to give back to Native people what whites had taken away. Both Debo and Marriott championed the 1930s political attempts of John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, who supported the Indian Reorganization Act, which essentially initiated retribalization and supported the collectivist nature of many Native people. This challenged the former federal government's assimilationist pressures since the Dawes Act of 1887. Debo and Marriott attempted to give back what their race had taken away while Muriel Wright insisted that Native people had survived in and adapted to Euro-American society. Despite these differences, Loughlin maintains, Wright, Debo, and Marriott were part of a groundswell of women who early in the century looked backward and

forward at one of the greatest culture wars of the American West and tried to give a type of victory to those Native people whom many believed had lost. Alone but together in the spirit of "hidden scholars" they blazed a trail for younger generations of women who struggled to find their place in male-dominated scholarly fields, all the while giving a public voice to those more marginalized than they.

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