ASSUMING INDIAN VOICES: WESTERN WOMEN WRITERS, ALICE MARRIOTT, MURIEL WRIGHT, AND ANGIE DEBO

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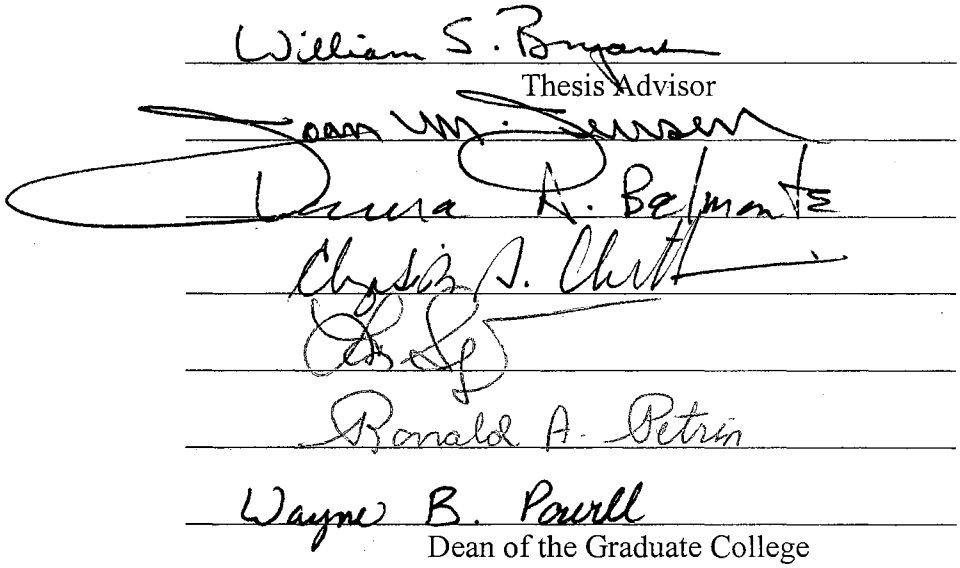

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CHAPTER ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO WESTERN WOMEN WRITERS

Women's presence in the American West has been coterminous with men's, but the professional writings of men have muted or overshadowed much of the professional writings of women as interpreters of the West. Matilda Coxe Stevenson traveled with her husband to Zuni in 1879 as a member of the first research expedition of the Bureau of American Ethnology. Scholars have called Stevenson the first woman ethnographer in the Southwest, due to her collection of information on women for the bureau.[1] Despite this recognition, it is important to understand that much of Stevenson's research appeared under her husband's name and therefore represents the submersion of women's presence in the fields of anthropology, ethnology and western history. This is only one of many examples of women's presence as researchers, observers, and interpreters of the West overshadowed and rendered invisible by men's observations. While the Southwest, particularly New Mexico and Arizona, have received extensive attention on the subject of women's professional writings, Oklahoma and Oklahoma women writers have not received adequate attention in this regard.

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[1]Nancy J. Parezo, "Matilda Coxe Evans Stevenson," in *Women Anthropologists*, ed. Ute Gacs, et al. (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1988), 338.

Despite the lack of scholarly attention, Oklahoma provides a distinct backdrop in which to study the intersection of race, gender, and place. By the mid-twentieth century, one-third of all native peoples lived in the state of Oklahoma. According to Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier's 1933 report, Oklahoma had the largest Indian population in the United States.[2] In addition, Oklahoma was home to fifty-seven federally recognized tribes.[3] With the state claiming the largest American Indian population and demonstrating marked diversity among the tribes, Oklahoma supplied a fertile place for historians and anthropologists, both women and men, to study Native Americans. Taking Oklahoma women writers as its subject, this study considers the careers and writings of ethnologist Alice Marriott, editor Muriel Wright, and historian Angie Debo as scholars of American Indian communities. These women created careers and a body of literature at a time when academia was almost exclusively the domain of men. In some cases explicitly and in others simply through their successful careers, these women embody both the limitations and opportunities faced by women scholars in the 1930s and 1940s. Their work was not submerged beneath or within the work of men, only because they strove so diligently to establish their own voices.

The work of Joan M. Jensen, Nancy J. Parezo, Barbara A. Babcock and others

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[2]John Collier, "Appendix, Indian Population," in *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1933* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1933), 111.

[3]Susan Labryn Meyn, "More Than Curiosities: A Grassroots History of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board and Its Precursors, 1920 to 1942" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1997).

reconsiders the presence of women interpreters in the American West.[4] In *One Foot on the Rockies*, Jensen discusses the tradition of women's creativity in such diverse fields as art, poetry, history, and anthropology in the modern American West. In a chapter entitled "With These Words: Silences/Voices," Jensen explores the academic literary tradition among western women. From the storytelling tradition of western Indian women to women anthropologists who entered the field with ambitions of preserving Indian culture, women addressed personal and professional concerns in their writings. The current study takes Jensen's examination of the "anthropological literary tradition" as its inspiration, and seeks to include both women anthropologists and women historians of Oklahoma as part of this tradition. The study reenforces the conclusion that the American West has been collected, interpreted and narrated by women who were active in the professions, even if on the margins, during the first half of the twentieth century.

Marriott, Wright, and Debo represent three western women who examined Native Americans through the lens of local history. All three scholars in this study made significant contributions to the historiography of Native American communities in Oklahoma while occupying various positions on the periphery of academia. Taken together, these women writers were pathbreakers who anticipated later methods and historical interpretations.

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[4]Joan M. Jensen, *One Foot on the Rockies: Women and Creativity in the Modern American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); Nancy J. Parezo, ed., *Hidden Scholars: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993); Barbara A. Babcock and Nancy J. Parezo, ed., *Daughters of the Desert: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest, 1880-1980* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988).

Alice Marriott (1910-1992) grew up in Oklahoma City during the 1920s. She received her degree in anthropology from the University of Oklahoma's new anthropology department in 1935, becoming the first woman graduate of the program. Her fieldwork experiences among the Modoc people in Oregon and the Kiowa in western Oklahoma provided a firm foundation for her later work as an ethnologist. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, Marriott worked as a field representative in Oklahoma for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board under the auspices of the Department of the Interior. During World War II she served as a field representative for the American Red Cross in southwestern Texas and New Mexico. Alongside her government and Red Cross work, Marriott wrote ethnographic studies on the Kiowa, the Cheyenne, and the San Ildefonso people. She later returned to Oklahoma and co-authored a number of works with archaeologist Carol Rachlin.

Marriott's use of experimental ethnography, openly autobiographical texts of an ethnographer's experiences among Indians, was an innovative approach which did not find prominence until the 1960s and 1970s. Such an open acknowledgment of subjectivity and a lack of distance between anthropologist and informant were unpopular during the 1930s and 1940s when she first began her work. Other women anthropologists used experimental ethnographic models in their texts, including Ruth Underhill's *The Autobiography of a Papago Woman* and Gladys Reichard's *Dezba, Woman of the*

Desert.[5] In general, Marriott's works were written for a popular audience, emphasizing the stories of Native American women. *The Ten Grandmothers* is the story of Kiowa culture, but it is also significant because it includes the voices of Kiowa women.[6] In *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso*, Marriott uses the life history of a famous individual, Maria Martinez, to explore a culture.[7] This approach was not without its own set of problems which will be explored at length in the Marriott section of the study.

Muriel Wright (1889-1975) was the editor of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, the state's historical quarterly, for over thirty years, from 1943-1973. In addition to her role as editor, she also operated an active historic sites marker program at the Oklahoma Historical Society, identifying and marking more than 600 sites in Oklahoma. Wright was an Oklahoma Choctaw and proudly acknowledged that her paternal grandfather had named the state "Oklahoma," or red people. Her mother came to Oklahoma as a missionary teacher. Wright's bicultural heritage, particularly her background as a member of an affluent Choctaw family, shaped her interpretation of Oklahoma history.

Wright was an early public historian who maintained a bicultural identity. She represented many women who wielded tremendous power at the state and local levels in

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[5]Ruth M. Underhill, *The Autobiography of a Papago Woman*. Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association No. 46 (Menasha, WI: American Anthropological Association, 1936); Gladys Reichard, *Dezba, Woman of the Desert* (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1939).

[6]Alice Marriott, *The Ten Grandmothers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1945).

[7]Alice Marriott, *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1948).

the fields of history and historic preservation from the 1930s to the 1960s. From a personal interest in recording her family's history to a longer view of Indian history in the story of Oklahoma, Wright told American Indian history with agency. In over one hundred contributions to the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Wright's topics included local history, Indian history, military history, and historic preservation. She was an "assimilationist historian,"[8] who elected to discuss the positive aspects of Oklahoma's unique heritage as a state with diverse American Indian populations coexisting with descendants from the land runs.

Angie Debo (1890-1988) grew up in the farming community of Marshall, Oklahoma, and her parents were tenant farmers. Debo attained the doctorate in history at the University of Oklahoma but never secured a permanent academic position. Debo received the majority of her training from E. E. Dale, a student of Frederick Jackson Turner, and her work reflects this tradition. But there were some significant departures from the Turnerian tradition in her texts. While writing within a frontier framework, Debo grappled with this framework and wrote on the periphery of what was considered traditional historical writing of Indian-white relations.

Debo's work in the 1930s and 1940s anticipated ethnohistorical approaches developed in the 1950s and 1960s. In *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, for example, Debo used tribal records, anthropological texts, and oral tradition in her texts, to

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[8]Rennard Strickland, *The Indians of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 81.

examine cultural changes.[9] By using a variety of sources, she attempted to frame her histories of Indian-Indian and Indian-white relations from a native viewpoint. But Debo also lacked the political savvy of her mentor at the University of Oklahoma, E. E. Dale. Although Dale would lecture in class on many of the injustices Native Americans experienced in Oklahoma, he would not tackle such topics in print. Debo, on the other hand, published *And Still the Waters Run* in 1940, an examination of the effects of forced liquidation of tribal lands and government on Oklahoma's Five Tribes.[10] Such a politically charged topic and her uncompromising determination "to discover the truth and publish it," could have extinguished any hopes she had for a career in academia.[11]

"Hidden Scholars"

These three writers join a group of women historians and anthropologists active during the first half of the twentieth century -- other "hidden scholars," as Parezo calls them. Academic jobs for women historians and anthropologists were scarce in the 1930s and 1940s. Women's opportunities often remained limited to women's colleges and those professions traditionally regarded as "feminine," nursing, education, and social work. Ruth Behar describes two types of nontraditional women scholars, or those

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[9]Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934).

[10]Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940).

[11]*Angie Debo: An Autobiographical Sketch, Eulogy and Bibliography* (Stillwater, OK: The College of Arts and Sciences and Department of History, Oklahoma State University, 1988), 2.

seemingly on the periphery of the academy. Many of these professionals did not hold academic positions, but influenced historical and anthropological interpretation as staff members of museums and historical societies. Wright's work within the historical society, as editor of the historical journal and an active member of the historic preservation program, fits the first type. Others survived without a regular paycheck, but sought part-time employment and grants to sustain themselves as they wrote the kind of books they wanted to write. Marriott and Debo are examples of the second type. Debo's career, however, meandered in and out of academic employment. She taught at the college level in Texas in the late 1920s and early 1930s and then returned to university employment in the 1950s as a librarian and researcher at Oklahoma State University. During the mid-1930s, however, she left her teaching position and returned to her home in Marshall, Oklahoma, to research and write histories of American Indian people and she sustained herself through grant support. Behar acknowledges that more often than not, these scholars did not attain permanent positions in academia, and therefore, could not train graduate students. These women, Behar writes, "had only their writing by which to stand or fall.[12] Their writings form the common thread which connects Marriott, Wright, and Debo together.

These women were prolific writers, yet we are only beginning to learn more about them and their significance to Oklahoma history, Indian history, and the American West. Of the three women writers under consideration in this study, Debo has received the most

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[12]Ruth Behar, "Introduction: Out of Exile," in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 17.

scholarly attention to date. For example, Shirley A. Leckie has written a biography of Angie Debo which will be published by the University of Oklahoma press next year. Leckie has conducted an extensive study of Debo and her arguments inform my work. Leckie views Debo's work in Indian history as a "bridge between the 'Old' and 'New' Indian history" and a "forerunner of ethnohistory."[13]

Ethnohistory emerged as a new methodology during the late 1950s. James Axtell defines ethnohistory as "the use of historical and ethnological methods and materials to gain knowledge of the nature and causes of change in a culture defined by ethnological concepts and categories." Especially since the early 1970s, proponents of the "new Indian history" strive to tell the story of Indian-white relations from an "Indian-centered" perspective.[14] In 1971, as Leckie points out, Robert Berkhofer, Jr. called for a "new Indian history," a history in which "Indian-Indian relations [would be] as important as white-Indian ones have been previously." While Leckie maintains that Debo had pioneered this type of "Indian-centered" history in her writings,[15] R. David Edmunds

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[13]Shirley A. Leckie, "Angie Debo, Pioneering Historian," public lecture delivered at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 29 March 1999, 4, 7.

[14]James Axtell, "Ethnohistory: An Historian's Viewpoint," in *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 5; Axtell, "The Ethnohistory of Native America," in *Rethinking American Indian History* ed. Donald L. Fixico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 11-28; William T. Hagan, "The New Indian History," in *Rethinking American Indian History*, 29-42.

[15]Shirley A. Leckie, "Women Writers Who Explored the Legacy of Conquest Out on Their Own Frontier," paper delivered at the American Historical Association, Pacific Coast Branch Conference, Maui, Hawaii, August 1999, 10.

disagrees, asserting that Debo's analysis "lacked an ethnohistorical perspective."[16] The evidence presented here sides with Leckie: Debo should be called a precursor to ethnohistory because she made gains in the effort to come closer to a so-called "Indian perspective." Although Debo did not utilize oral history or oral tradition in her earlier works, she did incorporate anthropological secondary literature and tribal records to inform even her initial studies. "Debo's lasting contribution to American history," as Kenneth McIntosh contends, "was her effort to interpret American history from the Indians' perspective."[17]

Some scholars may dispute the notion of Debo as an ethnohistorian, but all would agree that *And Still the Waters Run* remains her most controversial work. Suzanne H. Schrems and Cynthia J. Wolff trace Debo's efforts to publish *And Still the Waters Run.* Although Debo completed the manuscript in the mid-1930s, the book was not published until 1940 due to political and legal factors, particularly the threat of libel. Schrems and Wolff explore the struggles between the relatively new University of Oklahoma Press and its editor Joseph A. Brandt, the University of Oklahoma president and administration, influential Oklahomans who were linked to graft in the manuscript, and Debo. *And Still the Waters Run* was eventually published by Princeton University Press after Brandt

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[16]R. David Edmunds, "Native Americans, New Voices: American Indian History, 1895-1995," *American Historical Review* 100 (June 1995): 732.

[17]Kenneth McIntosh, "Geronimo's Friend: Angie Debo and the New History," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 66 (Summer 1988): 174.

accepted a position at the press.[18]

In her dissertation, "Angie Debo: In Search of Truth," Petrina Russo Medley explores Debo's life and writings, with particular emphasis on the unedited version of *And Still the Waters Run*. Medley finds that this controversial work, in fact, "corrected the historical record for Oklahoma history."[19] Richard Lowitt also includes Debo's *And Still the Waters Run* in his study of regionalism at the University of Oklahoma, covering similar ground as the Schrems and Wolff study.[20] Lowitt's most recent article in the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* examines the correspondence between Debo and Dale which began in 1925 and continued into the 1970s.[21] From these letters, Lowitt claims that both Dale and Debo acknowledged that Debo "became a far better historian and that what success came to her was based entirely on her own merits with little real assistance from Dale in easing her way."[22] Medley and Lowitt's texts are important, but this study is more concerned with Debo's claims of an Indian voice or an Indian perspective in her writings.

Angie Debo has also been described as a woman regionalist. In his treatment of

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[18]Suzanne H. Schrems and Cynthia J. Wolff, "Politics and Libel: Angie Debo and the Publication of *And Still the Waters Run*," *Western Historical Quarterly* 22 (May 1991): 184-203.

[19]Petrina Russo Medley, "Angie Debo: In Search of Truth," (Ph.D. diss., Oklahoma State University, 2000). Dissertation abstract in author's possession.

[20]Richard Lowitt, "Regionalism at the University of Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 73 (Summer 1995): 150-71.

[21]Richard Lowitt, "'Dear Miss Debo': The Correspondence of E. E. Dale and Angie Debo," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 77 (Winter 1999): 372-405.

[22]Ibid., 373.

the regionalist movement during the interwar period, Robert Dorman notes several trends among women regionalists such as Debo, Constance Rourke, and Mari Sandoz. They rejected middle-class expectations of marriage and motherhood or "dependent spinsterhood," in favor of careers as freelance writers. If they married as young women, they then divorced and never remarried. If they aspired for permanent, academic positions, they did not obtain them. In contrast, Dorman finds that most men described as regionalists were married with children and were members of university faculties.[23]

Alice Marriott has received some scholarly treatment over the last three decades. In 1969, Turner S. Kobler discussed the works of Alice Marriott as part of the Southwest Writers Series. Kobler's account offers a practical overview of Marriott's major works, including *The Ten Grandmothers* and *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso*. Kobler emphasizes Marriott's literary rather than historical significance, in contrast to this study.[24]

During the 1980s scholars pointed to Debo and Marriott as pathbreakers in the fields of American Indian history and ethnology and conducted extensive oral histories

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[23]Robert L. Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 38.

[24]Turner S. Kobler, *Alice Marriott*, Southwest Writers Series 27 (Austin, TX: Steck-Vaughn Company, 1969).

with them.[25] Marriott received renewed importance as part of a larger investigation of women anthropologists in the Southwest. In 1986, *Daughters of the Desert*, a conference and exhibit, was held in Tucson, Arizona. It highlighted women scholars who had been active in the Native American Southwest from 1880 to 1980. Marriott was among the scholars surveyed for this project. Nancy J. Parezo, Curator of Ethnology at the Arizona State Museum and one of the conference organizers, continued this important work with an edited volume, *Hidden Scholars: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest*, in 1993. This volume examines the influence of gender and ethnographic authority in women anthropologists' research. Other themes include the invisibility of women's presence as researchers of the Southwest, mentoring, professional opportunities or roadblocks, academic and nonacademic careers, and the notion of women's community within the profession.[26] Marriott's oral history conducted by Jennifer Fox in 1986 provides an important source in piecing together Marriott's life history and experiences in connection with her writings.

In her study of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, Susan Labry Meyn dedicates one chapter to the board's activities in Oklahoma from the late 1930s to the early 1940s. Meyn details Marriott's position as the board's Oklahoma field representative. Marriott

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[25]See Angie Debo, interviews by Glenna Matthews and Gloria Valencia-Webber, from 1981-1985, transcripts, Angie Debo Collection, Oklahoma State University Library, Stillwater, Oklahoma [hereafter cited as ADT]; Alice Marriott, interview by Jennifer Fox for the Daughters of the Desert Oral History Project, 13 March 1986, Tucson, Arizona, audio recording, Wenner-Glen Foundation for Anthropological Research, New York, New York [hereafter cited as AMI].

[26]Babcock and Parezo, *Daughters of the Desert*; Parezo, *Hidden Scholars*.

helped facilitate and market Indian arts and crafts and worked to revive many native artforms no longer practiced.[27] Meyn's work focuses on Marriott's government employment and does not discuss her fieldwork with the Kiowa community which resulted in *The Ten Grandmothers* or her later projects such as *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso*.

Deborah Gordon, on the other hand, uses Marriott's biography of Maria Martinez, the famous San Ildefonso potter, in her useful discussion on female paternalism, or "matronization," which takes place during storytelling.[28] Gordon does not view matronization as a manifestation of one-way power relations. Rather, she addresses the complexities and nuances of multidirectional relationships between gender and ethnographic authority. "The assumption," Gordon states, "that Anglo-American culture commands and intrudes and Native American cultures only defend themselves and need a basic support in doing this disallows the kind of experience and way of being that fieldwork promises – an openness that permits a conflict of interpretations."[29] After an examination of Marriott's *Maria* and Gladys Reichard's *Dezba*, Gordon concludes that "white women found in Native American women's lives the preoccupation of white

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[27]Meyn, "More Than Curiosities," 189-229.

[28]Deborah Gordon, "Among Women: Gender and Ethnographic Authority of the Southwest, 1930-1980," in *Hidden Scholars: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest*, ed. Nancy J. Parezo (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 129-45.

[29]Ibid., 144-45.

culture."[30] Many other scholars have echoed this position. Catherine Lavender, for instance, in her study of women anthropologists in the Southwest during the first half of the twentieth century, finds that while anthropologists such as Elsie Clews Parsons, Ruth Fulton Benedict, Gladys Reichard, and Ruth Murray Underhill were observing native peoples, they were simultaneously engaged in self-reflection. As much as they may have tried to distance themselves from their own culture as they observed another, their cultural assumptions and expectations were constantly at work during their research and appear in their texts.[31] Both Gordon and Lavender correctly identify the cultural assumptions women anthropologists of the 1930s brought to their texts. Other scholars such as Beatrice Medicine and Patricia Albers evaluate the research on Native American women and offer new approaches to American Indian women's studies.[32]

In contrast to Debo and Marriott, Muriel Wright has received the least historical

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[30]Ibid., 144.

[31]Catherine Jane Lavender, "Storytellers: Feminist Ethnography and the American Southwest, 1900-1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado-Boulder, 1997).

[32]Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine, *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1983); Gretchen M. Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands, *American Indian Women: Telling Their Lives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Nancy Shoemaker, ed., *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Clara Sue Kidwell, "Indian Women as Cultural Mediators," *Ethnohistory* 39 (Spring 1992): 97-107; Marie Annette Jaimes, "Towards a New Image of American Indian Women: The Renewing Power of the Feminine," *Journal of American Indian Education* 22 (October 1982): 18-32; Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Tradition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986); Nancy Bonvillian, "Gender Relations in Native North America," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 13 (1989): 1-28; Rayna Green, "Native American Women," *Signs* 6 (Winter 1980): 248-67; Valerie Sherer Mathes, "A New Look at the Role of Women in American Indian Societies," *American Indian Quarterly* 2 (Spring 1975): 131-39.

attention. This is unfortunate, for her life and writings reveal in a unique manner the connections between Indian identity, gender, and historical interpretation. LeRoy H. Fischer has written two articles which examine Wright's biographical information and her importance to the Oklahoma Historical Society.[33] Fischer's work provides a foundation for a discussion of Wright's bicultural heritage, her role as an "assimilationist historian,"[34] and her position of power as the editor of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma.*

Wright's work as an interpreter of Oklahoma history may be viewed best within the larger literature of Indians as cultural brokers or intermediaries. Cultural brokers, as described by Margaret Szasz, travel between cultures serving as "repositories of two or more cultures."[35] When viewed in this way, Wright's work at the Oklahoma Historical Society carries a variety of meanings as an historian with a bicultural identity.

"Indian Voice," Regionalism, and Audience

More than mere examples of "hidden scholars," this study represents the first attempt to make connections among Marriott, Wright, and Debo. It relies on the insights

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[33]LeRoy H. Fischer, "Muriel H. Wright, Historian of Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 52 (Spring 1974): 3-29 ; id., "The Historic Preservation Movement in Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 57 (Spring 1979): 3-25.

[34]Rennard Strickland first called Muriel Wright an assimilationist historian. See Rennard Strickland, *The Indians in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 81.

[35]Margaret Connell Szasz, ed., *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 6; Walter L. Williams, "Twentieth Century Indian Leaders: Brokers and Providers," *Journal of the West* 23 (July 1984): 3-6; James Clifton, ed., *Being and Becoming Indian: Biographical Studies of North American Frontiers* (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1989).

of the aforementioned scholars to place these three writers within the broader contexts of Native American and western history. Although the previous literature has examined them singly, this treatment discusses their careers and publications in relation to the others. Through an examination of their life histories and writings, three central themes emerge. First, the writers assumed an "Indian voice," or an Indian perspective in their writings. The complexities of this issue become apparent when the writers critique each other's work. The second theme considers the relationship between gender and regional identity. There is a connection, perhaps assumption, that local history in Oklahoma is Native American history, and this history is often told by women. And third, all three writers wrote for the general public, educating non-Indians on Indian people. Although their work was read by scholars, Marriott, Wright, and Debo wrote principally for a larger, general readership. The three women writers in this study represent these themes to varying degrees. No simple categorization applies to these women. They must be evaluated as individuals with disparate views.

Scholars of the New Indian History emphasize the need to write from an American Indian perspective, revealing an American Indian voice.[36] All three of these writers made self-conscious attempts to do this, long before the New Indian History emerged as a dominant trend in the discipline. Among these women, however, who best speaks for American Indians and who can claim authorship? Wright's Indian voice projected a more assimilationist position than did Debo's adoption of an Indian voice. Marriott used an ethnographic approach, and her books read like novels written as if the

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[36]See Hagan, "The New Indian History," in *Rethinking American Indian History.*

Indians in the stories were telling them. These writers brought three different approaches to their work, but all shared the common interest of preserving Indian culture and telling the stories of American Indians to the general public for greater awareness and understanding. The issue becomes more complicated when we consider the complexity of Indian cultures, and the interplay between these writers. If Debo was an early voice of ethnohistory, she did not speak for all Indians. For example, Wright laid claim to Choctaw history and criticized Debo's work on the Choctaws. Wright reminded Debo that she did not speak for Wright or her family. The claim that one speaks with a singular "Indian voice" is presumptuous. Native peoples are diverse and maintain a multiplicity of views.

The tension between Debo and Wright becomes clear in R. David Edmunds' discussion of the "Indian voice." Edmunds correctly points out that "Indians have repeatedly claimed that much of 'academic' Indian history does not reflect a Native American perspective; it reflects only what non-Indian academics think is important in the lives of Indian people." Edmunds asks two questions which address this difference of perspective between Debo and Wright: "Do historians who are members of the tribal communities possess particular insight into these historical issues?" And, "[c]an historians (non-Indian) who are not members of the tribal communities speak with an 'Indian voice?'"[37] In her texts, Debo self-consciously set out to record the native point of view. And yet the complexity of the issue becomes apparent when we learn that Muriel Wright, espousing her identity as a Choctaw, did not agree with Debo's proposed native

[37]Edmunds, "Native Americans, New Voices," 737-38.

view. What becomes clear is that Debo's empathy for the full-bloods of the Five Tribes did not meld easily with Wright's personal heritage as a mixed-blood Choctaw and a proponent of assimilation. In a similar vein, although Marriott included her informants in her texts, often giving the appearance that they were speaking in the first person, she still arranged and edited the material into a book marketable to whites. Also, she relied on informants from one family, which may or may not have been representative of the broader community.

The second theme is one of gender and place, specifically the connection between local history and women as the keepers of culture at the local level. All three writers recognized the importance of preserving the state's native heritage in their texts. Revealing the more unpleasant side of local history could also be perilous. In *And Still the Waters Run*, for example, Debo documents the local corruption which was coterminous with the liquidation of the Five Tribes' lands. But whoever controls local history also mediates interpretation. Wright used her role as editor of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* and her active leadership at the Oklahoma Historical Society for many decades as a vehicle to promote her interpretation of Oklahoma history. Overall, she championed Indian history in Oklahoma's development from territory to state; however, she carefully selected the histories that would be published and the histories that would not be published. In a similar manner, she selected which historic sites would be considered significant in Oklahoma history. Again, these decisions carry tremendous power on a local and even provincial level, for they shape the way history is interpreted and remembered. Questions regarding gender and the professions of history and

anthropology can also be addressed by looking at the career paths and texts of Debo, Wright and Marriott. Many women scholars did not attain tenure-track university positions. As Barbara Babcock and Nancy Parezo indicate, "despite the quality of work they did, few women had 'official' academic positions, many of them spending their lives in museums, which work anthropologist Clark Wissler saw as fitting for women since it resembled housekeeping."[38] What kind of role did gender play in their respective professions, in the field, and in their interpretations of Native Americans? Matilda Coxe Stevenson, for instance, was the first American ethnologist in the 1880s to recognize the value of including women and children in her studies of American Indians in the Southwest.

The third theme concerns Debo's, Wright's, and Marriott's deliberate interest in attracting a broad general audience to their works. Although they attracted Indians and scholars to their work, their primary purpose was to educate the broader public on Native American history. All three writers shared a common concern for preserving the state's heritage for future generations, both within the tribes themselves and for the general public. As an example, Marriott's *The Ten Grandmothers* (1945) aided younger generations of Kiowas during the 1950s as they prepared for the Sun Dance. Marriott's book helped preserve fundamental aspects of Kiowa culture that would have been lost without her written account. Her informants had been aware of this problem during the

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[38]Babcock and Parezo, *Daughters of the Desert*, 4.

1930s, and encouraged Marriott to preserve their culture in her book.[39]

Review of the Literature

In addition to Joan Jensen's *One Foot on the Rockies*, there is a growing literature on women's creative expressions in the American West. Vera Norwood and Janice Monk, in *The Desert is No Lady*, demonstrate the connection between women's art and literature and the land. A recent traveling exhibition and book, *Independent Spirits*, surveys women painters of the American West from 1890 to 1945.[40] A survey of women historians in the American West remains to be written. However, the work of women historians such as Debo and Wright can be examined in light of these recent studies.

While the scholarship on women in the Greater Southwest has grown in recent decades, the research on Oklahoma women remains limited. Linda Williams Reese's 1997 study, *Women of Oklahoma, 1890-1920*, is an exception.[41] An early work edited by Melvena K. Thurman, *Women in Oklahoma: A Century of Change* (1982), discusses a variety of topics including Osage and Cherokee women, women's suffrage, literature,

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[39]Alice Marriott, *Greener Fields: Experiences Among the American Indians* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, Company, 1953), 258-65.

[40]Vera Norwood and Janice Monk, ed., *The Desert is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987); Patricia Trenton, ed., *Independent Spirits: Women Painters of the American West, 1890-1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

[41]Linda Williams Reese, *Women of Oklahoma, 1890-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

education, and black women as elected officials.[42] More specifically, K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Devon A. Mihesuah provide accounts of Indian women in boarding schools in Oklahoma.[43]

In *Women of Oklahoma*, Reese traces the experiences of African American, native American, and white women from the creation of Oklahoma Territory in 1890 to the decade following statehood. Reese captures the variety of experiences among Oklahoma women across race, ethnic, class, and regional lines. For example, she points out that the land run experience was different for black women and white women. Even within black communities such as Langston or Boley, freedwomen and other black women settlers recorded different experiences. Reese's study includes women participating in Oklahoma's frontier process, as homesteaders, community builders, politicians, clubwomen, educators, proprietors, missionaries, students, and mothers. She also studies Oklahoma women's activism on a national scale through the work of Kate Barnard, Alice Robertson, and Edith Johnson.[44]

The most interesting comparison in the book concerns the responses to

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[42]Melvena K. Thurman, ed., *Women in Oklahoma: A Century of Change* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1982).

[43]K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Devon A. Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). For other studies on Oklahoma women, see Patricia L. Furnish, "Women and Labor on the Panhandle-Plains, 1920-1940," *Panhandle-Plains Historical Review* 68 (1995): 14-36; Courtney Ann Vaughn-Roberson, "Sometimes Independent But Never Equal – Women Teachers, 1900-1950: The Oklahoma Example," *Pacific Historical Review* 53 (February 1984): 39-58.

[44]Reese, *Women of Oklahoma, 1890-1920.*

The most interesting comparison in the book concerns the responses to acculturation among Cherokee and Kiowa women. Beginning in 1851, an elite mixed-blood and full-blood Cherokee population attended the Cherokee National Female Seminary in Tahlequah, an educational program based on the curriculum at Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts. Reese views the Cherokee educational system with its emphasis on Victorian refinement as the "ultimate example" of acculturation. The Cherokee Female Seminary students, according to Reese, "combined the education and public activism of New England, the refined graces of the South, and access to the land and wealth of the West gained by virtue of their Indian blood." Kiowa women, in contrast, experienced firsthand the federal government's mismanaged reservation administration. Kiowa parents often withdrew their children from school due to severe disciplinary action such as whippings. Certain individuals such as Baptist missionary Isabel Crawford encouraged the Kiowas to reassert a degree of autonomy within the system of government-imposed acculturation. In her final assessment, Reese maintains that both the Cherokee and the Kiowa women worked to preserve their cultures.[45]

Recent studies situate women's narratives of the American West as carriers of cultural assumptions and hegemonic power. In her survey of nineteenth and twentieth century women's writings on the American West, Brigitte Georgi-Findlay finds that "white women's western narratives do assume a role in the affirmation of cultural power

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[45]Ibid., 142.

and, in fact, establish materialist versions of an American West."[46] She interprets women writers as agents of territorial expansion. Georgi-Findlay finds that women's accounts add complexity to the literature of westward expansion, empire building, and colonization; for women's texts at once participate in and reject the national narrative.

Although she had assumed she would find women's texts to be more "detached and critical" than the predominantly male national narrative, in fact Georgi-Findlay finds that "white women emerge as authors and agents of territorial expansion, positioned ambiguously within systems of power and authority."[47] As an example of divergent interpretations, an army officer's wife may "feminize" her description of an Indian male servant by recalling his domestic instincts that include caring for her babies and serving a formal dinner, thereby exercising power over him reminiscent of colonial discourse. Conversely, Georgi-Findlay considers Caroline Leighton's *Life at Puget Sound* (1884), a travel account, atypical among those of her contemporaries because of her "unusually sensitive observations of intercultural encounters."[48] Adopting a primitivism in conflict with missionary rhetoric, Leighton records her observations as a participant who wishes to learn about the tribes of the Pacific Northwest, not change them through Protestant moral reform.

Georgi-Findlay also finds commonalities among women's western texts. Most of

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[46]Brigitte Georgi-Findlay, *The Frontiers of Women's Writing: Women's Narratives and the Rhetoric of Westward Expansion* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 13.

[47]Ibid., x.

[48]Ibid., 230.

the texts she considers describe the American West as an "extremely insecure terrain" where westward expansion maintains a tenuous position at best. Finally, these writers tend to link nature in the West with the Native American presence on the land. They do not see a pristine nature devoid of humans; rather they connect western nature with the Native Americans' connection to the land.[49]

In her examination of women writers in the American West, Shirley Leckie acknowledges the ethnocentrism and materialism these writers often showed toward native peoples. "[Women writers] saw much that was of value in the Indian world," Leckie maintains, "and often struggled to comprehend events from the Indian point of view."[50] Positing these concerns at the outset, Leckie delves into a discussion of women writers' contributions to Indian history drawing from the works of Lydia Maria Francis Child, Helen Hunt Jackson, Alice Fletcher, and Angie Debo. Taken collectively, Leckie finds that these women writers were on "their own frontiers":

> When most chroniclers of the westward movement or life in the western regions described the triumph of what they saw as a superior civilization, these women asked what it meant to be "civilized." As other Americans celebrated the creation of new homes in the West, these women expressed concerns for the homes new settlements were destroying. Often unread and, when read, often discredited because of their sex, they articulated ideas that later historians would rediscover or discover on their own and value.[51]

Debo is included in Leckie's discussion, but Marriott and Wright would fit into her

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[49]Ibid., 290.

[50]Leckie, "Women Writers Who Explored the Legacy of Conquest Out on Their Own Frontier," 3.

[51]Ibid., 12.

discussion as well. These writers studied a topic that was not receiving adequate attention in the 1930s and continued to write about Indians into the 1970s. Their works contribute to the early literature on Oklahoma's native peoples and their connection with state development.

To properly assess these three women writer's place within the broader western historiography, a general discussion of that historiography follows. With the professionalization of history and anthropology during the late nineteenth century, leading figures such as anthropologist Franz Boas at Columbia University and historian Frederick Jackson Turner at the University of Wisconsin established new frameworks for the study of Indian communities and the American West. Boas denied the notion of universal evolutionary stages as championed by the Bureau of American Ethnology, and advanced the theory of cultural relativism, or the idea that culture could be evaluated according to detailed studies of specific societies. As Curtis Hinsley points out, by World War I graduate programs in anthropology, first established by Boas at Columbia in 1895, represented the decline of government anthropology, specifically the Smithsonian Institution founded in 1846 followed by the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1879, and the rise of anthropology as a university-trained science.[52] With the federal government's assimilation policy in full motion at the turn of the century, Boas and his students took to the field in order to preserve what appeared to be vanishing cultures. Boasian thought

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[52]Curtis M. Hinsley, Jr. *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846-1910* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 9-10.

became the new paradigm in the discipline of anthropology.[53]

Similarly, Turnerian thought became the new paradigm in western history. Beginning with the frontier thesis in 1893 and followed by the frontier-section theory in the 1920s, Turner and his students advanced the notion that successive waves of frontier settlement explain the social process of "Americanization" – which included freedom, democracy, and individualism as leading principles.[54]

Both traditions must be acknowledged in this discussion of women anthropologists and historians for these central theories were present during the early decades of the twentieth century. Scholars have noted that men have dominated both professions since their inception, and men have framed many of the foundational models or "ruling theories."[55]

Another common thread through which to examine these women is their relationships with their mentors and the presence or absence of a women's community. Turner and Boas, as two of the most prominent scholars at the turn of the century, trained women scholars for future work in the American West. In fact, many of his students affectionately called Boas "Papa Franz." The presence of a women's community was stronger among anthropologists. Women ethnographers Matilda Coxe Stevenson and

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[53]Jerry D. Moore, "Franz Boas: Culture in Context," chap. in *Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1997), 42-52; Lavender, "Storytellers," 35-49.

[54]Wilbur R. Jacobs, *On Turner's Trail: 100 Years of Writing Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 3-15, 61-76.

[55]Parezo, "Anthropology: The Welcoming Silence," in *Hidden Scholars*, 5.

Elsie Clews Parsons provided the much-needed financial assistance to women anthropologists for field research in the Southwest, thus facilitating a women's community of anthropologists. Stevenson founded the Women's Anthropological Society to assist and encourage women in the field. Parsons also established an organization, the Southwest Society, which financed the fieldwork of both men and women anthropologists over three decades.[56] Turner trained as many as eight women Ph.D.'s, including Louise Phelps Kellogg, but the notion of a women's community within the historical profession was lacking during the early decades of the twentieth century.[57]

Debo and Wright approached westward expansion and Indian history in different ways, but Turner's influence is evident in their historical interpretations. Debo, for instance, was trained in the Turnerian tradition by Edward Everett Dale, a Turner student. She viewed Oklahoma's development as the United States in microcosm. But as Debo completed her studies and struck out on her own, her interpretation of Indian history began to change. She began to write her texts from an Indian perspective, from the other side of Turner's frontier, as Shirley Leckie puts it, but still within the paradigm.[58] Wright, however, utilized the language of Turner to describe the development of

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[56]Babcock and Parezo, *Daughters of the Desert*, 7.

[57]Jacobs, *On Turner's Trail*, 72. For the history of women in the historical profession, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988; reprint, 1993), 366-67, 491-510; Jacqueline Goggin, "Challenging Sexual Discrimination in the Historical Profession: Women Historians and the American Historical Association, 1890-1940," *American Historical Review* 97 (June 1992): 769-802.

[58]Shirley A. Leckie, "Angie Debo, Pioneering Historian," public lecture at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 29 March, 3, 20.

American history, speaking of "waves of migration" and "waves of settlement" of the frontier movement as "one of the great movements in history." She viewed the essence of Oklahoma history in the Indian and the frontiersman.[59]

The New Western History of the 1980s, led by Patricia Limerick, Richard White, Donald Worster, and William Cronon, challenged this interpretation of the "frontier" and westward expansion. This "new" approach to the American West rejected Turner's nationalistic vision of rugged individualism in an untamed wilderness, favoring one that highlighted race, class, and gender. Not only did they accent multiple voices in the western narrative, but they sought to redefine the terms "encounter," "invasion," and "conquest," to suit their redefined American West as a place, or a region, rather than a process. Patricia Limerick has turned Turner on his head, dismantling the patriarchal, traditional argument for one that seeks to include a multiplicity of voices, the winners and the losers, in this western power struggle. In *The Legacy of Conquest* (1987), Limerick argues that the notion of a closed West in 1890 should be replaced with her vision of the West as a continuously evolving place. Limerick acknowledges the significance of Turnerian thought, but regards the theory as obsolete. For a more usable past reflective

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[59]Muriel H. Wright, interview by Frank Doyle, 8 March 1965, tape recording, Indian Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City [hereafter cited as MWI].

of contemporary thought, Limerick promotes the West of conquest.[60]

It becomes difficult to describe the American West without confronting Turner's legacy. New western historians have demanded that we look beneath the myths of Turner's patriotic American development, and reveal the "conquest" and "exploitation" of peoples and the environment in the name of westward expansion and development. These themes can be traced back to earlier historical interpretations, particularly in the work of Angie Debo.

Prior to the 1970s, western history had been examined primarily through the lens of masculine exploration, exploitation, and conquest. In 1958, Dee Brown's *The Gentle Tamers* became one of the first works to examine women's roles in the West. Upholding the notion of separate spheres within the traditional framework, Brown argues that men tamed the physical conditions while women tamed the social conditions. In short, women as "civilizing forces" tamed the men. Elizabeth Jameson refutes this passive, gentle imagery surrounding western women: "Neither the civilizer nor the helpmate was an actor who helped to shape her own history, and thus neither image explains how beliefs and work roles changed." Jameson argues that western women's historians must move beyond these damaging stereotypes to reveal the "reality" of women in the American

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[60]Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987); Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin, ed., *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991); William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, ed., *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992); Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

West.[61]

Within the last two decades, historians have recognized the presence of women in the American West. Often studies focused on "westering" women, and utilized diaries, journals and novels to interpret predominantly white women's experiences as they traveled to and settled in the West.[62] As many of these studies on nineteenth-century women's writings indicate, ethnocentrism pervaded the accounts and Indians were often described as "savages." Shirley Leckie's work on Elizabeth Custer, for example, demonstrates how a woman imbued with Victorian notions of womanhood filtered these notions through her observations of Indian families. In her writings on army life in the West, Custer often portrayed Indian women's roles within the family as demeaning.[63] Annette Kolodny finds that women were all too prepared to create "cultivated gardens," thereby manipulating the landscape to replicate their former homes in the East.[64] But

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[61]Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West," in *The Women's West*, ed. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 158.

[62]Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1979); John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Sandra L. Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982); Glenda Riley, *Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984); Sherry Lynn Smith, *The View from Officers' Row: Army Perceptions of Western Indians* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990).

[63]Shirley A. Leckie, *Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of a Myth* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 236-55.

[64]Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

while these works served as a strong point of departure into the relatively new field of western women's history, critics maintained that many other women's stories were not included in these primarily white middle-class women's narratives.

In addition to a reevaluation of western women, the American West has been revisited according to race and ethnicity. In a pacesetting 1980 essay, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited," Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller called for multicultural studies of western women. "We need above all else," they stated, "studies firmly based on a comparative multicultural approach to women's history to understand fully the western experience."[65] *The Women's West*, the result of the first Women's West Conference in 1983, has responded to Jensen's and Miller's call for a more multicultural strategy and has affirmed the prevailing trends in western women's history. A second anthology, *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West*, published in 1997, continues this pursuit of a more inclusive history of women of different racial ethnic groups as well as continuing discussions of gender relations and power.[66]

The literature on the rise of women professionals beginning in the late nineteenth century discusses the assumptions of "women's work," graduate education, academic

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[65]Joan M. Jensen and Darlis Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review* 49 (May 1980): 213.

[66]Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, ed., *The Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); Armitage and Jameson, ed., *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

employment, women's community, and gendered limitations.[67] Moreover, with the professionalization of history and anthropology during this period, women traveled and wrote about the American West as historians and anthropologists.[68] As professional women, Wright, Debo, and Marriott must be considered in light of this tradition.

This study is based on both published texts and archival resources from each scholar. Alice Marriott's collection at the Western History Collections at the University of Oklahoma contains eighty-two boxes. The Marriott-Rachlin Collection at the Western History Collections supplements the Marriott Collection. In addition, the Marriott Collection contains over seven hundred photographs which aided my examination of Marriott as an anthropologist and observer of Native Americans. The Angie Debo Collection at Oklahoma State University and the Muriel H. Wright Collection at the Oklahoma Historical Society have substantial holdings. Furthermore, all three scholars

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[67]Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade: Women Social Scientists and Progressive Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Margaret W. Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies to 1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

[68]Kathryn Kish Sklar, "American Female Historians in Context, 1770-1930," *Feminist Studies* (Fall 1975): 171-84; Joan Jacobs Brumberg and Nancy Tomes, "Women in the Professions: A Research Agenda for American Historians," *Reviews in American History* 10 (June 1982): 275-96; Barbara J. Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation: The Legacy of Ann Pamela Cunningham," *The Public Historian* 12 (Winter 1990): 31-61; Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "Women in Early American Anthropology," in *Pioneers of American Anthropology: The Uses of Biography* ed. June Helm (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), 31-81; Robert E. Bieder, *Science Encounters the Indian, 1820-1880: The Early Years of American Ethnology* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986); Leah Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996).

have oral histories, with the Debo and Marriott interviews much more extensive than Wright's. Debo and Marriott were interviewed by feminist scholars who asked pointed questions regarding gender. These oral histories have proved extremely useful in my research. And finally, the Wright Collection contains photographs which have been incorporated into my discussion of Wright in the dissertation.

Marriott, Wright, and Debo maintained active careers in Oklahoma and the greater Southwest as writers of local history, primarily Native American history. By studying their lives and texts, this study contends that these women writers anticipated later anthropological and historical interpretations. In fact, they were precursors to later models of experimental ethnography, Indian history with agency, and ethnohistory. This examination is divided into three parts each containing two chapters. The first chapter examines their respective life histories and the second chapter offers a discussion of their significant works and interpretations. Section one examines the significant events that shaped Alice Marriott's interest in the study of American Indians, particularly her fieldwork with the Modocs in Oregon and the Kiowas in Oklahoma, and her employment as a Specialist in Arts and Crafts for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. The discussion of her work includes *The Ten Grandmothers*, *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso*, and two autobiographical accounts, *Greener Fields* and *The Valley Below*. Section two traces Muriel Wright's upbringing in Indian Territory, education, the early developments of her native-based identity and her role important role at the Oklahoma Historical Society. During her tenure as editor of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Wright published over one hundred of her own articles in the journal. The second chapter of this section explores

common themes from these articles, her participation in the Oklahoma Historical Society's historic preservation program, and her commitment to Oklahoma history. The third section discusses Angie Debo's early experiences in Marshall, Oklahoma, her pursuit of the doctorate in history, her frustration with the job search and employment to sustain her research and writing projects. The second chapter examines several of Debo's books, including *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, *And Still the Waters Run*, and *Prairie City*. The final chapter offers a comparative analysis of Marriott, Wright, and Debo and other women historians and anthropologists of their time as interpreters of the American West.

CHAPTER TWO

ALICE MARRIOTT: SOUTHWESTERN ETHNOLOGIST

In 1986, women scholars at the University of Arizona sponsored a public conference and exhibit highlighting the early work of women anthropologists in the Southwest, specifically those women who were active from the mid-1870s to the end of World War II.[1] Entitled *Daughters of the Desert*, the project began with women such as Matilda Coxe Stevenson and moved chronologically to women born after 1910 and academically trained as anthropologists. Alice Marriott, an ethnologist from Oklahoma, was featured among these "hidden scholars" comprising some sixteen hundred women who had conducted fieldwork with Native Americans in the Southwest. During an oral history interview recorded in 1986 as part of the *Daughters of the Desert* project, Marriott reminisced about her work as an ethnologist:

> If you establish that kind of relationship, a rapport, with an Indian group, it will spread from one person to another. You will eventually find that you have much more in common with them, than you have with people in your own age group, in your own culture. While all my friends were growing up with great agony about, am I going to marry him or am I not going to marry him, and what kind of job

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[1]Barbara A. Babcock and Nancy J. Parezo, *Daughters of the Desert: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest, 1880-1980* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988); Nancy J. Parezo, ed., *Hidden Scholars: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).

will he, or she, or it have, I was just going to go on . . . . I loved the Kiowas.[2]

Her interest in anthropology and her career as an ethnologist will be examined in this chapter.

Alice Marriott was born to a middle-class family in 1910 in Wilmette, Illinois. Marriott's first distinct memory of her interest in American Indians began with her English grandfather at Chicago's Field Museum. He had studied law at Oxford and one of his favorite pastimes in Chicago was to visit the curator of Egyptology at the Field Museum. At the age of six, Marriott visited the Field Museum with her grandfather. Rather than finding interest in her grandfather's passion for Egyptology, she had wandered off to the basement and found herself amid some enormous totem poles. When her grandfather went looking for her, he finally found her sitting at the base of one totem pole, looking with awe at another. This was the earliest event that Marriott remembered as her initial link to the study of anthropology. "If you found something like that, in very unusual circumstances, in childhood, you would just go on following it," she later recalled.[3]

At the age of seven, Marriott and her family moved from Chicago to Oklahoma City for economic opportunities. Her father had accepted a position as the treasurer of an insurance company and her mother worked as a certified public accountant. This move to

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[2]Alice Marriott, interview by Jennifer Fox for the Daughters of the Desert Oral History Project, 13 March 1986, Tucson, Arizona, audio recording, tape 1, side 1, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, New York, New York [hereafter cited as AMI].

[3]AMI, tape 1, side 1.

Oklahoma demonstrated the Marriotts' adaptability to change and cultural differences. Her paternal grandfather was English and her father's family grew up in that tradition. Her mother's family was from Virginia and had operated a station on the underground railroad. When these two traditions, one English, the other Southern, came together within the Marriott household, confusion sometimes reigned:

> We grew up at home speaking two different languages really. Then we went to school in Oklahoma and we learned a third. Nobody, but nobody could understand anyone of us when we spoke as we would have at home. We just had to switch tracks and learn Oklahoman.[4]

This adaptability proved beneficial for Marriott as her interest in anthropology grew.

In order to save money, Marriott lived at home as she pursued her college degree at nearby Oklahoma City University. In 1930, she graduated magna cum laude with a double major in English and French. For the next two years she worked as a cataloger for the Muskogee public library.[5] The second significant event which stimulated Marriott's interest in anthropology occurred in Muskogee. The Depression's economic impact was evident in Oklahoma, and the head librarian did not want to fire anyone. Instead, Marriott's employer organized extensive cataloging projects for her younger employees. "The head librarian had a passionate interest in history and genealogy," Marriott later wrote in one of her autobiographical accounts, *Greener Fields: Experiences Among the American Indians*, "which expressed itself in the form of a collection of books on local

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[4]Ibid.

[5]Turner S. Kobler, *Alice Marriott*, Southwest Writers Series 27 (Austin, TX: Steck-Vaughn Company, 1969), 1-2.

history, which in that town meant Indian history. It fell upon me to catalog the books, and subsequently, to index their contents. The indices completed, I discovered in myself an interest in the subjects it covered."[6] This cataloging project familiarized Marriott with the essentials of Five Tribes literature. From this tedious project sprang her interest in studying American Indians. She had always wished to return to graduate school, and she became fully committed to the study of anthropology.

With her bachelor's degree in hand, she believed she would attend the University of Oklahoma as a graduate student, only to discover that the new program in anthropology at the university did not have a graduate program in place. Without prior experience in anthropology, her advisor, Forrest Clements, a Berkeley graduate, enrolled her in Anthropology One, the freshman course. Marriott attended the University of Oklahoma "out of sheer necessity," she stated, in order to study anthropology.[7] During her first year of study, in addition to her entry-level courses in anthropology, Marriott conducted laboratory work in restoration and intensive library research on the archaeology of eastern Oklahoma, with a view to proving, through material culture, the relations of pre-Columbian and historical tribes in this region.[8] She received her second B.A. in 1935, as the first woman graduate of the University of Oklahoma's anthropology

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[6]Alice Marriott, *Greener Fields: Experiences Among the American Indians* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1953), 2-3.

[7]AMI, tape 1, side 1.

[8]Alice Marriott to Miss E. Petty, 12 August 1937, folder 4, box 18, Alice Lee Marriott Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma [hereafter cited as AMC].

program.

During the second year of her training at the University of Oklahoma, in the summer of 1934, Marriott received a fellowship from the Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe, to study the Modocs in southern Oregon as a fieldworker under the direction of noted anthropologist, Dr. Leslie Spier. This annual summer program provided graduate students from across the country with the opportunity to learn field methods under the guidance of experienced anthropologists. This became Marriott's first major trip in the field, as one of twelve fieldworkers and one of two women. The field experience introduced Marriott to the value of gender in anthropological work. "As I predicted," Marriott wrote to her mother in July 1934, "we two girls are working together, and on the women."[9] She described to her mother her first encounter with Modoc informants, a scene she had been told was "typical" by the more experienced anthropologists:

> We drove up to the house, and discovered our informant at dinner. With her were her daughter, her cousin, who was a much older woman, and the cousin's granddaughter, a child about seven. The woman to whom we were [to] talk was perfectly friendly, but the cousin announced that "I do not like to talk to white people." We sat down while they finished dinner, and got scraps of conversation. Among other things we learned that white women should stay home and mind their own business, and that the woman was not to know anything until she found out what we were going to pay![10]

Marriott and the other woman researcher, Ethel, returned the next day and discovered that the cousin of the original informant, Mrs. Walker, had the information that they needed on medicinal roots. That afternoon the three of them journeyed through the hilly country

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[9]Alice [Marriott] to Mother, 1 July [1934], folder 4, box 21, AMC.

[10]Ibid.

among the pine and juniper in search of roots. The two fieldworkers discovered that by gaining the interest and to some degree, trust, of Mrs. Walker, she became willing to act as an informant herself.[11]

Marriott's work with the Modoc people also focused on place names and kinship. On another excursion, Marriott, Ethel, and two Modoc informants, Mary and Celia, went to Clear Lake, just south of the California border, for a couple of days in pursuit of place names. "Goodness knows these trips are not for pleasure only," Marriott reported to her family, "they are real work."[12] After the long drive to California, the four women hiked to various sites, drew maps, and recorded place names in their notebooks. Marriott found that this type of fieldwork required extreme concentration. She also discovered that this work agreed with her. Writing home, she revealed her enthusiasm for fieldwork:

> The thing that amazes me about myself is the amount of patience and self-control I have developed, apparently from nowhere. I can sit for hours, repeating kinship terms over and over and over, and not only not lose my temper or my grip, but actually be fresh at the end of the session. It was particularly noticeable at the end of three hours of this sort of thing yesterday afternoon. Evaline and Mary [Modocs] were completely worn out, and I was only annoyed because I couldn't type my notes up then and there. And that it wasn't nervous energy is proved by the fact that I was going strong all evening.[13]

This research trip served as a catalyst for Marriott, reinforcing her desire and interest in anthropology. Marriott returned to the University of Oklahoma after her summer of fieldwork with renewed enthusiasm for ethnology, particularly with regard to the study of

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[11]Ibid. Ethel's last name is unknown.

[12]Alice [Marriott] to Casey, 15 August [1934], folder 3, box 20, AMC. Mary and Celia, the Modoc informants, last names are unknown.

[13]Alice [Marriott] to Dearest, 21 August [1934], folder 2, box 21, AMC.

Indian women. While working with the Modoc people, Marriott became aware of the contributions she could make as a woman ethnologist. She began to chart her scholarly course in Oregon, acutely aware of her value as a woman ethnologist and the value of studying Indian women's community.

Of the three scholars under consideration in this study, Alice Marriott most explicitly discussed gender in relation to her work. As Marriott explained in *Greener Fields*: "I am a woman and I talk to women."[14] Her approach to gender could be seen as her greatest contribution to the study of anthropology. She explained how her interest in American Indian women, being a woman herself, and employing women informants, culminated in numerous books on Indian women. Male anthropologists, during this time, did not tend to utilize women informants or study women's community among Indian people.

When it came to deciding on a research topic, in consultation with Dr. Clements, Marriott narrowed her choices to the Kiowa or the Arapaho communities. Of the fifty-seven Indian tribes in Oklahoma, these two had not received adequate ethnological attention since James Mooney in the 1890s, according to Clements. Marriott indicated the chance nature of her selection of the Kiowa project:

> I remember sitting in the office talking to Dr. Clements, and he was reaching for a pipe and then he reached for a cigarette. He went back and forth between the two things on the desktop and I made up my mind: if he picked up the pipe, it would be the Kiowa, and if he picked up the cigarette, it would be Arapaho. It was the Kiowa. I've never stopped with it since.[15]

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[14]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 79.

[15]AMI, tape 1, side 1.

While this story seems to make Marriott's decision to study the Kiowa people seem arbitrary, she prepared for her field work with a review of the literature on the Kiowas and continued to uphold the importance of gender in her work.

Marriott was breaking new ground. Her fieldwork while at the University of Oklahoma, during the summers of 1935 and 1936, was an examination of the material culture of the Kiowas. But her approach held something more – a conscious investigation into the lives of Kiowa women. In preparation for her fieldwork with the Kiowa, she became particularly interested in the study of social structure. As her reading of the secondary literature deepened, she grew disturbed by what was left out of these narratives – principally Indian women's stories and activities. She attributed this oversight to the fact that these studies were conducted by male anthropologists using male informants. She commented on this omission in the scholarship in her work, *Greener Fields*:

> The life pattern of Plains Indian men had been, by the time I came along, recorded thoroughly by several competent observers. The literature concerning the lives of Plains Indian women was less complete, and it seemed thoroughly natural and right for me to try to bring it up to date. After all, being a woman myself should give me a slight edge over the previous, masculine, field workers.[16]

Thus began Marriott's pursuit in collecting Kiowa women's narratives through her women informants. She focused on "women's life, women's ways, women's tricks" when she interviewed Kiowa women.[17] But she did not believe that her research was exclusively about Indian women, but rather the missing link to a fuller study of the social

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[16]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 102.

[17]AMI, tape 1, side 2.

structure of Kiowa culture. "I just felt that the audience for anthropology was going unsatisfied, so to speak," Marriott maintained. "Because half of everything was being left out. It became a kind of challenge, an 'I'm just as good as you are' way of proving to everybody I knew that women did have a life."[18] After only one year of anthropological study, Marriott had found an untapped resource. She uncovered material that had been invisible in prior anthropological research. She became committed to working with women informants and women interpreters in order to reveal a women's culture within Kiowa society.

Her summer fieldwork with the Kiowas would eventually be published as *The Ten Grandmothers* (1945), the work for which she is best known. The title of this book is derived from the ten medicine bundles of the Kiowas which are called the ten grandmothers, according to Marriott. These sacred bundles were thought by the Kiowas to hold the "power" of the tribe and to radiate "power" to tribal members. The story almost spans a century, from 1847 when a Kiowa war party set out against the Utes to 1942 when young Kiowa men and their families prepared for World War II .[19]

She began her initial acquaintance with the tribe during Thanksgiving break in 1934. First she received permission from the superintendent of the Kiowas at the agency

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[18]Ibid.

[19]Historian Clyde Ellis of Elon College has informed me that Marriott mistranslated the Kiowa word for the bundles. They are the "Boy Bundles." The two words are very similar: boy is "tahlee," and grandmother is "tawlee." Marriott does indicate that the bundles are connected to legends about the Half Boys, twin culture heroes. See Marriott, *The Ten Grandmothers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1945), viii.

in Anadarko. The superintendent and his staff recommended a few people as good informants. "I found out afterwards," Marriott reflected, "we had different standards."[20] She set out in her car — she had recently learned to drive — for the first informant's house. A violent November storm forced her car into a ditch. As Marriott recalled:

> I turned off the motor — I assumed that was as sensible as anything I could think of — and sat there and looked out of the window on a lower level. There was a house with a road going up to it. I got out of the car and started walking to the house. If you got to a house, they'd certainly take you in. About midway along the driveway, I bumped into a nice, square, chunky Kiowa gentleman who put a blanket around me and said, "Come on in the house and get warm." So we went in, and that was the beginning of what has been a lifelong and wonderful friendship.[21]

This hospitable man was George Hunt. He welcomed Marriott into his home that Thanksgiving weekend and proved a vital resource to her ethnological work, introducing her to potential informants. He even recruited his daughter, Ioleta Hunt McElhaney, to become Marriott's interpreter. In addition, McElhaney and her father introduced Marriott to potential informants, all drawn from the older members of their family.

What becomes clear in Marriott's work with the Kiowas, and also a point of criticism, is that her research was based largely on the stories told by one Kiowa family, the family of George Hunt. Many of the informants had been buffalo hunters on the Plains and shared their memories of those times with Marriott. Her informants included Kiowa George Poolaw; Henry Tsoodle, Margaret Tsoodle's father-in-law; Biatonma Hunt, George Hunt's mother; and Uncle Frank, Ioleta McElhaney's uncle. These

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[20]AMI, tape 1, side 1.

[21]Ibid.

informants were in their eighties and nineties during the 1930s. Marriott encouraged these older Kiowas to tell their stories. She told them that she was interested in learning about their lives as buffalo hunters and recording their stories so that other people may remember the days of the buffalo. The explanation Marriott offered to the older Kiowas she spoke with was typical of the "salvage ethnography" of the era, or as Louise Lamphere defines it, "the collection of myths, tales, details of kinship and social organization, items of material culture, details of phonology and grammar, and accounts of ritual practices and belief systems before cultures 'died out.'"[22] Marriott said to the older Kiowa informants, "think of the children who will grow up not knowing what their grandparents lived. It's cheating the grandchildren."[23] This approach proved effective, and Marriott marveled at their willingness to share their stories with her:

> Hour after hour it pour[s] out, as fast as I can write it, even when it goes thru [sic] the interpreter. If I can ever get my mind off the sign talk which accompanies the stories I shall do better, but it is fascinating. My pronounciation [sic] is, as usual, a huge joke, but they are willing to repeat words indefinitely, until I get them, which helps."[24]

Reflecting back upon her early fieldwork experience with the Kiowas, Marriott expressed her good fortune in talking with these informants during her research in the mid-1930s: "I was just unbelievably lucky in finding such people right at the turn of the decade, because

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[22]Louise Lamphere, "Gladys Reichard Among the Navajo," in *Hidden Scholars*, ed. Nancy J. Parezo (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 159-60.

[23]AMI, tape 1, side 1.

[24]Alice [Marriott] to darling, 4 July [1935], folder 5, box 21, AMC.

within five years all of that age group was gone. But I had got the essentials."[25] Again, Marriott's approach to her informants adhered to the tenets of cultural relativism made popular by Boas and his graduate students at Columbia University at the turn of the century.[26] But her adherence to the Boasian school ended here, for she did not take the time to learn and speak the Kiowa language. Instead, she relied solely on her interpreters.

Marriott did not speak Kiowa. She learned to say a few phrases, but she never pursued the study of the language. Most of her informants were older people who spoke only Kiowa. Therefore, an interpreter was essential to Marriott's fieldwork. Ioleta Hunt McElhaney became Marriott's interpreter and friend. McElhaney was Marriott's age and had just graduated from college with a degree in sociology.[27] She could speak both English and Kiowa. McElhaney became Marriott's principal interpreter, and occasionally her father or her sister, Margaret Tsoodle, also served as interpreters. McElhaney became, in Marriott's words, her "dearest friend," and for the next three summers, they did everything together. Marriott commented on her relationship with McElhaney: "She was the interpreter, I was the recorder, and anybody we could put our hands on, our four hands, was the informant! Most of them were in the family."[28] Marriott felt lucky when she secured McElhaney as her interpreter. "Getting a woman interpreter would not have

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[25]AMI, tape 1, side 1.

[26]Catherine Jane Lavender, "Storytellers: Feminist Ethnography and the American Southwest, 1900-1940 (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado-Boulder, 1997), 36-49.

[27]Throughout Marriott's correspondence, she refers to Ioleta Hunt McElhaney as Isleta, and appears to use them interchangeably.

[28]AMI, tape 1, side 1.

been easy under ordinary circumstances," Marriott noted. "When one added [McElhaney's] background in sociology, and her thorough training in social work to the fact that she knew and liked the older members of the tribe, the wonder is that she did not do the research for me."[29]

The relationship that evolved between Marriott and McElhaney was one of mutual fascination, learning, and growth. McElhaney began borrowing Marriott's anthropology texts and started using terms such as "culture-pattern" in their discussions, as ethnographer and interpreter engaged in the fieldwork experience together. Marriott wrote home telling her family about the progress she and McElhaney were making interviewing informants: "Isleta paid me a high compliment to-day [sic]. She said she didn't know which was the more interesting; what the old people have to say, or my questions."[30] Their relationship became one of sisters, as the Hunts accepted Marriott into their family.

Sometimes the sessions with informants would last all day, and only at night would Marriott have a few hours alone to type her notes from the day. She generally liked to keep a session limited to four or five hours, so as not to exhaust anyone. But sometimes sessions went longer. For example, Kiowa George Poolaw of Mountain View, Oklahoma, talked for six hours on the Sun Dance during one session. At the time, Marriott reported:

[Kiowa George] talked for six hours, Isleta going like mad to interpret, and I

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[29]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 102-3.

[30]Alice [Marriott] to Dearest, 10 July [n.d.], folder 5, box 21, AMC.

> scribbling notes that I can hardly read and that cover something like thirty pages. I haven't the nerve to count them. At four o'clock I stopped him, and he will begin where he left off tomorrow morning and go on till he comes to the end – I hope![31]

Marriott called Kiowa George a "gold mine" of knowledge on the Kiowas. "Of course the wonderful thing about this culture," Marriott added in a letter home, "is that people who are old enough to have lived it are still young enough to remember it in detail."[32] Marriott described Kiowa George as "the regular Remington picture-book type of Indian – over six feet tall if his legs were straightened out, enormous chest and shoulders, big, and very imposing, head and face. Fine features. Very commanding expressions, and a delightful smile."[33]

Working with Grandma Biatonma was one of the most memorable experiences for Marriott during her Kiowa research. During hot summer days, Marriott, McElhaney and Biatonma would meet together under the shade of the Hunt family's arbor, and discuss the stories of the buffalo-hunting days. According to Marriott, Biatonma was an "easy and willing informant" who was "pleasantly excited" when she discovered that she would be paid to tell Marriott about the stories of the old days.[34] Marriott's pleasant demeanor and her interest in these stories, prompted a special message from Biatonma:

> "I am a shy woman, and have always been afraid of white people, and especially of white ladies, because they laughed at me and my old clothes. But I know you

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[31]Alice [Marriott] to Dearling, 5 July [n.d.], folder 5, box 21, AMC.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Alice [Marriott] to Darling, 20 August [1935], folder 1, box 20, AMC.

[34]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 103.

are honest and do not laugh, and I talk to you as if you were my own daughter."[35] By the end of the second week, Biatonma was just as interested in learning more about Marriott's family and her background as she was in telling Marriott these stories. Biatonma wanted to know if Marriott's parents knew where she was and what she was doing. Marriott assured her that they did. As Marriott has recalled in *Greener Fields*, Biatonma wanted to know if Marriott's parents were concerned that she spent so much time with Indians. Biatonma suggested that her parents come to Mountain View to check on their daughter and for a chance for everyone to meet. Marriott contacted her parents, and they agreed to come to western Oklahoma.

What followed was an adoption ceremony under the Hunt family arbor. Biatonma donned her special white buckskin dress and moccasins, parted her hair in the middle and wore it loose down her back rather than in braids, painted red on her cheeks and yellow on her nose and chin, and wore many silver bracelets, rings and earrings. The entire Hunt family was also present. Marriott introduced her parents to the Hunt family. Then McElhaney interpreted Biatonma's adoption ceremony message, as Marriott has written in *Greener Fields*: "'[Biatonma's] first child was a girl that died. It was in the winter that the smallpox first came to us. That child would be a woman older than my father now. If that girl had children, one of them would have been a daughter, your daughter's age.'"[36] For that reason, Ioleta McElhaney explained, Biatonma wanted to adopt Marriott as her own granddaughter, "'to replace the child that died and the children who died with

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[35]Alice [Marriott] to Darling, 20 July [n.d.], folder 5, box 21, AMC.

[36]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 112.

her.'"[37] Biatonma requested the permission of Marriott's parents and they nodded.

Marriott's adoption ceremony also added to her ethnographic authenticity. Although "taking relatives" is common in many Native American communities, new status as a daughter of a Kiowa family reinforced her position to non-Indian readers that she had expert knowledge. Luke E. Lassiter maintains that many ethnographers reinforce their association with a tribe according to two relationships: "I'm adopted" or "I've got Indian blood." Both of these statements are used within the context of Native American studies literature to convey to the reader "insider" status.[38] Marriott often framed her writings according to this device in order to validate her authority and "expert voice" to readers.

Many of these informants, particularly the men, had worked with other anthropologists previously. And most of the anthropologists had also been men. When a woman anthropologist and a woman interpreter were added to the mix, interesting things happened, revealing certain cultural taboos and customs. For instance, Marriott experienced the father-in-law taboo firsthand during her sessions with Henry Tsoodle, Margaret Tsoodle's father-in-law. Henry Tsoodle was a "gentleman of the old school," Marriott described, and he insisted that, according to taboo, he could become Isleta McElhaney's father-in-law at any time. Out of respect for Henry Tsoodle and for the taboo, McElhaney could not speak to him, they could not look at one another, and she

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[37]Ibid.

[38]Luke E. Lassiter, *The Power of Kiowa Song: A Collaborative Ethnography* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 9.

was always careful not to step into his line of vision. The three of them reached a solution that would respect the taboo and allow sessions to commence:

> Isleta and I sit in the middle of the arbour – at the east end – at a table, one on either side. The old man lies at the place of honour at the west end. We keep our backs turned to him, and he to us. We all keep up the polite fiction of the tabu by solemnly addressing the centre-pole of the arbour. When anyone comes in who is of a safe degree of relationship, we use him as a telephone, but when there is no one, the centre-pole does very well.[39]

This anecdote indicates the richness of Marriott's fieldwork and the empathy she brought to her work, not just a recorder of words and stories, but as sympathetic and respectful of customs. As a family member, and out of respect for the father-in-law taboo, Marriott complied with these conditions, emulating McElhaney's demeanor with Henry Tsoodle. It also demonstrates how Marriott's role as a woman anthropologist and her added responsibility as a family member both increased her access to information and limited her access in certain circumstances. A male anthropologist, for instance, would not have to adhere to this taboo. In contrast, during her meetings with women such as Grandma Biatonma and others, Marriott discussed Kiowa women's culture with them and collected stories which may have been denied to a man studying the Kiowa people.

A few days later Henry Tsoodle devised a plan in order to accommodate the taboo and also relieve some of the awkwardness surrounding their meetings. Tsoodle decided that it would be too odd for him to sit in the arbor and talk in the presence of the two young women, Marriott and McElhaney. Therefore, he insisted on bringing Joanna, his second wife, to these meetings. "She is not permitted to take part in the conversation,"

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[39]Alice [Marriott] to Darling, 9 July 1936, folder 4, box 20, AMC.

Marriott observed in 1936, "a sore trial to Joanna; she loves to talk – she must just bring her work and play propriety. So there we sit and talk to the ridge-pole, while Joanna makes moccasins for the children."[40]

Their initial meetings with Henry Tsoodle had been "ghastly," according to Marriott, because he was reluctant to volunteer any information. For some reason Tsoodle was holding back. Marriott was almost ready to quit when Henry Tsoodle's son, also called Henry, discussed the situation with his father. Marriott learned that Henry Tsoodle was following the method insisted on by Alexander Lesser, a prominent anthropologist from Columbia, whereby Lesser and his students would ask specific questions and Henry Tsoodle would answer them and wait for the next question. Marriott's technique was a type of "stream of conscious" method, as she would later call it, posing a broad, general question and allowing the informant to discuss it at great length often leading to a wide range of topics. Henry Tsoodle said that if Marriott just wanted him to talk, he would. They compromised. "He talks, and then I cross-examine," Marriott explained. "It works very well, and saves a terrific amount of nervous wear and tear."

In July 1936, Marriott attended a Kiowa dance in Carnegie, Oklahoma. Now, she was not only a guest of the Hunts, but a family member.[41] The dance took place outside,

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[40]Alice [Marriott] to Darlings, 13 July [1936], folder 4, box 20, AMC.

[41]In letters between Alice Marriott and George Hunt, they refer to each other as "Dear Father" and "Dear Daughter." For examples, see Geo. Hunt to Alice Marriott, 11 October 1939, folder 3, box 22, AMC; Alice Marriott to George Hunt, 15 November 1939, folder 3, box 22, AMC.

under a big brush arbor. She was permitted to take pictures of the participants. In a letter home, she indicated that there were "very few white people there, and no other cameras."[42] Her description of the dance continued:

> Most of the dancers were young boys, but two of the older men and any number of the older women took part. The men – all who danced – wore the most gorgeous costumes I have ever seen. Real, too; heirlooms, most of them. The women, of course, wore the usual Mother Hubbards and shawls. Most of them wore moccasins, but a few had on store shoes – too funny, in the general set-up. There were two drums and eight drummers, and only the old songs were sung. There was a give-away for one of the boys, with first two girl cousins, and then his mother and grandmother dancing behind him. They gave money, pop, and ice-cream cones, and pledged a feast.[43]

In addition, Margaret and George Tsoodle also took Marriott to several peyote meetings. She was grateful for this introduction and the opportunity to participate in a peyote ceremony, for she commented that "I should not feel that I were qualified to write of the Kiowa unless I had attended at least one."[44]

Perhaps the culmination of her fieldwork among the Kiowas came when Uncle Frank allowed Marriott into his tipi – a tipi containing one of the ten grandmothers, or sacred bundles. They entered the tipi and talked for one hour. "We had to leave our hats outside," she described in a letter home, "and sit at the east end, because the place of honour is all filled up with the grandmother, but we got in, and saw not only the wrapping of the god, and the altar, but the pipe that goes with it, and the preparation of the

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[42]Alice [Marriott] to Darlings, 5 July [1936], folder 1, box 20, AMC.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Alice [Marriott] to Darlings, 13 July [1936], folder 4, box 20, AMC.

ceremonial tobacco."[45]

Marriott was not the only anthropologist studying the Kiowas during the mid-1930s. For example, in the summer of 1935, anthropologist Alexander Lesser from Columbia conducted fieldwork in Kiowa country with a group of graduate students. This program, sponsored by the Laboratory of Anthropology at Santa Fe, was similar to the one Marriott had participated in with Leslie Spier's study of the Modocs. This big budget operation, led by Lesser, stood in sharp contrast to Marriott's one-person work in the field. The team's fieldwork focused on "salvage ethnography," as the students collected oral histories among the older Kiowas and recorded Kiowa music. The graduate students came from top flight anthropology programs such as Chicago, Columbia, Northwestern and Yale, and one can sense in Marriott's correspondence her anguish as she attempted to compete for informants with her small stipend from the University of Oklahoma.[46]

Sometimes, Lesser hired informants away from Marriott because he could afford to pay them more. This happened with Kiowa George. Marriott was paying him thirty cents per hour for five-hour sessions, and Lesser was paying two dollars per day for a six to seven hour day.[47] Marriott could not compete with Lesser's ability to pay more and her time with Kiowa George ended. "I have got the best the old man had to give: the buffalo healing ceremony, the sun dance, and his calendar," Marriott confided to her

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[45]Alice [Marriott] to Darlings, 5 July [1936], folder 1, box 20, AMC.

[46]May Ebihara, "Jane Richardson Hanks," in *Women Anthropologists: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Ute Gacs, et al. (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1988), 141.

[47]Alice [Marriott] to Darling, 4 July [1935], folder 5, box 21, AMC.

family.[48] Comments like this, even in letters home, offer some indication that Marriott's anthropological approach was not much different from Lesser's salvagers.

Lesser's tactics were not always well received by the Kiowas. On one occasion, Marriott observed, Lesser purchased ice cream and cake and issued an open invitation to all the Kiowas to come and eat the desserts and go through dances and the hand game with him. "Unfortunately," Marriott chided, "that is not the way to go at these Indians. Nobody came to the party." She added sarcastically, "What a pity!"[49]

As she was concluding the second summer of fieldwork in western Oklahoma, Marriott paused to reflect on the wealth of materials she had collected during her time with the Kiowas. With great care she sent her notes back to the University of Oklahoma and her advisor, Dr. Clements. She believed that her fieldnotes were "GOOD" and "worth every cent they are costing."[50] She had talked with Isleta McElhaney and they both agreed that the first summer's work provided a "solid and lasting foundation," but the second summer's work proved invaluable to her project, creating something, Marriott assessed, "better than I ever dreamed it could be."[51] Marriott embraced Leslie Spier's method of literal transcription, and was striving to achieve this method in her own work: "If I have anything to say about it," she wrote in a letter to her family, "it will go as it is, literally transcribed without any literary English to come between the real life and the

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[48]Alice [Marriott] to Dearest, 9 July [1935], folder 5, box 21, AMC.

[49]Alice [Marriott] to Dearest, 2 July [1935], folder 5, box 21, AMC.

[50]Alice [Marriott] to Darlings, 13 July [1936], folder 4, box 20, AMC.

[51]Ibid.

reader."[52] This method was a recent trend, appearing first in Spier's Yuman *Tribes of the Gila River* and then in Ruth Underhill's *Autobiography of a Papago Woman*. She was influenced by these two books and referred to the latter as her Bible.[53]

Marriott made the transition from a student of anthropology to an employee of the federal government smoothly. From 1937 to 1942, Marriott worked for the federal government as a field representative based in Oklahoma for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board (IACB). She had received her second bachelor's degree in anthropology, considered herself an ethnologist, and found this job quite rewarding. As Specialist in Indian Arts and Crafts, Marriott acted as a liaison between Oklahoma's diverse American Indian population and the federal government's New Deal reform efforts.

John Collier, as Commissioner of Indian Affairs beginning in 1933, actively campaigned for economic revitalization among native peoples through the production of their arts and crafts. A component in his "Indian New Deal," Collier planned to halt the policy of assimilation in favor of a return to semi-sovereign status through communal land tenure, traditional religions, ceremonies, and arts and crafts. Under Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration in 1934, Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes formed a committee to investigate the issue of Indian arts and crafts and the promise of economic

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[52]Ibid.

[53]Ibid.; Leslie Spier, *Yuman Tribes of the Gila River* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1933); Ruth M. Underhill, *The Autobiography of a Papago Woman*, Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association No. 46 (Menasha, WI: American Anthropological Association, 1936).

growth among American Indians. With a favorable committee report, Congress enacted the Indian Arts and Crafts Act in 1935 and Rene d'Harnoncourt became General Manager of the IACB in 1937. Under d'Harnoncourt, the IACB encouraged the production and marketing of Indian arts and crafts. The board called upon field representatives such as Marriott to broaden the market and increase the quality of Indian goods. "The primary purpose of the board," as Susan Labry Meyn indicates in her study of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, "was to promote the economic welfare of Indians through the development and expansion of their arts and crafts."[54]

The IACB sectioned the United States into five geographical regions: the Northwest, the California-Great Basin, the Southwest, the Great Plains, and the East. Within these regions lived approximately 350,000 Indians, and some 200 Indian nations. In developing a strategy, the board realized that each tribe had specific needs, and these needs must be respected according to religious beliefs and heritage. The board concluded that each local group or tribal subdivision must be treated individually. This method proved time consuming, but necessary, in order to treat Indian groups on a case by case basis rather than employing a general plan which would cut across all tribes across the nation. Therefore, as part of the preliminary research, the board conducted in depth surveys of the arts and crafts of each Indian nation, with the intent of developing

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[54]Susan Labry Meyn, "More Than Curiosities: A Grassroots History of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board and Its Precursors, 1920 to 1942," (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1997), 165. See also Robert Fay Schrader, *The Indian Arts and Crafts Board: An Aspect of New Deal Indian Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983).

traditional native industries.[55]

Oklahoma proved a special region, in the board's view, for a variety of reasons. First, according to Collier's 1933 report, Oklahoma had the largest Indian population in the United States, with 94,707; Arizona was second with 43,927, and New Mexico was third with 34,196. Second, the diversity among Oklahoma's native peoples would be challenging, with fifty-seven federally recognized tribes living in the state.[56] An additional challenge was the general public's lack of awareness of Indian arts and crafts in Oklahoma, in comparison to the arts and crafts of Southwestern Indians, which had gained a high degree of visibility among the American public. Generally speaking, the state's crafts were divided into two sections: the beadwork made by the Southern Plains groups of western Oklahoma, and the basketry of the Five Tribes of eastern Oklahoma.[57]

Gender assumptions undergirded the structure and strategies of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. First, the board assumed a basic association between women and arts and crafts. The board also argued that most Indian women could not be employed outside of the home, but they could supplement their household income through the production of arts and crafts. Marriott agreed with this approach based on her experiences:

> The work of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board in Oklahoma has been principally concentrated on the development of home industries; both in traditional tribal crafts and in introduced handicrafts. We find that the majority of the crafts workers are women, who are anxious to earn extra money at home in their spare

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[55]Meyn, "More Than Curiosities," 172.

[56]Ibid., 189.

[57]Ibid., 196.

time.[58]

Given the board's initial awareness of the role of women in Indian arts and crafts, it is no coincidence that the first field representatives for the board were all women anthropologists.

The Indian Arts and Crafts Board's simple solution, Marriott wrote, "was to bring together females who had acquired a certain familiarity with Indians, and the lives and works of Indian women, [and then] put them under a male supervisor (naturally . . .)."[59] The number of IACB field representatives remained small throughout the board's existence. At the outset, the board would hire three field representatives. Marriott and the other women anthropologists working for the IACB were aware that the study of anthropology was traditionally a male profession. On her list of "men's professions" she included, medicine, dentistry, social reform, banking, the law architecture, and, of course, anthropology. "These women felt discriminated against," Marriott wrote, "especially when they tried to get equal pay for equal work from their male colleagues. Salaries were lower all across the board."[60]

The IACB consciously hired women anthropologists as field representatives, working with Indian communities on the production and marketing of arts and crafts. This decision to hire women followed the assumption that in the division of labor within

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[58]Alice Marriott, Specialist in Indian Arts and Crafts, to Miss Conroy, [n.d., 1942?], folder 5, box 18, AMC.

[59]Alice Marriott, unpublished manuscript on the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, "Changing Times," 2, folder 23, box 78, AMC.

[60]Ibid., 2-3.

the family, women were the craftsmen. The first three women anthropologists assigned as field workers were Gweneth B. Harrington, Gladys Tantaquidgeon, and Alice Marriott. The board assigned Harrington, a Bostonian with a degree from Harvard, to the Pima, Tohono O'Odham area in southern Arizona. Harrington's prior work with the Soil Conservation Service in southern Arizona familiarized her with the local conditions. The board instructed her to revive basketry in the region. The board assigned Tantaquidgeon, a Mohegan Indian from Norwich, Connecticut, to the Sioux area in North and South Dakota. She was the adopted daughter and former student of Frank Speck, a professor of anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania.[61] The board assigned Marriott to the Oklahoma-Kansas-Texas area which she soon discovered was a challenging task:

> I found myself with fifty-seven tribes and languages and a territory that eventually included everything Indian from the western Great Lakes to Florida, scooping up a heterogenous mass of archaeology, which had to be learned because it was the basis of the living crafts of that considerable area, set myself modestly to learn everything about everything.[62]

In an unpublished manuscript Marriott wrote on the Indian Arts and Crafts Board in 1986, she indicated the difficult employment situation anthropologists, particularly women anthropologists, faced during the Great Depression. Marriott commented that she was fortunate to have her position with the IACB:

> a single woman in the 1930's could live well and dress smartly on a salary of $1620.00 a year. She was lucky to get that much, and to have additional travel money, which meant that clothes that were new when they were first bought, if

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[61]Meyn, "More Than Curiosities," 177; Schrader, *The Indian Arts and Crafts Board*, 141.

[62]Alice Marriott, "Changing Times," 2-3, folder 23, box 78, AMC.

> they wore well, could survive many changes of seasons and places. Nobody but the wearers knew the difference.[63]

Prior to receiving the permanent position as Specialist in Indian Arts and Crafts on the IACB, in August 1937, Marriott's temporary position title was Arts and Crafts Investigator. The temporary position paid $1,620 with per diem for travel expenses. The permanent position paid $2,000.[64]

Working as a field representative for the IACB required self-motivation, enthusiasm for the work, and a belief that their efforts would assist in the economic improvement of native peoples. The field representatives' duties, as Meyn indicates, "largely consisted of surveying the history of an Indian group, assessing the activities related to obtaining a livelihood, looking for surviving cultural traits, attending arts and crafts meetings and related activities, and writing reports to d'Harnoncourt."[65] In reviewing Marriott's travel logs, one quickly realizes the fast pace of the work, the long hours, and the grueling lifestyle of living out of a suitcase. She would drive from town to town, talking with Indians and non-Indians about the need for reviving native arts and crafts and the additional need for markets.

Marriott's position with the IACB began in February of 1937. Her job title would later change to Specialist in Arts and Crafts. In the beginning, her assignment was to begin researching the Cheyenne women's crafts guild, as part of the preliminary research

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[63]Ibid., 4.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Meyn, "More Than Curiosities," 178.

for the Oklahoma region. Later, her study, *The Trade Guild of the Southern Cheyenne Women*, became the board's first "purely ethnological paper."[66] During the first six months of Marriott's employment, she also conducted extensive research in the material culture of the following tribes, as part of the board's preliminary survey of Oklahoma's native peoples: Kiowa, Cheyenne, Kickapoo, and Sauk and Fox, and to a lesser degree, the Arapaho, Kiowa-Apache, Comanche, Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, and Seneca, as part of the board's preliminary survey of Oklahoma's native peoples. Her reports detailed not only arts and crafts, but also the tribes' living and economic conditions, customs, traditions, and beliefs.[67]

Following these initial surveys, the board decided to begin its work among Kiowa, Cheyenne-Arapaho, Shawnee, and Five Tribes' people. For example, silver work – jewelry – was encouraged among the Kiowas and the Shawnees. Marriott and other field representatives relied on their contacts to serve as cultural brokers. Furthermore, the board employed only informants who were over sixty years old and had some knowledge of traditional arts and crafts.[68] The notion that older Indians equaled traditional, or "real Indians," was a very typical view during the era.[69] With the board's assistance, the

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[66]Ibid., 194.

[67]Alice Marriott, to Miss E. Petty, Indian Arts and Crafts Board, Washington, DC, 12 August 1937, folder 4, box 18, AMC.

[68]Meyn, "More Than Curiosities," 193-94.

[69]Helen Carr, *Inventing the American Primitive: Politics, Gender and the Representation of Native American Literary Traditions, 1789-1936* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 203.

Kiowas received a loan from the Anadarko Chamber of Commerce to purchase supplies and then the superintendent displayed the finished products in his office. "'They have been making this beautiful silver work for years and years,'" Marriott commented in *The Anadarko Daily News*, "'but they have done so, largely to make gifts for their friends. It is quite as traditional to their culture as bead and leather work, yet they are not remembered for it.'" The article also reported that "It is Miss Marriott's belief that the best and biggest market in the east will be for silver jewelry, because it is more adaptable for personal use than the beadwork and leather work."[70] The board, Marriott claimed, did not attempt to influence their Indian contacts' conceptions of good arts and crafts, but tried to focus on products that the board considered marketable. Eastern markets, through the Department of the Interior, the Department of Agriculture, and department stores, art galleries and gift stores, proved the most reliable.[71]

In addition to stimulating the production of arts and crafts among the aforementioned tribes, Marriott also researched stores that sold Indian-made goods. She became aware that Oklahoma stores that sold products identified as Indian-made stocked shelves primarily with items from the Southwest. These products, the store owners and managers maintained, were better known in Oklahoma than products made by local tribes. Even the Indian agency stores carried these goods.[72] This was reinforced to

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[70]"Exposition Exhibit to Further Arts and Crafts Program Here," *The Anadarko Daily News*, 1 April 1937, folder 13, box 16, AMC.

[71]Alice Marriott, Specialist in Indian Arts and Crafts, to Miss Conroy, [n.d., 1942?], folder 5, box 18, AMC.

[72]Meyn, "More Than Curiosities," 198.

Marriott with the IACB's Oklahoma City Christmas sale in 1938. Prospective buyers attended the sale expecting to find Southwestern products such as Navajo weaving and Pueblo pottery. Without these items on display, the public had a difficult time associating the local arts and crafts, largely ribbon work, silver work, and weaving, as "Indian."[73] Oklahomans needed to be educated in the arts and crafts made by Oklahoma's Indians. As she reported to d'Harnoncourt, "Indians in Oklahoma are so largely accepted as a part of the general population that the idea of their being different in any way, even in traditional crafts, does not occur to many persons."[74] Marriott faced a potential problem – lack of markets for local Indian products. Through public exhibits like Tulsa's American Indian Exposition in 1937 and later the San Francisco World's Fair in 1939, the IACB sought to generate a greater public awareness of quality Indian arts and crafts. By showing potential buyers how to use these arts and crafts as decorative accents in the home, the IACB hoped to stimulate market demand. These goals revolved around the board's notion, according to Meyn, "that it was possible to alter the nation's mindset and improve the Indians' income derived from the sale of their artistic creations."[75]

In her position as Specialist in Indian Arts and Crafts in Oklahoma, Marriott essentially brokered the specialty items made by Oklahoma Indians. She found work for

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[73]Alice Marriott to Rene d'Harnoncourt, 22 December 1938, folder 6, box 15, AMC.

[74]Alice Marriott to Rene d'Harnoncourt, [n.d.], folder 2, box 19, AMC.

[75]Meyn, "More Than Curiosities," 174.

Indian artisans, and at the same time, she found markets for their products. For example, in a letter to Mrs. Mary Inkanish, a Cheyenne woman from Anadarko, Marriott offered the artisan a position demonstrating her skill at moccasin-making at Oklahoma City's Indian Fair for one month. As Marriott suggested, "You could sell the moccasins that you made while you were here, and we would furnish food and living-quarters for yourself and Mr. Inkanish."[76] Marriott was keenly aware of the importance of having Indian craftspeople demonstrating their skills at these fairs and expositions. In addition to individuals such as Mrs. Inkanish, Marriott arranged for Choctaw and Cherokee basket- makers to be on hand at expositions such as the Tulsa Exposition in 1937. Marriott found that the public was receptive to demonstrations by the artisans, and she would continue to use this approach in preparation for the San Francisco Exposition.

Perhaps one of the largest projects Marriott organized in Oklahoma was the Choctaw women spinners in McCurtain County. Initially, the board had instructed her to study women's basketmaking among the Choctaws followed by an evaluation of the market potential for the baskets. As Marriott has noted in *Greener Fields*, during the 1930s many Choctaws were existing on a paltry income – the average family income was less than fifty dollars per year – and living in remote areas of eastern Oklahoma. In her unpublished manuscript on the IACB, Marriott commented on these desperate times: "Anything, however far-fetched, that could increase the Choctaws standard of income and living, would be a gain. All you had to do was find a traditional craft that was

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[76]Alice Marriott to Mrs. Mary Inkanish, 4 August 1939, folder 4, box 18, AMC.

marketable, and urge the Choctaws on, into production."[77] During Marriott's visits with Choctaw women, she learned that hand-spun yarn might also serve as a viable IACB-sponsored product. Three hundred Choctaw women were interested in the project and, although many of them were not familiar with the work, they wanted to learn how to spin. The project also showed potential because these women could be organized into a production and marketing cooperative, one of the board's objectives. "Here was the very thing we were looking for," Marriott stated emphatically in *Greener Fields*, "a product with an almost unlimited market."[78] The Choctaw yarn, although uneven and lumpy at the outset, became a success. By the end of the project's second year, the average family income per year had increased four hundred percent, according the Marriott.[79]

Marriott received the board's approval for this project and it began in earnest in late 1937. Mabel Morrow, of the Education Division of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, began teaching the necessary skills to the Choctaw women and critiquing their final product. Some Choctaw men also grew increasingly interested in the project and contributed by carving some spinning wheels by hand or by learning how to spin the wool.[80] Similar projects had been attempted by the Works Progress Administration and the Indian Emergency Conservation Work, but did not sustain themselves. The IACB believed it was essential to teach the spinners how to acquire the wool, presumably by

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[77]Alice Marriott, "Changing Times," 6, folder 23, box 78, AMC.

[78]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 183.

[79]Ibid., 186.

[80]Meyn, "More Than Curiosities," 216.

raising their own sheep, and how to market their product. This region was often damp, and sheep tended to suffer from hoof rot. The Department of Agriculture helped with drainage, and the sheep flourished. "Even the incidence of malaria and hookworm among the spinners and their families declined," according to Marriott.[81] Local interest continued to grow and by early 1938 the women organized a spinning association and expressed the desire for a spinning contest. In February, the Choctaw Spinning Association held its first spinning contest at Broken Bow, Oklahoma. Judges evaluated the yarn on fineness, length, cleanliness, and evenness of twist. The participants were pleased with the results and scheduled another contest for the fall.[82]

The Choctaw project was one of many. Marriott continued to encourage the production of specific crafts from each area. For instance, Marriott worked to organize the Plains tribes into a beadwork cooperative. Their intricate beadwork was often used for decorative purposes on moccasins and other leather goods. Other production projects that Marriott observed included Cherokee baskets and Creek baskets, and local artists teaching ribbon-work to the students of the Pawnee Indian School. In her report to d'Harnoncourt for 1938-39, Marriott listed the numerous Indian events she attended as the IACB field representative: the Seneca Blackberry Dance at Grove in July, the Kickapoo Harvest Dance at McLoud in August, the Cheyenne Sun Dance at Cantonment in October, the Kiowa Christmas encampment at Rainy Mountain Church in December, and the Shawnee Ceremonial Ball Game in the Big Jim Territory in April. She modestly

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[81]Marriott, "Changing Times," 6-7, folder 23, box 78, AMC.

[82]Meyn, "More Than Curiosities," 216-17.

mentioned that "Probably not more than five hundred personal interviews with workers took place during the year." One person acting as field representative for all of Oklahoma obviously required a person of stamina, perseverance, and a keen interest in all Indian people.[83]

Beginning in early 1939, Marriott traveled to the Great Lakes area and Florida collecting Indian arts and crafts in preparation for the World's Fair in San Francisco. The American Indian exhibit was one of ten sponsored by the federal government.[84] During much of 1938 and 1939, the IACB channeled the majority of its energies into this project. Indian artisans demonstrated their talents before the visiting public. Indian arts and crafts were also available for purchase. "D'Harnoncourt reasoned that the public, through this exhibit in the Federal Building at the fair, would learn that Indians and their artistic creations were more than curiosities," Meyn maintains in her study.[85]

From May to September, Marriott worked in the exhibition and sales rooms at the world's fair with Indian artisans. There were approximately forty Indian demonstrators ranging from a totem-pole carver from British Columbia to a potter from New Mexico. Indian demonstrators came to San Francisco for a specified length of time, and usually at Indian Service expense. Marriott arranged to have Mr. and Mrs. Inkanish, the Cheyenne couple from Anadarko, attend the world's fair as demonstrators of moccasins and

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[83]1938-1939 report, [n.d.], folder 2, box 19, AMC.

[84]*Official Guidebook*, Golden Gate International Exposition World's Fair on San Francisco Bay (San Francisco: The Crocker Company, 1939), 72, folder 5, box 17, AMC.

[85]Meyn, "More Than Curiosities," 184-85.

beadwork.[86]

Marriott worked as a Specialist in Indian Arts and Crafts for the IACB from 1937 to 1942 when, due to U.S. involvement in World War II, the field operations of the board were suspended and only nominal work continued at the Washington, D.C. office. Marriott considered her job with the IACB to be "heaven," and claimed that her position with the board never took her away from anthropology, as she continued to use her training as an anthropologist in the field.[87] Marriott evaluated the work of the IACB as a success: "As nearly as we could estimate, the Indians were doing a two million dollar a year business in fine arts — instead of twenty thousand a year in curios."[88]

During World War II, Marriott was employed as a Red Cross field representative in southwestern Texas and western New Mexico. Even though she enjoyed government employment, she always wanted to return to research. She contended that she knew the Plains tribes well, and wanted to tackle a new research project — the Indians of the Pueblos. At the end of the war, she received a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship and went to New Mexico to begin research. "A friend joined me for a visit," Marriott wrote in *Greener Fields*, "and we decided to spend a winter in the sun. I would do research and nothing but research. She would paint landscapes. In the intervals, we planned to rest."[89]

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[86]"Alice Marriott - Case History," 1, [n.d.], folder 23, box 78, AMC; Alice Marriott to Miss Morrow, 16 November 1939, folder 3, box 22, AMC.

[87]AMI, tape 2, side 1.

[88]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 187.

[89]Ibid., 232.

Marriott's research project centered around Maria Montoya Martinez, the famous potter of San Ildefonso Pueblo, and would be published as a book in 1948. Marriott and Martinez had met at the San Francisco World's Fair when Martinez was working as a demonstrator.

With Marriott's background in anthropology and her government experience, why didn't she obtain a Ph.D. and pursue a tenure-track position at the university level? Marriott considered the Ph.D. and then was persuaded to apply as Specialist in Indian Arts and Crafts for the IACB. She accepted the position and delayed entrance to graduate school. Her professor at the University of Oklahoma reminded her to take good notes for a future dissertation, since no adequate study had been done on the material culture of a southern Plains tribe.[90] Once she started working with native peoples, she was "too afraid of missing something" to take educational leave from her job with the IACB.[91] In her 1986 oral history interview, Marriott responded to this question by saying: "I never had time for an M.A. or a Ph.D. I keep thinking it would really look awfully impressive on a visiting card, but I never have done it. But that's it, that's me."[92] Although she has maintained that she never felt discriminated against because she was a woman, she commented on gender and anthropology as a profession in *Greener Fields*: "the fact remains that to get anywhere as an anthropologist a woman must work twice as hard and

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[90]Ibid., 180.

[91]Ibid., 187.

[92]AMI, tape 1, side 1.

be twice as good as any of the several men available to take her place. And she *still* needs that Ph.D."[93] Marriott continued to update her Kiowa material culture notes throughout her life for that future dissertation: "Maybe, someday," she mused, "when I don't feel that I might miss something by not being around in Indian country, where things are really going on — maybe, when I'm old and gray I'll get that Ph.D. yet."[94] Although she never did return to graduate school, Marriott wrote many books for the general public and for children describing American Indian cultures using a literary style that bordered on fiction and was pleasing to a lay audience.

Marriott evaluated her work as an ethnologist as successful, especially with the Kiowa people, because she had published several books on the Kiowas and they still welcomed her into their homes, their families and their lives. In 1983, Marriott was an honored speaker at the dedication of the Kiowa Cultural Center in Anadarko, where her fieldwork had begun more than five decades earlier. The Kiowas were dedicating this center to the "old people who were dead but not forgotten," Marriott explained.[95] In her dedication speech, Marriott discussed her initial work with the Kiowas:

> Perhaps they took pity on me and my open ignorance. I'm afraid I had no pity on them. I wanted to learn, learn, learn, whatever they were willing to teach me. I grabbed at every fragment of knowledge, and it all went into the scuffed stenographers note books in which I recorded everything. It is all still there, although most of it has been bound in books by this time, so that other peoples

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[93]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 178.

[94]Ibid., 188.

[95]AMI, tape 1, side 1.

may know about the Kiowas.[96]

She again reminded her audience that the Kiowa Cultural Center would encourage future generations of Kiowas to "learn what the old people tried to teach, and wanted to have known."[97] She viewed her presence in the Kiowa community as a collaborator, as one who was always welcome to return and participate in community events. And this also adds to her authenticity as an anthropologist who could claim "insider" status.

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[96]Typed document, "Dedication of the Kiowa Cultural Center," 24 June 1983, 3-4, folder 11, box 78, AMC.

[97]Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

ALICE MARRIOTT'S *THE TEN GRANDMOTHERS* AND OTHER NATIVE AMERICAN TEXTS

Many women during the early decades of the twentieth century were drawn to anthropology for the freedom it promised. Fieldwork provided the opportunity for women to travel alone, work independently, and assume the identity of a participant-observer in other cultures. For those who selected this profession, museum work and popular writing were the common means of support. The reality was that only a small percentage of women anthropologists could secure tenure-track positions at the university level.[1]

Alice Marriott was an ethnologist who enjoyed the independence of her profession. Completing a bachelor's degree in anthropology from the University of Oklahoma in the early 1930s, Marriott spent the next seven years driving from town to town in Oklahoma and frequently living in hotels as part of her job with the Indian Arts and Crafts Board (IACB). She was the field representative for Oklahoma's Indian population and her job required her to canvas the state as the liaison for the board – a

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[1]Jennifer Fox, "The Women Who Opened Doors: Interviewing Southwestern Anthropologists," in *Hidden Scholars: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest* ed. Nancy J. Parezo (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 306.

monumental mission for one person. This would be one of the only "regular jobs" she would hold. The remainder of her life would be spent as a freelance writer whose finances were linked to successful book sales and fellowships. She lived on the margin of traditional society, and she preferred it that way.

Alice Marriott was a good storyteller. Her books on Indians in Oklahoma and the greater Southwest read like fiction, separating her writing style from some other anthropologists' drier narratives. This was an intentional move on Marriott's part. She wanted to reach a broad, general readership with her stories of American Indians, both to educate readers about native peoples and interest them in the study of anthropology.

Marriott's first full-length manuscript, *The Ten Grandmothers*, published by the University of Oklahoma Press in 1945 as the twenty-sixth book in the "Civilization of the American Indian" series, became the book for which she is best known.[2] This book tells the stories of Kiowa life spanning almost a century from the mid-1840s to the early 1940s. For Marriott, this book represented an ethnological achievement by bringing Kiowa culture closer to her intended audience, a general readership of Kiowas and non-Kiowas. The Kiowa people with whom Marriott collaborated on this project also supported her research, according to Marriott, and viewed this publication as a way of preserving their culture. Marriott explains her relationship with the Kiowas in *Greener Fields: Experiences Among the American Indians*:

> The acid test of an ethnologist's relations with a tribe he has studied is whether or not he can go back. It has always been a matter of intense pride to me that I could

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[2]Alice Marriott, *The Ten Grandmothers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1945).

> return at will to the group of Indians whom I first studied, and could come and go among them, at once an honored guest and a member of the family. This was true even after I had published two books on the tribe, a time when, if ever, I should have been cast with scoffing into outer darkness.[3]

Marriott had developed a close familial relationship with George Hunt, a Kiowa, and his extended family, which secured her entrance and acceptance into the larger Kiowa community. The bulk of her research was conducted during the summers of 1935 and 1936, but she continued to return to Kiowa country in southwestern Oklahoma. Marriott lived with the Hunt family while conducting her Kiowa research. This family was the point of contact through which she conducted her research on the tribe in general. She also joined them when they camped together as a family at Kiowa gatherings. "If you establish that kind of relationship, a rapport, with an Indian group," she stated during an oral history interview in 1986, "it will spread from one person to another. You will eventually find that you have much more in common with them, than you have with people in your own age group, in your own culture."[4] Her emotional attachment to the Kiowa people never waned over the course of her life. She had been adopted by the Hunts in a ceremony attended by her parents. She continued to visit and correspond with the Hunts throughout her life. Her friendship with her principal interpreter, Ioleta Hunt McElhaney, George Hunt's daughter and a social worker for the Indian Service, was

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[3]Alice Marriott, *Greener Fields: Experiences Among the American Indians* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1953), 255.

[4]Alice Marriott, interview by Jennifer Fox for the Daughters of the Desert Oral History Project, 13 March 1986, Tucson, Arizona, audio recording, tape 1, side 1, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, New York, New York [hereafter cited as AMI].

lifelong. In short, Marriott's ties to the Kiowas were not restricted to the realm of science – ethnological study – but were the result of years of cultivating a relationship with one family within the tribe. "I loved the Kiowas," she expressed emphatically during the same interview.[5]

Although Marriott lived intermittently with the Hunts, she did not learn the Kiowa language beyond a few phrases. She contended that this five-toned, pitch language was too difficult for her to learn, for, she said, "I have no ear, none whatever, for pitch." Therefore, it was absolutely essential that she secure McElhaney's services for her research with the older Kiowas who did not speak English.[6] These older Kiowas had lived as buffalo hunters on the Plains at one time. One of her principal informants was McElhaney's grandmother and another was her uncle. During the mid-1930s these informants were in their mid-nineties. Marriott considered herself so fortunate to have had this opportunity to work with them, for within the next five years their entire age group had passed away.[7]

In evaluating *The Ten Grandmothers*, however, one must bear in mind that Marriott "normed" the voices of George Hunt and his family. She used his family's stories to represent "Kiowa culture." This is very problematic from an ethnographic point of view. For example, the Hunts were strong Christians, which inevitably affected their interpretations. According to Luke E. Lassiter, Kiowa consultants often discuss

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[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., tape 1, side 2.

[7]Ibid., tape 1, side 1.

anthropological texts by noting which Kiowas worked with the anthropologist. "They do not," Lassiter states, "talk about Maurice Boyd's *Kiowa Voices* (1981, 1983) or Alice Marriott's *Ten Grandmother's* (1945), for example, as a definitive representation of Kiowa culture. Instead, they explicitly point out that these books reflect the opinions and viewpoints of the particular Kiowa people who worked with the authors of those books."[8] In Marriott's case, she specifically worked with the Hunt family and this family would not speak for all Kiowas, and thus would not be representative of Kiowa culture.

During the course of her research, Marriott was most interested in Kiowa social structure. In preparation for her fieldwork, she began reading the wealth of ethnological literature available on American Indians, particularly Plains Indians. Most of the studies were written by men about men. This bothered Marriott. She was aware of anthropology's neglect of women – even she used the masculine pronoun to describe the professional ethnologist. She felt compelled to write about the missing half of the story. She began collecting stories about "women's life, women's ways, women's tricks." She did not view her work as exclusively women's history or feminist ethnography, rather she believed that "half of everything was being left out" and her goal was to provide a more complete story for the reader. As a woman, Marriott's interest in the Kiowas from the perspective of gender offered her distinct advantages over other anthropologists, predominantly men, who were also researching the Kiowas. Marriott was interested in the tribe from a vantage point which included women, thus she tapped into new sources

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[8]Luke E. Lassiter, *The Power of Kiowa Song: A Collaborative Ethnography* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 13.

of information, for example, women informants, who had not been previously interviewed by an ethnologist.[9]

The Ten Grandmothers is based upon Kiowa oral traditions that were passed down from generation to generation through tribal members. Marriott draws the bulk of the material for her sketches from two informants, Spear Woman and Eagle Plume, whose memories spanned the period of white conquest on the Southern Plains. In her discussions with these two informants and others, Marriott concluded that she could not make generalizations about the Kiowas during the one-hundred year period from the 1840s to the 1940s. This was a period of "great stress" due to white incursion and, according to Marriott, "While each person acted within the general pattern of the culture he knew, the pattern itself was changing too rapidly and too radically to be absolutely defined." Therefore, the sketches illustrate individual behavior rather than generalizations about all Kiowas. However, she adds, "It is only that no one but a Kiowa would have behaved in that way, at that time, under those conditions, that links the sketches." And finally, Marriott notes that she did not embellish these stories: "I have tried to tell these stories as much as possible as they were told to me," she states in the preface.[10] The result is a series of chronological sketches under four headings: "The Time When There Were Plenty of Buffalo," "The Time When Buffalo Were Going," "The Time When Buffalo Were Gone," and "Modern Times." Although Marriott cautions the reader that she merely recorded these Kiowa stories as they were told to her, what she

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[9]Ibid., tape 1, side 2.

[10]Alice Marriott, *The Ten Grandmothers*, xi.

does not acknowledge is her crucial role as the constructor of the narrative. For instance, like most anthropologists of the era, she cast the story along fairly rigid declensionist lines: good times, not so good times, bad times, and modern times. The implicit argument is that for Indians, this decline was unavoidable, and that "modern times" are not as "Indian" as the good old days. Kiowas tend to talk about this process very differently. This is not a literal translation of stories – Marriott crafted them into her Kiowa sketches. Her role as the narrator must be understood. Although she is a sympathetic narrator, she is still positioning herself as the authority.

The book's title refers to the ten medicine bundles which, according to Marriott, the Kiowa tribe called the ten grandmothers.[11] These sacred bundles hold the "power" of the tribe and emanate that power among the Kiowa people. As Marriott explains in the preface of *The Ten Grandmothers*, the bundles' contents are now unknown, though the bundles do still exist. Even the guardians of the sacred bundles were not allowed to open them. Once a year the ten guardians brought the ten grandmothers to a priest who had inherited this duty. In his ceremonial tipi the priest would open the sacred bundles, examine their contents, pray and partake in ceremonial smoking, and close the bundles. In the 1890s the last priest who had this duty died, and the bundles since have remained closed. During a period of great change, from 1847 to 1944, these ten sacred bundles

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[11]In correspondence with Clyde Ellis and Eric Lassiter, they contend that most Kiowas refer to the bundles as "the bundles," or the "boy bundles." In Kiowa, the word for grandmother is "tawlee," for boy it is "tahlee." Perhaps Marriott or her interpreter, Ioleta Hunt McElhaney, made this mistake in translation. Once the term was printed as the "grandmother bundles," it became the standard description.

remained a stable force within the Kiowa community.[12]

In *Greener Fields*, Marriott discusses the ten grandmothers with her interpreter whom she called Elizabeth. Elizabeth explained that the old religion of the tribe was still a contemporary concern among the Kiowas. "The ten medicine bundles, which Elizabeth referred to as 'the ten grandmothers gods,' were still in the hands of ten traditional guardians," Marriott explains. She asked Elizabeth what purpose the grandmothers served? "'Well,' Elizabeth answered me, considering, 'I suppose you could say that the grandmothers work rather like vacuum cleaners. They suck up all the evil that might come to the tribe, and hold it. As long as the bundles are safe, the whole tribe is safe, and no harm can come to anyone who belongs to it.'"[13] McElhaney's uncle was one of the guardians of the sacred bundles and he allowed Marriott to enter his tipi and sit with him for one hour. Marriott noted that she saw "not only the wrapping of the god, and the altar, but the pipe that goes with it, and the preparation of the ceremonial tobacco."[14] Being in the presence of one of the ten grandmothers was a significant experience for Marriott. She had respect for the Kiowas' religious practices and was grateful for the opportunity to enter such a sacred place.

Such discussions between Marriott and McElhaney were part of Marriott's larger effort to record the stories of American Indian women. George Hunt first suggested to

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[12]Ibid., viii.

[13]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 119-20. In *Greener Fields*, Marriott refers to Ioleta Hunt McElhaney as Elizabeth.

[14]Alice Marriott to Darlings, 5 July [1936], folder 1, box 20, AMC.

Marriott that she talk with the older women and preserve their stories for the young members of the tribe.[15] Some of the women were shy and unwilling at first to share their stories with an ethnologist. But Marriott's soothing disposition and sincere interest in the stories encouraged even the most reluctant of informants to talk with her. As Turner S. Kobler points out in her study of Marriott, "One of Miss Marriott's great advantages as an ethnologist has been that she can talk to women about women's affairs – such as housekeeping and child rearing – which they would not discuss with any man, certainly not an alien anthropologist."[16] Marriott was keenly aware of this gap in the literature as well and capitalized on it in her own research:

> The life pattern of Plains Indian men had been, by the time I came along, recorded thoroughly by several competent observers. The literature concerning the lives of Plains Indian women was less complete, and it seemed thoroughly natural and right for me to try to bring it up to date. After all, being a woman myself should give me a slight edge over the previous, masculine, field workers.[17]

Marriott's work with American Indian women was a conscious effort on her part to give voice to their stories, and, in turn, provide a fuller, more complete narrative of Indian life. Even though Marriott did not view her own work as women's history or feminist ethnography per se, her writings did, in fact, contribute to the small but growing literature on Indian women's narratives during the 1930s and 1940s, such as Ruth Underhill's *The Autobiography of a Papago Woman* (1936).

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[15]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 65.

[16]Turner S. Kobler, *Alice Marriott* (Austin, TX: Steck-Vaughn Company, 1969), 13.

[17]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 102.

Marriott presents the history of the Kiowas in story form, through a series of sketches. As one reviewer noted, "The style in which the book is written is the brief Indian manner." Moreover, the reviewer continued, Marriott "caught the real Kiowa manner of expression and faithfully under-told the story, as a Kiowa would, instead of over-telling it, as a white man would."[18] Marriott provides the reader with insight into Kiowa customs, clothing and social activities. She intended for her story to be told as some Kiowas would tell it and she explained this in a letter regarding the manuscript being sent to the press: "If I have anything to say about it, it will go as it is, literally transcribed, without any English to come between the real life and the reader."[19]

The Ten Grandmothers received praise from those close to Marriott. Her advisor at the University of Oklahoma, Forrest Clements, was one of the readers of the manuscript for the University of Oklahoma Press. Clements was quite pleased with Marriott's "brain child" and was particularly complimentary with regard to the organization of the book. "I think [the book's organization]," Clements wrote to Marriott, "gives the book a vitality which would have been absent had you followed the orthodox ethnographic report style and this method is particularly effective when dealing with a culture which is cracking up."[20] Clement's "cracking up" comment follows the lines of "salvage ethnography" and also indicates that he did not spend much time with

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[18]"Legends and History of Kiowa Indians Told Vividly in 'The 10 Grandmothers,'" [unidentified newspaper], [n.d.], folder 9, box 32, AMC.

[19]Alice Marriott to Darlings, 13 July [1936], folder 4, box 20, AMC.

[20]Forrest [Clements] to Alice [Marriott], 28 January 1943, folder 3, box 22, AMC.

Indian people. After reading *The Ten Grandmothers*, Ioleta Hunt McElhaney's husband, Louis McElhaney, a Cherokee, commended Marriott for "writing a book about Indians which is, so far as I can tell, utterly devoid of prejudice, and which reveals a genuine desire on your part to get at the simple truth." He admitted that he expected to read a "coldly-analytical, test-tube treatment" of the Kiowa people and was surprised that the book read like a novel.[21]

Professional reviews were somewhat less favorable. For example, Ernest Wallace, a specialist in Southern Plains studies, commented that the "scholarly reader may be disappointed that the author has not cited her authorities as the story progresses, and consequently may wonder at times if there is any departure from fact to fiction."[22] Wallace's claim is valid, for Marriott did not document her sources. In addition, Marriott's writing style is fluid and fiction-like, which could cause people, like Wallace, to question the book's credulity. She assures us in the preface, however, that the stories have been told to her by Kiowa informants and they have not been embellished. And Wallace concludes, "after a careful study and analysis of the work," that Marriott did present an accurate depiction of Kiowa life.[23] To Marriott's credit, she contended that the book was intended to appeal to a general readership, not necessarily a scholarly one. Angie Debo, on the other hand, sent Marriott a note of praise, stating that for her, *The Ten*

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[21]Louis [McElhaney] to Alice [Marriott], 7 March 1945, folder 3, box 22, AMC.

[22]Ernest Wallace, Review of *The Ten Grandmothers* by Alice Marriott, *Southwestern Sciences Quarterly* 26 (June 1945): 99-100.

[23]Ibid.

Grandmothers was a "once in a blue moon" kind of book. "I have no words to tell you how much I enjoyed it. I read it slowly savoring every word to make it last longer," Debo wrote.[24]

Marriott's second major book, *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso*, was an outgrowth of her work with native women artists for the Department of the Interior. Beginning in the mid-1930s, Marriott was employed by the Department of the Interior as a field specialist for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. Her work required her to travel extensively throughout Oklahoma consulting with native peoples about the marketability of their arts and crafts. Marriott enjoyed her work with the Board and was disappointed when World War II intervened and the Board's funding ended. Marriott met Maria Martinez at the San Francisco World's Fair of 1939. From 1942 to 1945, Marriott worked as a field representative for the American Red Cross in western Texas and eastern New Mexico. Although she enjoyed her government and wartime employment, these jobs prevented her from writing. At the end of the war, she was anxious to commit her full energies to research and decided to write a biography of the famous potter from San Ildefonso Pueblo, Maria Montoya Martinez. With encouragement from the director of the University of Oklahoma Press, Savoie Lottinville, Marriott secured a grant-in-aid from the Rockefeller Foundation to support research for the Martinez biography.[25]

Marriott was working for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board at the time she met Martinez. Martinez attended the Fair as a pottery-making demonstrator along with her

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[24]Angie Debo to Alice Marriott, 16 December 1946, folder 9, box 32, AMC.

[25]Savoie Lottinville to Alice Marriott, 22 March 1945, folder 4, box 19, AMC.

husband, Julian. Each Indian demonstrator came to San Francisco for about six weeks and the Indian Service paid their expenses.[26] Following the World's Fair, Martinez came to Oklahoma a couple of times to demonstrate pottery making and Marriott talked with her.[27] By the mid-1940s, Julian Martinez had passed away and Maria Martinez was an elderly woman. Marriott believed it was "high time" that her biography of Martinez commenced. "With Maria's consent," Marriott explained, "I undertook the task of making that record."[28]

Marriott moved to New Mexico with her friend, Margaret Lefranc, a painter. Lefranc illustrated several of Marriott's books, including *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso*, *The Valley Below*, and *Indians on Horseback.* The two of them had met in 1940 at an Indian arts and crafts show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. They purchased a house in Nambé, approximately twelve miles from San Ildefonso Pueblo, to be near Maria Martinez.[29] Marriott describes their experiences in Nambé in *The Valley Below*, predominantly an Indian and Hispanic community. They led a contented life in Nambé, with Marriott working on the Martinez project and Lefranc working on her art. The two of them maintained an active social life and always had guests dropping by their adobe home.[30]

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[26]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 204.

[27]AMI, tape 1, side 2.

[28]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 233.

[29]AMI, tale 1, side 2.

[30]Alice [Marriott] to Darlings, 28 March 1947, folder 2, box 21, AMC.

Marriott and Martinez established an orderly interview schedule. From nine o'clock in the morning until noon they would sit in Martinez's living room and talk. With notebook in hand, Marriott utilized what she called a "stream-of-consciousness" interviewing method. She had used this approach before, but only with people she knew well. Martinez and Marriott were still on very formal terms with one another. Using this method, Martinez would select a topic to discuss that day, and if anything was unclear to Marriott, she would ask the necessary questions.[31] But she promised Martinez that her questions would be limited. Marriott needed to approach her research with Martinez with a high degree of sensitivity, for the Pueblo was a particularly insular community and was cautious of outsiders. When their work together began, both women agreed that Martinez would only talk about herself and her experiences, not Pueblo matters. The council of the Pueblo forbade them to discuss Pueblo government or religion. Marriott posited that white people who speak with authority on Pueblo religion and government are "either violating confidences or falsifying."[32] She respected the privacy of the San Ildefonso community and did not use her association with Martinez to pry into these sensitive matters. "I do not know what it would take to induce a Pueblo Indian to discuss honestly and frankly the government or religion of his people. I do know that if I were in possession of that information I should not expect to live long if I divulged it in casual conversation to casual ears."[33]

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[31]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 234-35; AMI, tape 1, side 2.

[32]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 162.

[33]Ibid.

The women continued to meet daily for morning interviews for several months. In a letter home in 1946, Marriott noted that they were making significant headway with regard to women's issues. For example, Martinez wanted to tell her about "the woman's part" of the kiva rituals. In addition, Martinez mentioned the significance of Marriott's work to future generations of Pueblo people. The Indian Service school principal refused to allow the older children to come home from the Santa Fe boarding school to participate in some of the spring dances. This action discouraged Martinez, for she was concerned that the younger generation would not learn some of these traditions. Martinez insisted that Marriott's book record these traditions and other aspects of Pueblo life: "If these things are written in a book, they can at least read it," she told Marriott. Better if it's written by someone who knows and likes Indians, too."[34]

After several months of morning interviews, Martinez came to the end of her story. As Marriott recalled, "the day came when [Martinez] said, gently, 'I think that's all I have to tell you.'" Then Marriott went back to her home in Nambé to organize her field notes and "to coax from them a coherent story of one woman's life."[35]

Marriott used life histories, such as her biography of Martinez, as a device for exploring culture. "Only by knowing one person," Marriott commented, "can you even begin to picture a culture." She did not arrive at this theme consciously until she was halfway through her interviews with Martinez. Then she realized that life histories, or using individuals to explore a culture, was her "answer" – the "thing [she's] been living

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[34]Alice [Marriott] to Darlings, 16 April 1946, folder 2, box 21, AMC.

[35]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 234.

for."[36] This again raises the issue of norming, similar to her practice of working with the Hunt family to describe Kiowa culture. Although norming was typical among anthropologists of the era, it also posed a real problem. Marriott's use of this device is not an accurate way to "picture a culture."

Marriott highlights several themes in *Maria*.[37] She discusses the importance of family, the insularity of the San Ildefonso Pueblo, the degeneracy of Julian Martinez's alcoholism, and the economic success of Maria and Julian Martinez's pottery and its beneficial effects on the Pueblo. For example, in the third section of the book, "The Bowl is Fired," Marriott explores Maria and Julian Martinez's distinctive pottery-making process, black-on-black pottery, and then the dramatic sales which followed. The black-on-black pottery began as a mistake during the firing process. Julian Martinez, who fired and decorated Maria Martinez's pots, once put too much manure on the fire. All the pots turned black. They did not like these "ruined" pots and stored them away. One of their Santa Fe traders requested more pots for his shop and took the black-on-black ones and marketed them as special. Tourists fancied these black pots and quickly the trader requested more. Beginning in 1908, Maria Martinez would make the pots and Julian would decorate them. What began as a mistake in firing the pots became a profitable product – people flocked to Santa Fe and to San Ildefonso Pueblo to purchase their black-on-black pottery. Eventually, Maria Martinez was encouraged to sign her pottery and

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[36]AMI, tape 1, side 2.

[37]Alice Marriott, *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1948).

became the first Pueblo potter to do so.[38]

Marriott presents Maria Martinez as the savior of her pueblo. Martinez capitalized on her black-on-black pottery and became a famous potter. But she also shared this popularity and economic benefit with her community. Pueblo potters could increase their family income without working outside the community. Marriott equates life outside of San Ildefonso's walls with tempting vices which threaten the insularity of the pueblo. Prior to the success of the pottery, for example, most men of the pueblo would work in the outside world and would be subject to the evils of alcohol. In the case of Julian Martinez, alcohol would ultimately destroy him. For a time, Maria Martinez tried to keep her husband occupied with decorating and firing pottery, but his need for alcohol took him from his family and killed him. Marriott makes this case plain in her book.

Maria Martinez would spend time with other women of the pueblo teaching them how to make pottery and encouraging them to sell it. Maria sold her pottery as well as the pottery of others in a pottery salesroom attached to her home. Due to the popularity of her pottery, the entire community reaped the benefits. Tourists would come to the pueblo in search of Maria Martinez's pottery and would also buy the pottery of other San Ildefonso women. In addition, the Santa Fe stores would request San Ildefonso pottery, particularly Maria Martinez's, but others as well. The pueblo advanced economically due to the success of the Martinez family.[39]

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[38]Ibid., 195-202.

[39]Ibid., 217-35.

Marriott's interpretation of Maria Martinez was created from her time spent with Martinez in the San Ildefonso Pueblo. Although Marriott claims that her biography was based only on information provided by Martinez, after the interviews were finished, Marriott had to go home and create a narrative. For example, the strength of the community over the individual is one of Marriott's pervading themes. She described the San Ildefonso community in *Greener Fields* in this way:

> All their being was encompassed by the group, as it was enclosed by their houses and as the houses formed a wall about the town. Impossible that the silence, or the sheltering wall, should give way to admit the noise and clutter of individualism. People spoke always of "our houses" and "our ways." No one would have claimed individual ownership of either.[40]

Themes such as the importance of community over individual shaped Marriott's writing of *Maria*. This narrative was told within a postwar framework which emphasized the importance of family, the strength of community, the danger of individualism, the callousness of the outside world – themes which call to mind critiques of postwar suburbanization, as Deborah Gordon points out.[41] In short, the biography of Maria Martinez was constructed to tell the story Marriott wanted told.

As an ethnologist, Marriott was writing her texts for the Indian people themselves as a means to preserve culture as well as for a general audience. Marriott wanted to educate the public on the life of an ethnologist in the field and her experiences with

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[40]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 235.

[41]Deborah Gordon, "Among Women: Gender and Ethnographic Authority of the Southwest, 1930-1980," in *Hidden Scholars: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest*, ed. Nancy J. Parezo (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 140.

Indians such as Maria Martinez. Deborah Gordon terms this "matronization." Matronization, according to Gordon, "involved white women educating the public as well as attempting to educate themselves into another kind of Anglo-American female identity through a simultaneous helping and exalting of Native American women."[42] The notion of matronization aptly applies to Marriott, for in her fieldwork with Martinez, she was exploring the boundaries of gender as well as her own ethnographic authenticity. She had the utmost respect for Maria Martinez, calling her "Mrs. Martinez," and maintaining a formal friendship with her. However, at times her role as an ethnographer placed her in a position of power over her subject. For instance, upon completing the *Maria* manuscript, Marriott read it aloud to Martinez, asserting the matronization role. After the book had been published, a local bookstore suggested an autographing party for Martinez, Marriott, and Lefranc. After the event, they drove Martinez home. "'Good night,' Maria said to us,'" Marriott recalls in *Greener Fields*. "'The boys is waiting up to hear what people said 'bout my book what Alice wrote down.'"[43] Again, the idea that Marriott is "helping" or "exalting" Martinez becomes clear.

Historians and anthropologists have debated white women anthropologists' cultural critiques of American Indians. The general consensus claims that white women anthropologists studied Indians as a critique of their own culture. Deborah Gordon, for instance, argues that white women anthropologists such as Alice Marriott "looked to

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[42]Ibid., 144.

[43]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 237.

Native Americans and Native American women for the reconstruction of themselves."[44] Historian Catherine Lavender echoes this position in her study of feminist ethnographers in the Southwest from 1900 to 1940:

> [I]t is as if these early anthropologists looked through a window at Native American cultures, fully believing that what they saw through the window were the Native American activities on the other side of the glass. In fact what they saw through the glass were Native American activities as well as their own reflections.[45]

What they recorded in their texts, however, did not always distinguish the difference between "Native American actions and anthropologists' reflections."

While this idea of a reflected gaze may be true to a degree, in Marriott's case, this notion of a critique of one's own culture only offers an initial explanation of Marriott's interest and study of Native Americans. As her biography demonstrates, Marriott was a committed ethnologist who enjoyed the life of fieldwork. Moreover, her writings were intended to appeal to a general audience, not a scholarly one, and spark their interest in anthropology. Her writings, in part, were critiques of the larger American culture, but more importantly to Marriott they were life histories of individual Indians, intended to educate the American public. These life histories were also important to the tribes being studied. Martinez, for example, insisted that Marriott record some of the women's customs in the pueblo so that the younger women who were attending government boarding schools could read about them.

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[44]Gordon, "Among Women," 130.

[45]Catherine Jane Lavender, "Storytellers: Feminist Ethnography and the American Southwest, 1900-1940," (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado-Boulder, 1997), 1-2.

In 1949 Marriott published the first of two experimental ethnographies,[46] *The Valley Below*.[47] She received a Guggenheim Fellowship for this project. In her grant application, she stated that the project would be a study of Nambé Pueblo in New Mexico. Marriott commented that perhaps the foundation expected a serious, scholarly work, but her book was more conversational and filled with personal observations. In *The Valley Below*, Marriott discusses the community of Nambé, located approximately twenty miles from Santa Fe, and her place within this largely Hispanic town. She shares her experiences on what brought her to Nambé, her decision to live with Margaret Lefranc, their decision to purchase an old adobe and add a fireplace and additional room, their work, and their interactions with neighbors. This book is particularly helpful because, as an experimental ethnography, it provides insight into Marriott's life and environment during her fieldwork. For example, *The Valley Below* includes some passages on Marriott's experience working with Maria Martinez and the adventures Marriott shared with Lefranc as they worked on their book projects from their home.

The Valley Below also includes some significant remarks Marriott made on her reasons for moving to New Mexico following World War II. She was disillusioned with

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[46]I use the term "experimental ethnography" to convey Marriott's embrace of the "personal voice," in autobiographical terms, particularly within *Greener Fields* and *The Valley Below*. For more on experimental ethnography, see Ruth Behar, "Introduction: Out of Exile," in *Women Writing Culture* ed. Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 4-5.

[47]Alice Marriott, *The Valley Below* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949).

the modern world and was drawn to the "relatively untouched" condition of the Pueblos. She was dissatisfied with urban living and was searching for the simple life. As she put it, she and Margaret Lefranc were part of a "postwar back-to-the-soil movement."[48] This disillusionment with modern America was a common theme among many of the anthropologists, social critics, artists and writers who flocked to the Southwest in droves beginning in the 1920s and again in the 1940s. Leah Dilworth calls this search for the simple life and the idea that this life could be found in American Indian communities "modernist primitivism."[49] Marriott's decision to live in Nambé and conduct fieldwork on Martinez fits into this larger movement of women ethnographers who were critiquing modern life through the study of native peoples.

After the manuscript was finished, Marriott sought a publisher. Houghton Mifflin rejected *The Valley Below* because it was too much of a personal narrative. The manuscript was rejected by five more commercial presses before being accepted for publication at the University of Oklahoma Press. "I feel grateful to Mr. Lottinville," Marriott commented, "for sticking his neck out when others refused the risk." Marriott had published a number of other books with the University of Oklahoma Press and was thankful for her connection with the press. She admitted that her status as a professional ethnologist was reinforced by her association with the University of Oklahoma Press.[50]

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[48]Ibid., 8-12.

[49]Leah Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 173-82.

[50]Alice [Marriott] to Darlings, 9 April 1947, folder 2, box 21, AMC; Alice Marriott to Miss Joseph, 14 November 1949, folder 1, box 22, AMC.

Marriott's second experimental ethnography, *Greener Fields* published by Thomas Y. Crowell Company in 1953, is Marriott's autobiographical account of how to be an anthropologist. She explains that these stories address "how one woman has lived and worked and studied among American Indian tribes."[51] She explains how she first became interested in ethnology, her fieldwork with the Kiowas, effective techniques for interviewing an informant, and a pragmatic discussion on earning a living as a woman anthropologist. In a chapter entitled, "Gainful Employment," Marriott comments on the gender inequities of anthropology:

> Anthropology generally is a man's trade, and women have a time fitting themselves into it. Unless a woman has been endowed by nature with tremendous health, enthusiasm, and drive, she does not get to the top. I don't want to sound unhappy about the matter – after all, some of my best friends and closest allies are men.[52]

Marriott supported herself as a freelance writer for the majority of her life. She also relied on grant support to fund her fieldwork. As a result of her commitment to fieldwork and writing, Marriott's publication record boasts twenty books and even more articles and short stories. She was not a wealthy person by any means, but she was able to pay her bills and live near the communities where she researched in Oklahoma and the greater Southwest. In the late 1940s, Marriott hired an agent based in New York to place her work in magazines such as *The New Yorker* and *Woman's Day* and help boost her financial security. For example, portions of *Greener Fields* had first appeared in *The*

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[51]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 255.

[52]Ibid., 178.

New Yorker.[53]

Marriott's ultimate goal in her fieldwork with Native Americans was reaching the general public and educating them on her favorite subject. She deliberately avoided anthropological jargon and told her stories in an almost fictional style. This style held popular appeal with her readers. When she first began her studies in anthropology at the University of Oklahoma in the early 1930s, much of the literature was technical. She believed that the subject of anthropology was so interesting, yet wondered why was the body of literature so obscure. She was determined to claim her audience as the general public rather than other scholars, and her books would promote the excitement of anthropology. For her, anthropology was more than a science – it was a point of view that should be shared with others.[54]

Marriott considered herself an ethnologist, although she described her own work as distinct from professional anthropologists. Professional anthropologists, she explained, concern themselves with cultural differences. "I have always worked on the basis that people are alike," she explained to her agent in 1953, "that differences arise from environmental circumstances, and that the resemblances exist and should be defined."[55]

Marriott distanced herself from professional anthropologists, preferring to call

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[53]Nannine Joseph to Alice Marriott, 29 May 1952, folder 5, box 27, AMC; Alice [Marriott] to Darling, 26 February 1953, folder 3, box 21, AMC.

[54]Kobler, *Alice Marriott*, 4-5; AMI, tape 1, side 2.

[55]Alice Marriott to Nannine Joseph, 25 August 1953, folder 5, box 29, AMC.

herself an ethnologist who wrote for the general public. Her formal education as an anthropologist ended with a bachelor's degree in anthropology from the University of Oklahoma, and although she was encouraged to continue pursuing advanced degrees, she consciously chose to spend her time in the field. The following passage from *Greener Fields* on who should study ethnology captures the way Marriott perceived herself:

> All your accomplishment depends on your ability to detach yourself from your own culture. In fact, it is safe to say that you would not be where you are, doing what you are doing, if you easily found a satisfactory niche within your own culture. Mentally, emotionally, or in some other inner way you are a displaced person, or you would not have found interest in or satisfaction from the study of other cultures. This is your lack – or your great good fortune. Face it squarely, admit it honestly, take advantage of it.[56]

Marriott was a "displaced person" who lived quite contentedly on the margin of what was considered acceptable behavior for women during the first half of the twentieth century. She carved out a niche for herself doing what she loved to do – writing ethnographies about American Indian communities.

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[56]Marriott, *Greener Fields*, 84.

CHAPTER FOUR

MURIEL H. WRIGHT: NATIVE HISTORIAN OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY

In 1965, at seventy-six years of age, Muriel Hazel Wright, an Oklahoma Choctaw, reflected on her ties with the state: "I don't own Oklahoma," she said, "but I have a very deep feeling [for the state] because of being in the historical field."[1] This identification with Oklahoma, this deep sense of place, shaped Muriel Wright's presentation of Oklahoma history. She preserved her view of Oklahoma through her work in the Oklahoma Historical Society. She served as editor of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, the state's historical quarterly, for thirty years, from 1943-1973. From this position as editor, Wright successfully implanted her interpretation of Oklahoma history within the historical society.[2]

Educated Indian women, Nancy Shoemaker maintains, often selected professions that were considered women's professions such as education, social welfare, and health care. Some women may have felt constrained by these "gendered limitations," but the

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[1]Muriel H. Wright, interview by Frank Doyle, 8 March 1965, tape recording, Indian Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City [hereafter cited as MWI].

[2]Selections from this chapter have appeared in article form. See Patricia Loughlin, "The Battle of the Historians of Round Mountain: An Examination of Muriel Wright and Angie Debo," *Heritage of the Great Plains* 31 (Spring/Summer 1998): 5-18.

majority of women in these professions assumed the role of "expert" and performed an important service in their Indian communities.[3] Muriel Wright assumed such a role as editor at the Oklahoma Historical Society. Many women around the country were editors of state history journals. In this case, however, Wright published articles on local history, which often meant Indian history as well. Under her leadership, the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* consistently produced articles on Native American history and the development of the state during a period when few national journals provided a forum for such research. She took history courses as an undergraduate and enrolled at Barnard College for one year of special graduate study. During her thirty-year tenure at the historical society and her leadership role in the development of the historic sites program, Wright firmly embedded her presence in Oklahoma as an early public historian.

Historians have debated the question of Indian identity and the preservation of Indian culture. Historically, the Five Tribes have embraced cultural change through accommodation and encounter with Euro-Americans. Prior to removal to Indian Territory, the Five Tribes had established schools, adopted Christianity, and participated in the market economy. Some individuals were wealthy landowners with slaves, and two of the tribes had drafted written constitutions in the southeastern part of the United States. The Five Tribes exemplified the success of government policy and missionary work among Indians – they were viewed as proof that Indians could be "civilized." The

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[3]Nancy Shoemaker, "Introduction," in *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*, ed. Nancy Shoemaker (New York: Routledge, 1995), 12.

success of assimilation policy prompted a question that David Baird poses: "Are the Five Tribes of Oklahoma 'Real' Indians?" His response is clear – yes, they are. Baird maintains that to create a hierarchy of Indian identity, by determining who is "more Indian" based on a rejection of acculturation or adaptability to change is ahistorical and dangerous. By making these kinds of distinctions, Baird continues, "we deny the vitality of Native American society and its ability to adapt dynamically to change. We assume instead that culture is static, and that once it is altered, regardless of extent, the real Indians disappear."[4] Similarly, Clara Sue Kidwell's research on the Choctaws in Mississippi has led her to conclude that "dynamic change over time does not necessarily mean the loss of culture."[5] Muriel Wright's career exemplifies Kidwell's and Baird's position regarding Indian identity and the preservation of culture. Wright created a significant space for herself as an historian of Oklahoma history, particularly as a chronicler of the contribution of American Indian people in the development of the state.

Born in 1889 at Lehigh, Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory, to a notable Choctaw family, Muriel Wright's heritage and education provided the solid foundation for her future work. Her father, Dr. Eliphalet Nott Wright, a graduate of Union College and Albany Medical College in New York, returned to the Choctaw Nation in 1895 to establish his private practice and serve as company physician for the Missouri-Pacific

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[4]W. David Baird, "Are the Five Tribes of Oklahoma 'Real' Indians?," *Western Historical Quarterly* 21 (February 1990): 16.

[5]Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), xvi.

Coal Mines at Lehigh. Wright entrenched himself within the Choctaw Nation not only as a doctor but as a businessman who was interested in improving his nation. His interests included the development of oil in the Choctaw Nation, and he became the first president of the Choctaw Oil and Refining Company in 1884. An active supporter of allotment in his negotiations with the Dawes Commission on behalf of the Choctaws, Wright was also a strong proponent for bringing together Oklahoma and Indian Territories in statehood.[6] Her mother, Ida Belle Richards, educated at Lindenwood College of St. Charles, Missouri, came to the Indian Territory in 1887 as a Presbyterian missionary teacher. On both sides of the family tree, Wright proudly traced her heritage to descendants aboard the *Mayflower* in 1620 and the *Anne* in 1623.[7] The pursuit and preservation of her bicultural heritage remained everpresent in Wright's personal life, career, and historical interpretation. In an autobiographical sketch, Wright described her identity as "one-fourth Choctaw" and "also from distinguished colonial ancestry."[8] A member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Colonial Dames, Wright maintained these commitments in addition to active participation in Choctaw Nation politics.

Wright's most distinguished relative, and her favorite to discuss, was her Choctaw grandfather, the Reverend Allen Wright. A graduate of Union College and Union

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[6]Muriel H. Wright, "A Brief Review of the Life of Doctor Eliphalet Nott Wright, 1858-1932," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 10 (June 1931): 180-94.

[7]LeRoy H. Fischer, "Muriel H. Wright, Historian of Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 52 (Spring 1974): 3.

[8]Muriel H. Wright, typed document, [n.d.], Muriel H. Wright Collection, 83-18, Indian Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City [hereafter cited as MWC].

Theological Seminary in New York, he served as principal chief of the Choctaw Nation from 1866 to 1870. As Wright pointedly recalled, her grandfather was the "first Indian from Indian Territory to have earned the master's degree."[9] In 1866 during the Choctaw-Chickasaw Reconstruction Treaty delegation's visit to Washington, D.C., this learned man offered the name "Oklahoma" for Indian Territory. Muriel Wright remembered the story vividly:

> My grandfather was sitting at the desk. As a linguist, he knew Choctaw. On one side of the sheet he was writing Choctaw and on the other English. One of the officials, probably the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, said what would you call the territory? Grandfather was sitting absentmindedly, writing around, and he said immediately, Oklahoma. Well that Choctaw name is synonymous with Indian, there isn't any word in the Choctaw language for Indian. Oklahoma means "red people."[10]

Wright recalled that her grandfather used to laugh when he told this story, because he had spoken out of turn in the eyes of the "older, dignified Indian delegates."[11] The name "Oklahoma" quickly gained popularity among Indians and other settlers. When the twin territories merged as one state in 1907, the natural name of choice was that offered by Muriel Wright's grandfather, Allen Wright, in 1866.[12] The Wright family roots run deep within the state's history. She took hold of this history in a personal, almost proprietary

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[9]MWI.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Regarding Allen Wright and the naming of Oklahoma, see Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934; reprint, 1961), 214; W. David Baird and Danney Goble, *The Story of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 309.

way, carefully preserving her Choctaw ties with the state's development.

Beginning in 1897 with the Atoka Agreement and continuing with the Curtis Act of 1898, the Dawes Commission systematically sectioned the Choctaw National landscape into individual allotments in severalty. Such federal government interference dramatically altered the organization of Choctaw institutions, including education. During this transition, formerly reputable tribal schools deteriorated in the hands of the federal government. As a result, Wright received most of her primary and secondary education at home from her mother. Boarding school was not an option, Wright noted, for her mother said she was "too small" to attend Indian boarding school.[13]

Following a family tradition of Eastern education extending back to her grandfather, Wright attended Wheaton Seminary in Norton, Massachusetts. Overall, her experience at Wheaton was pleasant, although she has remarked that being "a Choctaw Indian was no asset."[14] She was a Southerner and an Indian from Indian Territory, two distinctions which set her apart from her classmates at the northern institution and sometimes caused friction. In her own words she felt this to be "no asset," but her comment may indicate a growing awareness of her Indian identity which prompted her future work as an interpreter of Oklahoma's Indian history. Two years later in 1908, she joined her parents in Washington, D.C., where her father served a two-year term as resident delegate of the Choctaw Nation.

A social function in Washington, signifying Muriel Wright's introduction to

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[13]MWI.

[14]Muriel H. Wright, Autobiographical Notes, box 4, MWC.

Washington society provides a glimpse of her adeptness at "playing Indian," a term Philip J. Deloria uses, when called upon to perform.[15] Deloria notes that in the early twentieth century, Indian people participated in these performances as never before — as he describes it, they were "imitating non-Indian imitations of Indians."[16] Muriel Wright had attended the event wearing a white dress, and was described by one Washington newspaper as "demure and dainty as any conventional sweet girl graduate." Wright left the party to change attire. When she returned, to quote the article, Wright had been "transformed, idealized, a creature of a different race--an Indian girl in all the picturesque trappings of her ancestral tribe." But, interestingly, Muriel Wright was not wearing traditional Choctaw attire, she was wearing Cheyenne buckskin attire. With her hair in braids, she projected an image which the Eastern audience identified as "Indian," essentially verifying her authenticity. In other words, Wright was fulfilling Eastern expectations of "Indianness," while simultaneously validating her family's status among Washington's elite. The article concluded that "Miss Muriel Wright will be a social success in Washington."[17]

This type of performance was typical among prominent Indian women during the early twentieth century. For example, in 1925, Ruth Muskrat Bronson, a Cherokee student at Mount Holyoke, donned similar attire in her presentation to President Calvin

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[15]Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[16]Ibid., 123.

[17]Article, unidentified Washington, D.C. newspaper, [1909], "Miss Wright a most charming Indian-Girl," box 7, MWC.

Coolidge.[18] Wright's and Bronson's performances appear to coincide with decades of federal assimilation policy, rather than challenging assumptions of Indian identity. Coincidentally, in 1947 Wright was photographed wearing Cheyenne buckskin similar to the attire she had worn at the Washington function and she was also photographed on another occasion wearing a traditional Choctaw dress. As Deloria asks, "To what extent had acting like Indian Others formed a part of their identities around the very images they attempted to change?"[19]

I would add, how did Wright's Indian performances in turn redefine her sense of Indian identity? Wright's interest in Indian performance paralleled her interest in educating the general public on native peoples. She helped to erode stereotypes of Indians using her own life as an example, as well as dedicating her life's work to promoting her own heritage within Oklahoma history. If anything, Wright added complexity to the notion of Indianness. She was a confident bicultural woman. She was proud of her Choctaw grandfather's role as principal chief and her father's leading role in the Choctaw Nation. Simultaneously, she made connections to her Anglo past, a past of Christian missionaries and educational leaders. As a cultural broker, Wright's identity was a composite of all of these roles. Secure in her Indian identity, she was able to "play" with it and participate in Indian performance. She was no less an Indian because of this participation. Rather, through Indian performance, Wright educated her audience

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[18]Alison Bernstein, "A Mixed Record: The Political Enfranchisement of American Indian Women During the Indian New Deal," *Journal of the West* 23 (1984): 13-20. See also Baird, "Are the Five Tribes of Oklahoma 'Real Indians?"

[19]Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 125.

on the complexity of Indian identity, and challenged stereotypes of Indianness in her public role, first while accompanying her family and their political role in Washington, D.C., and in Choctaw Nation, and later as an independent career woman working at the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Upon return to the family allotment in Lehigh, Wright prepared for a career in teaching as she completed her bachelor's degree at the newly founded East Central Normal School in Ada, Oklahoma, in 1912.[20] One-room or two-room rural schools predominated in Oklahoma in the 1910s and 1920s. As James Smallwood indicates, Oklahoma had 12,390 teachers in 1915, and more than half, 7,333, were dispersed throughout the state in the rural schools.[21] Wright's educational theory courses at East Central emphasized the importance of new teachers visiting the students' families at home in order to gain insight into their backgrounds, particularly in rural areas. Wright conducted these home visits throughout her teaching career and discovered that this method helped reduce discipline problems in the classroom.[22]

Wright began her teaching career at Wapanucka, Oklahoma, in Johnston County, teaching high school English, English history, and U.S. history. Her initial salary was $50 a month. In the early twentieth century, teaching positions in public schools were predominantly held by women, but the men involved in elementary and secondary

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[20]Fischer, "Muriel H. Wright," 7-8; MWI.

[21]James Smallwood, ed., *And Gladly Teach: Reminiscences of Teachers from Frontier Dugout to Modern Module* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 9.

[22]Wright, Autobiographical Notes; Fischer, "Muriel H. Wright," 8.

education received higher salaries and obtained the majority of the administrative positions. Some women, however, ascended to administrative posts. For instance, in 1914 sixteen of seventy-seven county superintendents were women. By the early 1930s, almost half of the county superintendents were women.[23] By 1914, not only had Wright risen to high school principal, but she was also earning $95 a month. Wright's role as a principal was a rarity among women teachers.[24] In 1916 women high school principals, according to Courtney Ann Vaughn-Roberson, represented sixteen percent of all high school principals in Oklahoma, and by mid-century their representation dropped to seven percent.[25] For a brief period beginning in 1916, she attended Barnard College, the women's college of Columbia University, to pursue a master's degree in history and English. World War I interfered with her education at Barnard and she returned home.[26]

From 1918 to 1924, Wright was principal of Hardwood District School, a rural school in Coal County near her family home. The school stood on the section line road at the south end of the Wright family allotment comprised of some 735 acres. The school building was situated on a five-acre tract and was heated by two large wood-burning

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[23]Joe Hubbell, "Women in Oklahoma Education," in *Women in Oklahoma: A Century of Change*, ed. Melvena K. Thurman (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1982), 150.

[24]Wright, Autobiographical Notes; Ruth Arrington, "Muriel Hazel Wright," in *Notable American Women: The Modern Period*, ed. Barbara Sicheman and Carol Hurd Green (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1980), 751-52.

[25]Courtney Ann Vaughn-Roberson, "Sometimes Independent But Never Equal – Women Teachers, 1900-1950: The Oklahoma Example," *Pacific Historical Review* 53 (February 1984): 49.

[26]Fischer, "Muriel H. Wright," 9-11.

stoves. Again she acted as both teacher and principal, this time with a salary of $150.00 per month. Wright had one assistant teacher who taught the first through fourth grades and Wright taught the fifth through eighth grades. The local community centered around the timber industry, with bois d'arc timber and oak railroad ties as the principal commodities. Wright described the people of the district as an all-white "renter class," renting from the Choctaws. The region and school were closed to African Americans. The nearest black settlement was approximately nine miles southeast of Boggy Creek in the upland timber region. Wright took an active interest in the welfare of her students. She introduced a student-administered assistance program for students who could not afford school supplies. Most of the Hardwood students, Wright noted, earned their money for textbooks, new coats, and shoes by harvesting cotton on their parents' farms.[27]

In addition to teaching, Wright actively participated in Choctaw Nation politics. Beginning in 1922, while her father served as chair of the Choctaw Committee, Wright held the office of secretary. The council supported educational and welfare programs, making improvements at Wheelock Academy, Jones Academy, Goodland Indian Orphanage, and constructing and maintaining the Indian hospital at Talihina. In addition, Muriel Wright successfully implemented a program to restore and preserve the Choctaw Council House at Tuskahoma, defeating an initiative to move the house to Southeastern State College in Durant. Such efforts proved a natural springboard for her future involvement in Choctaw politics. Regarded as "one of the most accomplished women in the Choctaw nation," Wright became a candidate for principal chief of the Choctaws in

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[27]Wright, Autobiographical Notes.

1930.[28] Four years later, she helped create the Choctaw Advisory Council and served as the Choctaw delegate from Oklahoma City until 1944. During this period the Council worked to secure final settlement of Choctaw properties still outstanding.[29]

In the midst of teaching and Choctaw political involvement, Wright began a textbook project with historian Joseph B. Thoburn. Introduced to Thoburn through her father, Wright collaborated with Thoburn on a four-volume compendium of Oklahoma history entitled *Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People*.[30] Written for an adult audience, this series supplied an overview of Oklahoma history. Wright's interest in the subject heightened as she conducted the extensive fieldwork required for the book.[31]

Along with this intensified interest in historical writing, and with Thoburn's assistance, Wright produced a second work in 1929, *The Story of Oklahoma*, a textbook for public school children.[32] This book, and others that followed, provided balanced accounts of Native American participation in shaping Oklahoma's history. In addition, supplemental workbooks required active student participation in piecing together

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[28]Article, "Miss Muriel Wright May Be Appointed Chief of Choctaws," *The Colgate Courier*, 23 January 1930, box 7, MWC; Walter Ferguson to Muriel Wright, 1 February 1930, box 1, MWC; Muriel H. Wright to Walter Ferguson, 3 February 1930, MWC.

[29]Fischer, "Muriel H. Wright," 12; MWI; Ben Dwight to Muriel H. Wright, 2 November 1931, box 1, MWC.

[30]Muriel H. Wright and Joseph B. Thoburn, *Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People* 4 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing, 1929).

[31]MWI; Fischer, "Muriel H. Wright," 18.

[32]Muriel H. Wright and editorially assisted by Joseph B. Thoburn, *The Story of Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: Webb Publishing Company, 1929).

Oklahoma's history.[33] As more and more public schools across the state adopted her textbooks, Wright became more involved with the Oklahoma Historical Society. When her father died in 1931, Wright moved to Oklahoma City to work at the historical society on a special research project on the Five Tribes, and continued her freelance writing.[34]

For the next thirty years Wright guided and protected the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, shaping the journal's content through her many scholarly contributions and as editor. A member of the historical society from its inception in 1922, Wright contributed her first book review to the journal's third issue. Appointed associate editor in 1943, she held this position for twelve years prior to her promotion to editor in 1955. At the editorial helm, Wright produced well over one-hundred issues, which included sixty-six of her own articles. Wright's contributions to the journal emphasized local topics such as military history and Indians of Oklahoma. As editor, Wright claimed she "practically rewrote" many of the articles submitted by other historians.[35] Described as "a persistent and exacting editor" by Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., Wright used her position and influence

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[33]Muriel H. Wright with Lucyl Shirk, *The Story of Oklahoma: A Work Book* (Guthrie, OK: Co-operative Publishing Company, 1951; Muriel H. Wright, *Our Oklahoma: Work Book in Oklahoma History* (Guthrie, OK: Co-operative Publishing Company, 1951).

[34]MWI; Fischer, "Muriel H. Wright," 18. In addition, Wright wrote *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), a reference book covering over sixty tribes. This work has become a standard reference among Native American historians studying Oklahoma.

[35]Handwritten document, Wright, n.d. [mid-1970s], MWC.

as editor to shape the historiography of Indian tribes in Oklahoma.[36] She served as editor until her retirement in 1973 at eighty-four years of age. In 1994, *Chronicles* editor Bob L. Blackburn wrote that Muriel Wright was "the heart and soul" of the Oklahoma Historical Society during her thirty-year tenure as editor.[37]

State and local history is commonly prone to local, and often personal, disputes. Wright, as a confident and controlling editor at the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, asserted authority over Oklahoma history and in this way her interpretation of Oklahoma history became institutionalized in the historical society. Although she made claims that she did not "own" Oklahoma, she did control what the journal published, which historic sites would be sponsored by the historical society, and how the inscriptions would read on the markers.

This proprietary impulse often prompted Wright to act as the guardian and protector of a carefully crafted version of Oklahoma history. For example, what Oklahoma historians know as the "Battle of Round Mountain Controversy" has served as an intriguing reminder of lively debate and feuding parties within the historical

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[36]Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., "Muriel Hazel Wright," in *Native American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Gretchen M. Bataille (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 287.

[37]Bob L. Blackburn, "Oklahoma Historian Hall of Fame–Muriel Wright," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 71 (Winter 1993-1994): 450.

profession at large.[38] In this case, two groups squared off over the location of the first battle of the Civil War in Indian Territory. Muriel Wright, editor of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, commanded an active historic sites marker program on behalf of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Angie Debo, prominent historian of American Indians, also worked in historic preservation with the Payne County Historical Society. Both historians agreed that the first battle of the Civil War in Indian Territory occurred on November 19, 1861, between the Union Creeks headed for Kansas and Confederate troops, including a Creek regiment, Choctaw-Chickasaw and Creek-Seminole regiments, and a detachment of the Texas cavalry. The point of contention, however, pivots over place. Documentary evidence corroborates the correct date of the battle, but exact location within the territory remains ambiguous. In fact, two markers presently exist, at the "Keystone site" near Tulsa, and the "Round Mountain site" in Yale, near Stillwater.[39]

During the 1940s most Oklahoma historians agreed that the Battle of Round Mountain site was located in the Keystone area between the confluence of the Cimarron and Arkansas rivers. The Payne County Historical Society revisited the issue in 1949, when an amateur historian, Stillwater real estate agent John Melton, revealed new evidence supporting the Yale site. Melton collected battlefield artifacts and affidavits

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[38]Angie Debo, "The Site of the Battle of Round Mountain, 1861," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 27 (Summer 1949): 187-206; Muriel H. Wright, "Colonel Cooper's Civil Report on the Battle of Round Mountain," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 39 (Winter 1961-1962): 352-97; Angie Debo, "The Location of the Battle of Round Mountain," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 41 (Spring 1963): 70-104.

[39]LeRoy Fischer, interview by author, 22 September 1996; Dale Chlouber, interview by author, 20 October 1996.

from older Yale residents.[40] In addition, Berlin Basil Chapman, Oklahoma State University history professor, and Angie Debo, both active members of the Payne County Historical Society, secured a photocopied statement made by Confederate Creek leaders in 1868 regarding the events of 1861 and 1862, from the National Archives in Washington, D.C.[41] Debo reviewed the battle in light of this new information and in the early 1960s wrote an article in support of the Yale site for the *Chronicles of Oklahoma.* Debo closed this article with the statement: "To this one historian at least, the evidence is conclusive."[42] In a *Chronicles'* article written one year prior to the Debo piece, Muriel Wright continued her support for the Keystone site, declaring that the Yale site "has never been accepted by the Oklahoma Historical Society in its statewide program of marking historic sites" since 1949.[43] Thus began the battle of the historians of Round Mountain.

To commemorate the Civil War centennial both Wright and Debo produced articles on the Battle of Round Mountain for the *Chronicles.* Not much new evidence emerged as a result, and the stalemate persisted. Wright used her editorial authority to imperiously reject Debo's article, only to be overturned by the O.H.S. Board of Directors. The location of Round Mountain remains unconfirmed to this day. In an effort to end the

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[40]Dale Chlouber, "Revisiting the Battle of Red Fork," 1, unpublished manuscript in author's possession, 1996.

[41]Debo, "Battle of Round Mountain," 190.

[42]Ibid., 206.

[43]Wright, "Colonel Cooper's Civil War Report," 356.

controversy, National Park Service historians and local historians held a conference in 1993 but unfortunately reached no consensus regarding the exact location of the battle. Thus, the two markers in Keystone and Yale remain intact, and the Battle of Round Mountain controversy continues to divide local historians.[44]

In this public controversy, Wright and Debo touched the public pulse and engaged their audience in the narrative. Both historians, in fact, presaged the "new" Indian history, carving a distinct place for themselves in Great Plains and Native American history. Both women chronicled the history of Oklahoma, particularly Native American topics, with scholarly rigor and ingenuity. Their passion for recording Oklahoma's past stemmed in part from their strong ties to the region.

When Debo's *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* appeared in 1935, Wright used the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* as a forum to attack it, deepening these divisions. In general, Angie Debo's *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* received favorable reviews. One stinging exception was Wright's thirteen-page response in the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*. Due to "errors in statement, half-truths and refutation," Wright argued, the work could not be called an "authentic history" of the Choctaws. Continuing in this vein, Wright attacked Debo's "hurried research" and "prejudiced viewpoints" making for a "superficial study of Choctaw affairs.[45] Moreover, Wright disputed Debo's claim that Wright's grandfather, Allen Wright, accepted "kickbacks" from his treaty

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[44]Chlouber, "Revisiting the Battle of Red Fork," 2.

[45]Muriel H. Wright, Review of *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, by Angie Debo, in *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 13 (March 1935): 108.

negotiations in Washington, D.C. According to historian LeRoy Fischer, kickbacks of this kind were routine matters; county commissioners received them as well.[46] With reference to the scathing book review, historian David Baird has commented that many reasons explain the animosity. "Wright believed she was most qualified to deal with Choctaw, almost family matters," Baird explained, "and she was probably a bit intimidated by Debo's academic credentials."[47] This episode was the genesis of the professional conflict between Wright and Debo, even before the Round Mountain controversy. Wright might be considered a chronicler of history because she lacked the academic credential of the doctorate that Debo possessed. But, on the other hand, Wright wielded tremendous power from her editorial position at the Oklahoma Historical Society. Of the three writers surveyed in this study, only Debo held the doctorate. Alice Marriott's work in anthropology was also one of a chronicler, for she did not obtain the doctorate either. The authority of Wright and Marriott came from their practical experience on the job – Wright as editor of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* for thirty years and Marriott's government employment with the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. They were considered experts in their respective professions.

Wright disputed many of Debo's claims with her own evidence. For example, with regard to Allen Wright's compensation for treaty negotiations in Washington, D.C., Wright stated that he received $2,968, and so did three other delegates. This amount included travel, salary and expenses. Upon ratification of the treaty, all delegates

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[46]LeRoy Fischer, interview by author, 22 September 1996.

[47]David Baird, interview by author, 17 September 1996.

received $9,583.33 from the Choctaw Nation for their services.[48] In addition, Wright recounted her grandfather's political achievements:

> As for Allen Wright, one of the younger men on the delegation, his personality, ability and educational advantages won for him recognition as a leader during his sojourn at Washington. A man of principle and honor, he considered it his duty to apply himself energetically to each task that he was called upon to perform in furthering the welfare of his people. During the period of one year (1865-6), he served as treasurer of the nation, delegate to Fort Smith, delegate to Washington to negotiate a new treaty, was specially employed to assist in securing its ratification, and just before returning home, received word he had been elected principal chief. He served two consecutive terms (four years) in this position and remained to the end of his life beloved by a host of friends and a respected citizen of his nation, whose advice and counsel, due to his ability and experience, were sought by leaders among his people and in the States. What he accomplished in the educational and governmental affairs and in the mission field was outstanding in the history of the Choctaws and of the Indian Territory.[49]

Upon reading the evidence, it appears that Wright and Debo interpreted the same event differently. Debo viewed Allen Wright's payment as a delegate as a "kickback," and Wright viewed it as services rendered. The remarks Wright made in her book review to uphold the honor of her grandfather border on filiopietism and demonstrate Wright's passionate moments when her objectivity unravels.

What can one learn from this entanglement between two historians? Although they did not usually agree, to say the least, they did respect each other's work as historians. Mutual professional respect emerges within their limited correspondence. For example, in a letter addressed "Dear Angie," dated May 3, 1950, Wright referred to a

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[48]Wright, Review of *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, 115-16.

[49]Ibid., 118-19.

historical conference that they both attended in the recent past in Oklahoma City. In a session on American Indians, Debo presented a paper on the social and economic conditions of Oklahoma's Five Tribes and Wright was in attendance. In her letter, Wright discusses Debo's session:

> That day of the meeting during the Mississippi Valley convention, I tried to get to you before you left. I hope that I did not seem critical in my remarks for I did not intend them that way. But somehow those politicians "kinda roused" me; they always have the same "poor Indian" story but never seem to get anywhere except to be on hand at campaign time.[50]

In the same letter, Wright evaluated Debo's 1951 report on the social and economic conditions of the Five Tribes, calling it a "fine report" that demonstrates "insight and knowledge on the subject."[51] Continuing in this vein, Wright wrote that "You have done a wonderful piece of work in this report and I hope that much good will come in solving the problems of our full-blood Cherokee and Choctaw who are in the main worthy of consideration and trust."[52]

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[50]Muriel H. Wright to Angie Debo, 3 May 1950, folder 22, box 25.2, Angie Debo Collection, Department of Special Collections, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater [hereafter cited as ADC]; Colin B. Goodykoontz, "The Forty-Third Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 37 (September 1950): 265-88. This panel on American Indians included Howard H. Peckham of the Indian Historical Bureau as chair, and fellow panelists Wilbur R. Jacobs of the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Dwight L. Smith of Ohio State University. Unfortunately, I do not have transcripts of the discussion that followed the papers. However, Goodykoontz notes that "Discussion was initiated by Anna Lewis of Oklahoma College for Women and continued vigorously, with several persons of Indian blood participating. There was general agreement that the United States has not yet discharged its obligations to the red man," 284.

[51]Ibid.; Angie Debo, *The Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma: Report on Social and Economic Conditions* (Philadelphia: Indian Rights Association, 1951).

[52]Ibid.

On the other hand, Wright used the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* as a platform to advance her own cause. A relative of Wright, J. B. Wright, a Choctaw who had served in the U.S. Indian Service in Oklahoma for sixteen years, reacted negatively to the report, and Wright published his letter in the "Notes and Documents" section of the *Chronicles*.[53] In Debo's response to the *Chronicles*, she wrote:

> In all my career as a writer I have never replied to a review of one of my books. A reviewer is supposed to be a scholar in his own right, and his judgment is entitled to respect. If he makes a mistake, it is his own reputation that suffers. Thus if Miss Wright had reviewed my Report unfavorably, I should have made no objection, because she is a distinguished historical writer who has earned the right to criticize. But this is different. It is simply a letter from an individual correspondent.[54]

In short, Debo respected Wright's opinion as a fellow historian — Wright had earned her right to critique the work of others in Debo's opinion. But by publishing this particular response to Debo's report in the *Chronicles*, written by an "individual correspondent," not an historian, Muriel Wright tacitly supported her relative, without raising the issue herself.

Fortunately, Debo spoke of her relationship with Wright in an oral interview. She spoke of three specific topics which came between them: assessment of Wright's grandfather, Allen Wright; resentment and misunderstanding stemming from Wright's

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[53]J. B. Wright to Mr. W. O. Roberts, "Notes and Documents," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 29 (Spring 1951): 243-47.

[54]Angie Debo to Dr. Charles Evans, 31 January 1952, folder 28, box 31, ADC.

heritage; and the Battle of Round Mountain.[55] In comments regarding Allen Wright's receiving kickbacks as a member of the Choctaw delegation following the Civil War, Debo said, "Miss Wright would never have known how shocked and distressed I was when I found out" that Allen Wright did, in fact, receive kickbacks as part of the attorney's fees.[56] Again, perhaps Wright and Debo were interpreting Allen Wright's fees differently. Wright viewed the fees as services rendered and Debo viewed them as "kickbacks."

Secondly, according to Debo, while the majority of Oklahoma's Indian population was receptive to her work, Wright was not. Conflicts continued to brew between Wright and Debo, as their mutual interest in Oklahoma's Native Americans clashed over interpretation. Debo believed that Wright's heritage and class status helped to explain this position. Debo commented on Wright's views in an interview:

> [P]erhaps I don't know of anyone except Miss Wright and her relations, but perhaps there might have been other Indians like her, who were extremely successful leaders of the white man's society, who resented any allusion to the unhappy situation of the full-bloods who were cheated out of their property and who lived in remote places, on land that nobody wanted, who suffered from actual hunger and lack of educational opportunities, and everything else. Miss Wright resented that; and I know that some of her relatives did.[57]

Unfortunately, Wright chose not to comment on her association with Debo during her

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[55]Angie Debo, interviews by Glenna Matthews and Gloria Valencia-Webber, from 1981-1985, transcripts, Oklahoma State University, 16 December 1981 [hereafter cited as ADT].

[56]Ibid., 1.

[57]Ibid.

oral history interview in 1965. To put this in perspective, Wright's interview was one hour and forty-five minutes in length, compared to Debo's seventeen oral interviews over a four-year period. Perhaps Wright chose to refrain from commenting on Angie Debo or perhaps the interviewer decided not to raise the issue, given the limited time to record Wright's oral history.

Personal disagreements between Wright and Debo became public knowledge through public discourse regarding the Battle of Round Mountain. Round Mountain enthusiasts dismiss it as an academic duel, several historians who knew Wright and Debo point to personal jealousy, and milder interpretations call it a difference of opinion.[58]

The controversy, now as then, was more than a historical turf war. Two women historians played central roles in this local duel. Muriel Wright headed the charge for the Tulsa County Historical Society under the auspices of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Angie Debo defended the Yale site on behalf of the Payne County Historical Society. Although both historians recognized the larger goal of educating the public on serious issues that held personal meaning for them, at times their personal differences and strong convictions interfered with their professional responses. Their differences, however, do not diminish their contributions to Oklahoma history. Perhaps the competitive spirit between them, combined with historical inquiry, spurred them on to seek regional and national recognition for their respective talents. Regardless of the reasons, Wright and Debo represent state and regional women historians who produced invaluable history.

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[58]Dale Chlouber, interview by author, 20 October 1996; LeRoy Fischer, interview by author, 22 September 1996; David Baird, interview by author, 17 September 1996; Mary Jane Warde, interview by author, 24 September 1996.

Some historians emphasize the need to write from an Indian perspective, revealing an Indian voice. Who, then, in this case, speaks for American Indians and who can claim authorship? Muriel Wright maintained her Indian identity and preserved her family legacy as an historian of state and local history. Her voice was often the authoritative one with regard to Oklahoma history, and particularly Indian history in the state. There cannot be only one "true" Indian voice. Rather, there are many Indian voices which lobby for legitimacy amid the contestation. Many Indian scholars maintain that a gentle massage of non-Indian written sources will not result in an Indian perspective. This is not American Indian history from an Indian perspective, Angela Cavender Wilson claims, but American Indian history from a white perspective.[59] Wright understood this. Wright's Indian voice projected a more assimilationist position than did Angie Debo's adoption of an Indian voice. Thus, we can see the complexity involved in a discussion of Indian perspective and Indian voice. Unwavering, Muriel Wright projected her views through the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*. This was her forum. And from this position of power, she influenced and gave shape to the historical interpretation coming out of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Muriel Wright wrote Oklahoma history textbooks for the secondary level and served as editor of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* for over thirty years. She died without heirs, as did Debo and Marriott, but her legacy of historical writing remains preserved

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[59]Angela Cavender Wilson, "American Indian History or Non-Indian Perceptions of American Indian History?," in *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*, ed. Devon A. Mehesuah (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 26.

within Oklahoma and regional history. Her strong connection with Oklahoma's past, her steadfastness as an editor of a state historical journal, and her enthusiasm for educating the public, are qualities she injected into the historical society, and they remain evident today.

In the larger sense, Wright joins a group of women historians and anthropologists active from the 1930s to the 1960s who studied American Indians. Many of these professionals did not hold academic positions, but influenced historical interpretation as staff members of museums and historical societies. From her editorial position in the Oklahoma Historical Society, Wright consciously shaped the content of Oklahoma history for over thirty years. In April 1993, the Oklahoma Historical Society launched the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame. Muriel Wright was among the four inductees named during the inaugural year, a true testament to her work and dedication to the Oklahoma Historical Society.

CHAPTER FIVE

MARKING AND PRESERVING WESTERN HISTORY

During the 1960s and 1970s, Native American activists sought to reclaim their native pasts and reassert their Indian identities. Muriel Wright had been documenting Indian history since the 1920s and her contributions to the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, the state's historical quarterly, emphasized her consistent theme of the positive aspects of Indian history: progress, strength, and endurance. She envisaged Oklahoma's place in American history as unique due to the historical forces of the Indian removals and the thrust of white settlement. "A lot of people don't like Indians," Wright stated. "But I think in Oklahoma, of all the states in the Union, you have the finest feeling for the Indians. The American race is developing. The nucleus, whether you like it or not, is the Indian with the frontiersman."[1] With this notion of Oklahoma's national significance in mind, Wright produced publicly funded and publicly accessible documents in an effort to promote Oklahoma history.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Wright often opened her articles in the *Chronicles of*

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[1]Muriel H. Wright, interview by Frank Doyle, 8 March 1965, tape recording, Indian Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City [hereafter cited as MWI].

Oklahoma by stating that one-third of the Indian population of the United States lived in Oklahoma. This assertion indicates the significant presence of native peoples in Oklahoma. For Wright, her heritage was interlinked with the development of the state. Her Choctaw grandfather was a participant in the Indian removals of the 1830s and later served as principal chief of the Choctaw Nation. Her father and mother met in the Choctaw Nation where her father was a doctor and her mother was a Presbyterian missionary teacher. Wright represents what historians call a "cultural broker" or "cultural mediator," meaning one who moves between two worlds or two cultures.[2] In many ways, Wright symbolizes a cadre of bicultural Oklahomans, whose identity was connected with the state's history. What makes Wright and her work distinct, however, was her willingness to share her interest in history, storytelling, and family history with the state at large. She invested her energies in the Oklahoma Historical Society, particularly in its journal, *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, and in the preservation of Oklahoma's historic sites. In these ways, Wright influenced the historiography of Oklahoma history. She told the story of the state's development from her perspective, which generally concentrated on the positive aspects of Oklahoma's Indian history.

Wright's Indian identity led to a research project in 1947. Wright took a six-month leave of absence from her position as editor at the Oklahoma Historical

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[2]See Margaret Szasz, ed., *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994); Clara Sue Kidwell, "Indian Women as Cultural Mediators," *Ethnohistory* 39 (Spring 1992): 97-107; James Clifton, ed., *Being and Becoming Indian: Biographical Studies of North American Frontiers* (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1989).

Society in order to devote full attention to a new project, a study of the Indian tribes of Oklahoma. Wright had been selected by E. E. Dale, professor of history at the University of Oklahoma and board member at the historical society, to research and write the book. This project was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation.[3]

In *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma* (1951), Wright surveyed the sixty-seven tribes living in Oklahoma. This book has become a standard reference among Native American historians studying Oklahoma. In each section, Wright discussed the tribe's location, number of members, tribal history, government and organization, contemporary life and culture, and ceremonials and public dances. Arrell Morgan Gibson maintains that Wright demonstrated "nonpareil credibility as spokesman" for Oklahoma's native peoples.[4] Wright's Indian identity and her stature as an authority on the history of Indians in Oklahoma made this work "authentic." Gibson, in fact, calls it "an Indian viewpoint."[5] In the text, Wright selects themes which join the tribes together such as their common removal experiences and how the tribes adapted to changes in Indian Territory. She identified the positive manifestations of these changes. Indian people, in general, manipulated the land into productive farms, tribal government resumed, and

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[3]Muriel H. Wright to Mrs. L. E. Custer, 5 July 1947, box 4, Muriel H. Wright Collection, 83-18, Indian Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City [hereafter cited as MWC]; "Notes and Documents," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 25 (Summer 1947): 153; "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Oklahoma Historical Society at Pryor, May 26, 1947," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 25 (Summer 1947): 169.

[4]Arrell Morgan Gibson, forward to *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma*, by Muriel H. Wright (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951; reprint, 1986), vii.

[5]Ibid.

towns, schools and churches were established in Indian Territory. The recurrent theme of the positive effects of assimilation are clearly at work in this study. As Gibson indicates, Wright portrays the Native Americans who settled in Indian Territory as "carriers of American civilization to this new land" as seen in their adherence to constitutional government, education, Christianity, law enforcement, and participation in the market economy.[6]

Her historical interpretation emphasized the role of American Indians within Oklahoma, particularly the Five Tribes: their common removal experiences, cultural perseverence, and adaptability to change. Overall, the story she told was a positive one. In her view, the acculturation experiment in Oklahoma was generally a success. Rennard Strickland describes Wright as an "assimilationist historian," upholding the popular notion that Oklahoma's assimilationist program worked.[7] For example, in her introduction to *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma*, Wright wrote:

> The unique experiment of the removal of the Indian tribes to Oklahoma by the government, begun under inauspicious circumstances in the eighteen thirties, has resulted in a degree of mutual tolerance, understanding, and affection between two races which has no counterpart elsewhere in America.[8]

This type of Oklahoma exceptionalism pervades Wright's work, and to my mind, is her major weakness as an historian. Oklahoma is a place where diverse native peoples

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[6]Ibid., viii.

[7]Rennard Strickland, *The Indians in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 81.

[8]Wright, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma*, 27.

coexist alongside descendants from the land run days and that part of Oklahoma's story is unique. But such an emphasis on the positive aspects of Oklahoma's story without a critical evaluation of the underside of such a story is selective and objectionable.

For instance, in her interpretation of the Choctaws she emphasizes successful leaders such as her grandfather and father – as examples of assimilation into the larger society. This has been noted by Strickland and others, but particularly Angie Debo. In her review of Wright's *Guide*, Debo critiques Wright's selective interpretation:

> Not all Oklahoma Indians have been able to make a successful transition from a tribal to a composite society. Very little mention [is made] of the social degradation and poverty of many fullblood settlements. . . . This omission is not only a disservice to these Indians – victims of a too violent policy of disruption – but a serious gap in an otherwise complete coverage.[9]

Wright's interpretation of the Choctaws did not attempt to portray an image of Indian "pristineness" devoid of forms of cultural incursion. Her approach was selective – she selected examples of successful Choctaws as representative of all Choctaws – neglecting those who were suffering and propertyless. This is not to imply that Debo was not also selective; however, she was willing to be more critical of her native state than Wright.

Because of Wright's Republican allegiance and her reverence for the political stances of her grandfather and father, one can infer that Wright would not have supported the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which was intended to reverse the federal government's policy of 150 years of assimilationist policies. As David Baird maintains,

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[9]Angie Debo, Review of *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma*, by Muriel H. Wright, *The American Indian* 6 (Summer 1953): 45.

most Oklahoma Indians ignored the legislation.[10] In a letter written in 1932, Wright expressed some of her positions on Indians and the expansion of the federal government:

> one can point to the results of the Bureau control of the Indians as an example of what bureaucracy will do for the whole American people if allowed to widen its scope. I believe that assistance is only going to come through Christian education, for real Christian education among the Indians involves his spiritual, social, and economic welfare.[11]

This position aligns with her Choctaw family ties to Christian education, the Republican party, and the positive aspects of assimilation. She continues that although she is a Republican, she is first of all an American Indian citizen. Once again, she returned to the ideas of her father: "For a definite period of years, a board of Indians should be chosen to act in an advisory capacity at Washington with regard to Indian affairs in general, correlating its work with that of the representative council of Indians in each tribe."[12]

Religion was an important component in Wright's identity as a native scholar and a community leader. Her mother had been a Presbyterian missionary teacher in Indian Territory and Wright was raised and remained Presbyterian. Her paternal grandfather and several of his sons including Wright's father attended Union Theological Seminary in New York.[13] For example, Frank Hall Wright, Wright's uncle, became a licensed Presbyterian minister and served as a missionary to the Indians of western Oklahoma in

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[10]W. David Baird, "Are the Five Tribes of Oklahoma 'Real' Indians?," *Western Historical Quarterly* 21 (February 1990): 13.

[11]Muriel H. Wright to Hon. Joseph W. Latimer, 6 August 1932, box 1, MWC.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Muriel H. Wright, Autobiographical Notes, box 4, MWC.

the 1890s.[14] Although she acknowledged that some Five Tribes people faced economic hardship, particularly during the 1930s, she remained firm in her convictions regarding the importance of Christianity, education, and native contributions to the development of Oklahoma.[15]

Class was also a factor in Wright's Indian identity. She identified with affluent Choctaws such as herself who grew up in prominent families comprised of politicians, religious leaders, and professionals. Debo, on the other hand, did not share this privileged background and identified more with Native Americans from a more modest socioeconomic background.

Wright published a steady stream of articles in the *Chronicles*, with regular contributions beginning in 1923 and continuing until 1971. In many years, Wright contributed at least three or four articles. This indicates a continuous record of publication, and also provides an excellent opportunity to trace her position or interpretation on different facets of Oklahoma history over a period of forty-eight years. In over one hundred contributions to the journal, Wright's interests remained centered on local history, Indian history, military history, and historic preservation.

One of her first contributions to the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* was a 1927 article on

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[14]Muriel H. Wright, "Organ Honors Memory of Indian Evangelist," *The Daily Oklahoman*, 1 May 1927, box 4, MWC.

[15]Muriel H. Wright to Hon. Joseph W. Latimer, 6 August 1932, box 1, MWC.

Old Boggy Depot, once a bustling town in Choctaw Nation during the mid-1800s.[16] This town was where her grandfather, Allen Wright, had resided and where her father was raised. During the Civil War, Confederate troops were stationed at Boggy Depot, and the Confederate flag "floated bravely" in the center of town.[17] In the early 1870s, Allen Wright opened a flour mill and cotton gin in town. People traveled as far as seventy-five miles to have their wheat ground at the mill. Former slaves and servants of Allen Wright and other Choctaw families worked there.[18] Little remained of the town in the 1920s except her grandfather's house, built in 1860, and the remains of three other houses. In preparation for the article, Wright and her father had traveled to Old Boggy Depot where they retraced the old town site and made a map which accompanied the article. According to Muriel Wright, her *Chronicles of Oklahoma* article resulted in the restoration and repair of her grandfather's house. For many years, her grandfather's house was preserved as one of the last prominent pre-Civil War homes in southeastern Oklahoma.[19]

This article is also significant because it provides a glimpse of Wright's family background. Her family was an affluent Choctaw family. They had been slaveowners at one time. They supported the Confederacy. Wright's grandfather and father had been

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[16]Muriel H. Wright, "Old Boggy Depot," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 5 (March 1927): 4-17.

[17]Ibid., 8.

[18]Muriel H. Wright, Autobiographical Notes, box 4, MWC.

[19]Ibid.

political leaders in the Choctaw Nation. Wright had also held political posts in the Choctaw Nation. She was part of a mixed-blood elite that had participated in the benefits of statehood and her historical interpretation conveyed this message.

As a regular contributor to the journal, Wright often educated the readership on popular misconceptions regarding Indian people. For example, Wright wrote an article on the "marriage" of Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory during the statehood celebrations of 1907. Writers often portrayed the bride, "Miss Indian Territory," as a Plains Indian woman who wore her hair in braids, with a feather headdress and a beaded, buckskin dress and moccasins. The groom, "Mr. Oklahoma," was popularly identified as a cowboy. These images were incorrect, as Wright indicates. During the 1907 statehood ceremony in Guthrie, the bride was a Choctaw woman who wore a floor length satin dress in lavender, with long sleeves and a high collar, which was fashionable at the time. Mr. Oklahoma wore a black coat and striped pants. According to Wright, the Five Tribes people of Indian Territory did not wear buckskin and were sensitive to this misrepresentation of their people as "uncultured." The exquisite satin gown worn by the bride represented the "civilized ways" of the Five Tribes. They were not to be mistaken for the less acculturated Plains tribes of western Oklahoma.[20]

In her articles on Indian history, Wright often described the participation and the significant contributions made by Native Americans to the development of the nation and, in particular, Oklahoma. In 1937, in an article entitled "Contributions of the Indian

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[20]Muriel H. Wright, "The Wedding of Oklahoma and Miss Indian Territory," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 35 (Autumn 1957): 255-60.

People to Oklahoma," Wright stated that "the story of Oklahoma centers around the story of the Red Man – the Indian or Amerind."[21] When Indian Territory joined with Oklahoma Territory to form the state of Oklahoma in 1907, the Five Tribes contributed "educated and experienced citizens who took an active part in the founding of our state institutions and have continued in the upbuilding of Oklahoma."[22] She listed the men and women of Indian descent who had made significant political and cultural contributions to the state. Wright revealed her personal beliefs concerning the future of Oklahoma's Indian population. Education should be a priority, along with "the continued progress of Christian civilization," and "the preservation of the best in native traditions and customs."[23] Wright did not waver on this position throughout her career. Education, Christianity and the preservation of native culture were three paths that Wright maintained and she encouraged other Indians to follow suit.

Prior to working at the historical society, Wright was a history and English teacher for several years in rural schools in eastern Oklahoma. As a result, she understood the need for Oklahoma history textbooks which would present a balanced account of the contributions made by the state's Indian population as well as white participants and other ethnic groups. *The Story of Oklahoma*, first published in 1924,

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[21]Muriel H. Wright, "Contributions of the Indian People to Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 14 (June 1936): 156.

[22]Ibid., 159.

[23]Ibid., 161.

served that need. The textbook was adopted by the State Text-Book Commission of Oklahoma for the public schools and by 1939 it had sold over 20,000 copies and had gone through several editions. Wright dedicated *The Story of Oklahoma* to her grandfather, Allen Wright, who had named the state in the late nineteenth century. Wright's editor was pleased with her choice, and remarked that he was "proud of the fact that the name was suggested by a fullblood Choctaw Christian and Statesman." The editor also indicated that the book should prompt future research of "the vanishing race."[24] Although Wright and other bicultural Oklahomans demonstrated through living example that some aspects of their native heritage could be preserved while at the same time embracing some aspects of the larger society, popular thought in the 1920s still used terms such as "the vanishing race" to describe Native Americans.

Coincidentally, when Wright collaborated with Joseph B. Thoburn on a four-volume set on Oklahoma history published in the same year, Thoburn emphasized Wright's Choctaw heritage in order to promote the set and signify the authenticity of her historical approach and the set's uniqueness. This work, Thoburn wrote to booksellers in California, "includes the most complete and accurate account of the old Indian Territory." He claimed that Wright was "possibly the first of her race in the United States to become recognized as a historical writer."[25]

The State Text-Book Commission of Oklahoma also adopted two more of Wright's books, *Our Oklahoma* (1939) and *The Oklahoma History* (1955) and both

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[24][unidentifiable name] to Muriel H. Wright, 26 August 1924, box 1, MWC.

[25]Joseph B. Thoburn to Armacost & Royston, 13 February 1931, box 1, MWC.

volumes went through several editions.[26] In a review of *Our Oklahoma*, Thoburn commented on Wright's straightforward presentation of material:

> Although both by heredity and environment, she might easily have manifested a measure of prejudiced feeling in some instances of text expression, her statements concerning controversial issues are noticeably fair-minded and free from any hint of personal bias.[27]

He also remarked on the positive qualities that Wright's credentials and heritage bring to this textbook:

> Lastly it is a fact worthy of mention that this book is the first history of Oklahoma that has been entirely planned and written by a native of the state, one who has been a successful teacher in its public schools and one, who, in her own personality, combines much that is best and most desirable in both the Caucasian and native American elements of its citizenship.[28]

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Wright could be less than kind in a book review. In her thirteen-page review of Debo's *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, Wright refuted many of Debo's claims. She even disputed the title. "The Choctaw republic rose but it did not fall," she wrote.[29] In contrast, albeit thirty-five years later, in another review Wright put a much milder spin on *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* (1970) by Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr. DeRosier concluded that after the Choctaws resettled in Indian Territory

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[26]Muriel H. Wright, *Our Oklahoma* (Guthrie, OK: Co-operative Publishing Company, 1939); Muriel H. Wright, *The Oklahoma History* (Guthrie, OK: Co-operative Publishing Company, 1955).

[27]Joseph B. Thoburn, Review of *Our Oklahoma* by Muriel H. Wright, *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 17 (September 1939): 451.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Muriel H. Wright, Review of *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* by Angie Debo, *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 13 (March 1935): 108.

they never rose again as a nation. "The Choctaws, lived as a tribe well over one hundred years after the great Indian Removal," Wright responded, "and have had an important role in the history of Oklahoma, the very name itself of Choctaw origin – 'Red People.'"[30] Perhaps the difference between these two reviews revolved around the fact that Wright's grandfather was a subject of concern in the Debo book but this was not the case in the DeRosier book. Attacks on her family history incited a more passionate response from Wright than statements on the Choctaw Nation in general.

Many of Wright's articles for the *Chronicles* and other publications promoted her active interest in identifying and preserving a sense of Oklahoma's Indian heritage through her historic preservation program. This is illustrated, for example, in Wright's use of photographs to identify historic sites. She made special trips and expeditions on behalf of the historical society beginning in 1922, in which she located historic sites, took photographs, and compiled brief histories. During the summer of 1930, Wright and two other members of the Oklahoma Historical Society took a six-week tour of southeastern Oklahoma in order to identify, photograph, map, and temporarily mark the region's historic sites.[31] The resulting album, prepared in 1931 and now in the Oklahoma Historical Society, is the result of these field trips, and contains brief sketches of 75 historic sites and 125 photographs identifying these locations.

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[30]Muriel H. Wright, Review of *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* by Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr., *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 49 (Spring 1971): 127.

[31]LeRoy H. Fischer, "Muriel H. Wright, Historian of Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 52 (Spring 1974): 17.

The following four examples from the album illustrate Wright's meticulous recording, collection, and interpretation of Oklahoma history. The first photograph shows Peter Conser, on the left, a well-known Choctaw citizen, and his grandson. Born in the Choctaw Nation in the 1850s, Conser was a longtime law-enforcement official among the Choctaws. He then served as a legislator in the Choctaw Nation. Wright recorded in her album that "Conser is one of the oldest living Choctaws, age about 86."[32] The second photograph captures Conser's home, located in LeFlore County, Oklahoma. This image was taken to illustrate life and architecture in Choctaw Nation before statehood. Due in large part to Wright's efforts, the Conser home has been restored and is an historic site owned and operated by the Oklahoma Historical Society. The Choctaw Agency, the third image, would become an example of the historical society's roadside marker program. "The Agency was in operation on this site in 1831," Wright has written, "which year saw the beginning of the main immigration of the Choctaws to Indian Territory." The final image depicts Creek graves, again revealing Wright's interest in educating the public on Five Tribes traditions. Again, she has provided a narrative next to her photograph: "The custom of covering a grave with a small house as shelter was common among all the Five Civilized Tribes. Many examples can be found throughout the eastern part of Oklahoma."[33] She took these photographs in 1930 as part of her larger effort to identify and mark historic sites, with a heavy emphasis on the preservation of

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[32]Muriel H. Wright, photo album, "Some Historic Sites in Southern and Southeastern Oklahoma" – photographs taken on field trips made during 1930, 29 January 1930, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[33]Ibid.

Five Tribes history. Her photography of Native American sites was essential in preserving a native-based identity for Oklahoma.

Wright's travels throughout Oklahoma were not limited to Native American sites. As a member of the historic sites committee, beginning in 1929 Wright conducted research on the Butterfield Overland Mail Route, which transported passengers and mail between Tipton, Missouri, and San Francisco, California, during the late 1850s and early 1860s. She identified all twelve stations in southeastern Oklahoma. She took several field trips, wrote the inscriptions, and photographed old buildings and ruins in preparation for the onsite marker program.[34] She published an article on the mail route along with a map in the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* in 1933.[35] So while her primary interest in historic preservation revolved around the Five Tribes, particularly the Choctaws, her secondary interest in preserving and interpreting the larger vision of Oklahoma history, was evident in her long career with the Oklahoma Historical Society.[36]

Historic preservation was an important facet of Wright's role as a public historian in Oklahoma. She was raised with a conscious appreciation of her surroundings and her Indian heritage, taking trips as a child with her father to her grandparents' home in Boggy

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[34]Muriel H. Wright, Biographical Notes, March 1966, box 4, MWC; Muriel H. Wright, et al., *Mark of Heritage* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1976), 185-86, 189-90, 194.

[35]Muriel H. Wright, "Historic Spots on the Old Stage Line from Fort Smith to Red River," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 11 (June 1933): 798-822.

[36]LeRoy H. Fischer, "The Historic Preservation Movement in Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 57 (Spring 1979): 9-10. Fischer's article provides an important overview of the historic preservation movement in Oklahoma.

Depot and touring the state with her uncle, James B. Wright, and his family.[37] She was also encouraged by Joseph B. Thoburn, during their collaborative work on *Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People* (1929) to take an active role in identifying and interpreting Oklahoma's historic sites. The initial interest in launching a historic preservation movement in Oklahoma began in the 1920s, under the auspices of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Muriel Wright's research interest paralleled these early efforts to identify and study historic sites in Oklahoma. Her article on Old Boggy Depot was Wright's first historic site article. Other early articles also promoted her interest and familiarity with Choctaw history in Oklahoma, including the Choctaw Council House and the Choctaw Chief's House. These articles centered on her family relations and regional identification which formed the backbone of her sense of Oklahoma history.

These early efforts at historic preservation in Oklahoma grew into the larger program of the 1950s with the support of legislative funding. Wright and her colleagues launched this program in an effort to promote a new sense of historical awareness across the state. George H. Shirk chaired the Oklahoma Historic Sites Committee and Wright conducted most of the research for the inscriptions on the historical markers. She also helped identify or mark more than 600 sites in Oklahoma. She drafted a list of 512 historic sites for additions and modifications by the committee. By 1958 the completed list contained 557 historic sites arranged by counties. The list was published in the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* in the autumn 1958 issue, and then republished as a pamphlet. As LeRoy Fischer indicates, "the completion of the basic sites survey produced among

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[37]MWI.

many historically minded people an appreciation for the first time of the magnitude and significance of Oklahoma's historic sites."[38] From this initial survey sprang numerous other works on historic preservation published by the Oklahoma Historical Society. In 1958, Wright and Shirk compiled and edited *Mark of Heritage: Oklahoma Historical Markers*. This publication focused on 131 historic sites, provided the location and inscription of each marker, and provided accompanying photographs taken by Thoburn and Wright on many of the sites. Wright engaged in another collaborative historic sites effort in 1966 with LeRoy Fischer, "Civil War Sites in Oklahoma," first published in the *Chronicles* and later as a pamphlet. Again, the publication identified the site location along with a description of its historical significance. "Without her long interest and dedication to the historic site identification, preservation, restoration and marker program in Oklahoma," Fischer writes of Muriel Wright, "the state could not today be a leader in the nation in its historic site program."[39] Rounding out this effort to educate the state's citizens on local history, she conducted public tours of these historic sites, under the auspices of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

In a letter nominating Wright for the Indian Achievement Honor Medal, William M. Dunn, of Choctaw descent, wrote about the importance of Wright's research and writing in Indian history and Oklahoma history. "When Miss Wright began her work in this field," Dunn wrote, "there was a great lack of knowledge of Indian history both

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[38]Fischer, "Historic Preservation," 13-14.

[39]Fischer, "Muriel H. Wright," 17.

among the Indians themselves and the general readers of this subject. She had to educate her readers in the viewpoint of the Indian and in the facts as she found them." He viewed her work as significant, for it gave "the Indian proper balance in history and contemporary life." Her historical research, he wrote, preserved "the Indians' part in Oklahoma history."[40] This testimonial recognized the Indian voice in Wright's histories as a result of her identity as a Choctaw, something that Debo and Marriott could never claim.

Wright wrote for the general public – an Indian audience and a white audience – as well as a scholarly audience in an effort to promote the study of Oklahoma history. The *Chronicles of Oklahoma* was perhaps her most important legacy. The journal represented a forum in which to meld Indian and white stories of Oklahoma's history – a journal, and a history, in fact, which emulated Wright's heritage. From the 1920s to the 1970s, Wright consistently advocated Christianity, education, and the preservation of native traditions in her writings as her message to the Indians who lived within the state. She was a cultural preservationist and a cultural broker who mediated the histories of Oklahoma. She marked historic sites and constructed their significance in order to generate a greater awareness of Oklahoma history among the general public. We must recognize that this presentation of Oklahoma history was selective and tailored to meet the needs of her message. This should not devalue, however, her contributions as an

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[40]Wm. M. Dunn to The Committee of Awards, Century of Progress, 20 July 1933, box 2, MWC.

Oklahoma historian or an Indian historian.

CHAPTER SIX

ANGIE DEBO: THE POLITICS OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY

Angie Debo's prolific publication record throughout her career is remarkable. During her professional writing career, she wrote thirteen books. In addition, she published over one hundred articles and books reviews on Indian history and Oklahoma history. "In a real sense, [Debo] invented the 'new' Indian history," Richard White posits, "long before there was a name for it."[1] While this is rather extraordinary praise to laud one historian as a forerunner of the "new Indian history," it is just as dismaying to examine the flip side of her career as an historian. Although Debo published both her master's thesis and her doctoral dissertation, she never held a tenure-track position as a history professor. This failure to achieve university status was not through a lack of will or ambition. In the midst of the depression years, Debo turned her attention toward a career as a professional writer. She supported herself through part-time employment, grant support, and by living within limited means with her family in rural Oklahoma. In a back room of the family home, Debo would pound out the stories of Oklahoma's native

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[1]Richard White, Review of "Indians, Outlaws, and Angie Debo," produced by Barbara Abrash and Martha Sandlin, *Journal of American History* 76 (December 1989): 1010. Selections from this chapter have appeared in article form. See Patricia Loughlin, "The Battle of the Historians of Round Mountain: An Examination of Muriel Wright and Angie Debo," *Heritage of the Great Plains* 31 (Spring/Summer 1998): 5-18.

peoples and pioneers on her typewriter. The controversy that swirled around her was at times quite contentious, but her reliance on her personal mantra, "to discover the truth and publish it," provided Debo with the ability to tell the stories of Oklahoma's people.[2]

Shirley Leckie argues that Debo heard native voices more clearly because women were professionally marginalized. Debo would not speak out on behalf of gender discrimination, but she would write quite passionately about injustices to American Indians. Debo had sustained injustices herself but she would not complain about them. "Stoic cheerfulness" is Leckie's interpretation of Debo's activism on behalf of Indians. "Imbued with her parents' stoic attitude towards hardship and their dedication to maintaining the 'Oklahoma spirit,'" Leckie explains, "Debo could express her outrage over the treatment of others in a way that would have been unacceptable for herself."[3]

Born to tenant farmers in Beattie, Kansas, on January 30, 1890, Angie Debo experienced the quest for land settlement and opportunity firsthand in her family's relocation to Marshall, Oklahoma. She arrived in Oklahoma Territory by covered wagon in 1899 with her parents, Edward and Lina Debo, and younger brother, Edwin. In order to finance this land acquisition, the Debo family sold their cattle and purchased their own

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[2]"Angie Debo: An Autobiographical Sketch, Eulogy, and Bibliography," (Stillwater, OK: The College of Arts and Sciences and Department of History, Oklahoma State University, 1988), 1-2.

[3]Shirley A. Leckie, "Angie Debo, Pioneering Historian," paper delivered at the Western History Association Conference, Lincoln, Nebraska, October 1996, 7.

farm in "Old" Oklahoma for $1400.[4] "We arrived on November 8, 1899," Debo wrote, "and I have a distinct memory of the warm, sunny day, the lively little new town, and the greening wheat fields we passed as we lumbered slowly down the road to our new home."[5] She came of age in Marshall, and her identity was inextricably linked to this developing pioneer community. Notions of the "pioneer spirit," homesteading, and the desire for economic opportunity and land pervaded Debo's upbringing in Oklahoma Territory and would shape her later historical writings.

Growing up in a developing pioneer community had its benefits as well as its drawbacks. The sluggishness of the educational system in Marshall – the community did not have a high school, forcing Debo to wait for one to open – would hinder Debo's intellectual development and she has called this waiting period her "wasted years." Her educational experience began in rural one-room schools in Kansas and Oklahoma. At the age of twelve, Debo received her common school diploma and waited for the next four years to become a teacher. She has looked back with regret on this time as something that was beyond her control: "But for those four years in there I really could have had the equivalent of four more years to live if I hadn't wasted those four years in futile unhappiness, and almost despair, in my inability to get anywhere at all educationally."[6] At the age of sixteen, Debo received her teaching certificate and taught in the nearby rural

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[4]Angie Debo, interviews by Glenna Matthews and Gloria Valencia-Webber, from 1981-1985, transcripts, Angie Debo Collection, Oklahoma State University Library, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 16 December 1981, 7 [hereafter cited as ADT].

[5]"Angie Debo: An Autobiographical Sketch," 1.

[6]ADT, 15 August 1983, 11, 1.

schools of Logan and Garfield counties. She continued teaching in rural schools and waited in anticipation for the new high school to open. She graduated from Marshall High School with the first graduating class in 1913 at the "advanced age" of twenty-three.[7]

After two more years of teaching, Debo attended the University of Oklahoma and majored in history. She became a history major at the University of Oklahoma because of Edward Everett Dale's enthusiasm as an instructor and his interest in teaching historical writing to his students. Dale received his bachelor's degree in history from the University of Oklahoma in 1911 and continued his interest in history as a graduate student at Harvard, working with Frederick Jackson Turner. After completing his master's degree at Harvard in 1914, Dale was appointed instructor of history at the University of Oklahoma. Five years later he returned to Harvard for his doctoral training under Turner, which he completed in 1922. He then resumed his position at the University of Oklahoma, became chairman in 1924, and remained in the department until his retirement in 1952. Dale was the first professor in the history department at the University of Oklahoma to add a course on Indian history to the course offerings. He also encouraged his graduate students to pursue Indian topics for their seminar papers and dissertations.[8]

There were many parallels between the lives of Dale and Debo which produced a

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[7]Ibid.

[8]ADT, 20 November 1981, 1-4; Arrell M. Gibson, "Edward Everett Dale: The Historian," in *Frontier Historian: The Life and Work of Edward Everett Dale*, ed. Arrell M. Gibson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 18-19.

natural kinship between them. For example, both were from rural families – Dale was raised on a north Texas farm, worked as a cowboy for a period of time, and later owned a ranch in southwestern Oklahoma with his brother – and both experienced the limited educational opportunities of rural life. As Debo has commented:

> I suppose it was true that I had somewhat the same kind of background that Dr. Dale had had – of course, his was of the cow country, and mine was of the homesteaders, but both of us had been unable to pursue our education. Both of us had read every book we could get hold of, which were not very numerous. And both of us had gone to a country school, and learned whatever we could learn.[9]

In Dale's case, few of the local school districts could afford to hold class for more than three to five months per school year, and children were expected to work alongside their parents on the family farm. In addition, they both taught in the rural schools. Lastly, Dale and Debo attended college at a more mature age, with Dale entering college at the age of twenty-six. In assessing Dale's contribution to western history, Arrell M. Gibson writes that "[Dale's] social milieu more than his academic training shaped his values, commitment, writing bent, and productivity as a professional historian."[10]

Debo attributed her research methodology to the training she received from Dale during an undergraduate history course. It was in his class that Debo discovered historical writing and she would return to Dale again when pursuing the doctorate. In class, Dale would check his students' notes every week, inspecting citations and pointing out sloppy note taking techniques. Debo would return to the methods she learned from

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[9]ADT, 20 November 1981, 4.

[10]Gibson, "Edward Everett Dale," in *Frontier Historian*, 4.

Dale throughout her career.[11]

In his book, *On Turner's Trail: 100 Years of Writing Western History*, Wilbur Jacobs argues that "the bole and root of western history is the sturdy Turnerian tree."[12] This is hardly an overstatement about the historian who could be called the first great promoter of western history. As Turner stated in his 1893 essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History:" "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of the American settlement westward, explain American development."[13] Essentially, Turner constructed a sweeping theme of American development, and justified American greatness through the movement westward. In a masterpiece of synthesis, Turner brought significance to western history. The frontier thesis was at once a challenge and a call. It challenged the prevailing notion that American expansion was an extension of the European tradition. It called for historians to search for the larger meaning of the American West in national history. In short, Turner's thesis became the new paradigm.

Dale absorbed Turner's frontier thesis into his own work and considered Oklahoma within the Turnerian framework of westward expansion. As Richard Lowitt

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[11]ADT, 20 November 1981, 2-3.

[12]Wilbur R. Jacobs, *On Turner's Trail: 100 Years of Writing Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 236.

[13]Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), 1.

puts it, "Turner wrote about it; Dale lived it."[14] In turn, Debo would be considered an intellectual grandchild of Turner through her studies with Dale. In her assessment of Dale as a teacher, Debo referred to the influence of Turner:

> To Turner's thesis that American history furnishes a concrete illustration of social evolution through various stages from savagery to a complex industrial civilization, [Dale] added from his own experience this significant particular: that only in Oklahoma was the process rapid enough to take place within the memory of one still living generation.[15]

Throughout her writings, Debo has returned to this theme of Oklahoma as a microcosm of the frontier experience, which has demonstrated Dale's lasting influence on Debo's work.

Dale was an optimistic instructor who believed that the story of American history was one of progress. In one of his early seminar papers as an undergraduate at O.U., Dale wrote that the territorial expansion of the United States was a "very wonderful story." And yet, Debo's critique of this position represents a distinct distancing from her advisor: "It is refreshing if one is sympathetic toward his viewpoint of joyful interest in American achievement, but painful in the extreme to the writer who has subscribed to the orthodox creed of historical methodology."[16] According to Debo, only later in Dale's career would he conclude that the story of American expansion was a far more complex, "mixed"

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[14]Richard Lowitt, "Regionalism at the University of Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 73 (Summer 1995), 156.

[15]Angie Debo, "Edward Everett Dale: The Teacher," in *Frontier Historian*, 28.

[16]Angie Debo, "Edward Everett Dale, Historian of Progress," 1930-1931, 14, box 7, folder 3, Angie Debo Collection, Oklahoma State University Library, Stillwater, Oklahoma [hereafter cited as ADC].

story.[17]

As Shirley Leckie and Richard White have both indicated, Debo moved beyond both Turner and Dale, becoming a precursor to the "new Indian history." Debo would study American Indians in light of ethnological studies and oral histories to present what she believed was a more accurate narrative. Debo saw Indians on the other side of Turner's frontier, as Leckie cleverly phrases it.[18] Whereas Dale remained within the Turnerian tradition during his entire career, Debo wrestled with this framework and wrote on the periphery of what was considered traditional historical writing of Indian-white relations. Although she never lived among Indians as a participant observer like Alice Marriott, she did incorporate anthropological research in her writings and utilized oral history. Although Debo added these new methods to her research, Turner's influence is apparent in her work. For example, she viewed Oklahoma's rural communities, particularly "Prairie City," as America in microcosm, thus maintaining the tradition of Turner and Dale.[19]

Debo graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a bachelor's degree in history in 1918. During the next five years, Debo was employed as village principal at North Enid for one year followed by a four-year teaching position at Enid High School, with the hope of saving enough money to attend graduate school. Encouraged by Dale's

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[17]Angie Debo, "Edward Everett Dale: The Teacher," in *Frontier Historian*, 27.

[18]Shirley A. Leckie, "Angie Debo, Pioneering Historian," public lecture at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 29 March 1999, 3.

[19]Angie Debo, *Prairie City: The Story of an American Community* (New York: Knopf, 1944; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), xii.

enthusiasm for historical research and writing, Debo sought entrance into two of the top history programs in the country during the 1920s, at the University of Chicago and Columbia University. She concentrated on these schools because she wanted to experience urban living in contrast to her rural upbringing.[20] She selected the University of Chicago because it was "at the very height of its influence at that time" boasting a faculty which included Avery Craven, William E. Dodd, and J. Fred Rippy.[21] At the University of Chicago, Debo studied international relations. Her master's thesis, *The Historical Background of the American Policy of Isolation*, was published in 1924 in the Smith College Studies in History, with her advisor, Rippy, as co-author.[22]

Graduate programs in history at the time prepared women for historical writing and a future in women's colleges.[23] Although Debo felt no discrimination while attending Chicago, the job search clearly sent the message that university teaching positions were for men. History departments actively solicited male students from Chicago, but they politely did not request women. In fact, twenty-nine of the thirty colleges and universities requesting Chicago history graduates would not consider women applicants.[24] This surprised Debo. With the publication of her thesis, Debo

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[20]ADT, 20 November 1981, 4.

[21]Ibid., 5.

[22]Ibid., 4-8.

[23]Jacqueline Goggin, "Challenging Sexual Discrimination in the Historical Profession: Women Historians and the American Historical Association, 1890-1940," *American Historical Review* 97 (June 1992): 769-802.

[24]ADT, 20 November 1981, 9.

expected that she would be in a competitive position for the job market. When she realized she would not secure the university position she desired, she consulted a woman on the history faculty at the University of Chicago. Debo recalled:

> "Women are sometimes on history faculties. How do they get there?" She said, "When in time of war or some other situation where it's impossible to get a man they had to take a woman – temporarily." And then she acquitted herself so brilliantly that they had to keep her. And so that's the only way that a woman ever does get a position.[25]

After Chicago, Debo received two offers from training schools teaching future history teachers. She selected West Texas State Teachers College because it was in the Texas panhandle, and it was the familiarity of this "pioneer situation," according to Debo, that attracted her to the area.[26] "I had grown up in a pioneer Oklahoma," she recalled, "and here was another pioneer place."[27] Whereas her upbringing in Marshall was one of homesteading, she believed the "pioneer spirit" of Canyon's cattle country was similar. During the next ten years in Canyon, Debo "absorbed this pioneer spirit" and shifted her historical focus from international relations to local history.[28] Concurrently, she worked on her doctorate in history at the University of Oklahoma, again working with Dale. She received her degree in 1933.

During the early twentieth century, the percentage of women receiving doctoral

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[25]ADT, 12 December 1981, 2.

[26]Ibid., 3.

[27]ADT, 16 February 1984, 2.

[28]ADT, 16 December 1981, 4.

degrees in history remained minimal; however, it grew considerably following World War I. From 1920 to 1930, 131 women received their Ph.D. in history. From 1931 to 1935, 122 additional women received their doctorates in history.[29] Debo was among these 122 women. Between 1893 and 1935, 16 percent of doctoral degrees in history were awarded to women – a slender fraction of the total number of degrees awarded.[30] The dramatic disparities along gender lines increases when one considers that the majority of these women historians did not obtain tenure-track positions at the coeducational universities in which they were trained. Most of these women, like Debo, were relegated to teacher training colleges, women's colleges, museums, and government employment.

With *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* receiving positive reviews from other journals across the country, Debo made a swift career move. Sources conflict regarding Debo's decision to leave West Texas at this time. Records indicate departmental budget cuts forced Debo's resignation, for she had repeatedly been passed over for promotion by recent additions to the department. Debo maintained that she chose to resign her position and devote her full energies to writing. After a one-year position as curator of the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum in Canyon, Texas, Debo returned to her home in Marshall.[31] "I was so encouraged" by the success of *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, she recalled in 1981, "that I decided to leave my work

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[29]Goggin, "Challenging Sexual Discrimination," 771.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Leckie, Angie Debo, Pioneering Historian," 3.

at West Texas State Teachers College and write another book."[32] That may have been the case, but correspondence between Debo and Dale indicates that she continued to pursue teaching positions without much success. In 1934, Debo wrote to Dale asking for his recommendation for a position in the history department at Western Reserve University. "They want a woman," she stated in her letter to Dale.[33] The next day Debo wrote another letter to Dale regarding her strong desire for this teaching position. The letter clearly indicates Debo's frustration with the job market in the 1930s:

> I hope they will not think I have been too eager, but they ought to realize how desperate one feels when he is out of employment. This is the first vacancy I have discovered during the two years I have spent all my spare time hunting for work. I did learn of the death of two history teachers, and though I felt like a ghoul I wrote the minute I heard the news before they had time to be decently buried. But one place was already filled when my letter arrived and they distributed the work of the other among the other members of the department and did not employ a new teacher.[34]

While it remains unclear what motivated Debo's departure from West Texas State Teachers College – whether the promotions of her colleagues infuriated her, or the job market did not hold any promise – during the depths of the depression Debo returned home to Marshall and dedicated her full energies to producing another manuscript. She had also referred to a potential teaching position at Tahlequah that she turned down "with considerable fear and trembling" at this time in order to pursue writing. She would support herself through grants from the Social Science Research Foundation and part-

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[32]ADT, 12 December 1981, 4.

[33]Angie Debo to E. E. Dale, 4 January 1934, box 12, folder 31, ADC.

[34]Angie Debo to E. E. Dale, 5 January 1934, box 12, folder 31, ADC.

time teaching positions during the summer months at Steven F. Austin State Teachers College and Oklahoma A&M.[35]

Debo's pursuit of a tenure-track teaching position continued throughout the 1930s and 1940s. In fact, she contacted both of her advisors, Rippy at the University of Chicago and Dale at the University of Oklahoma, and asked them to assist her in job placement. In a letter to Dale in 1938, Debo wrote of her recent visit with Rippy at Chicago regarding the "very vital matter of getting a job before I starve."[36] Three years later, Debo asked Dale to consider her when he would receive teaching position announcements. The following rambling plea to Dale indicates Debo's compelling desire for a teaching position:

> When you go to the Mississippi Valley meeting, won't you please keep a look-out for a teaching position for me? You enjoy your classroom work and your association with students so much that you can understand how seriously and definitely I chose teaching as a profession and how satisfying it was to me. I was so completely happy at Canyon – expecting to stay there the rest of my life – that I specialized unwisely in Southwestern History, and came for my graduate work to Oklahoma where I could obtain the best courses in that field. Then when I lost my position, the very specialization that would have made me more useful if I had remained there, proved to be my greatest handicap.[37]

And she continues:

> The successful books I have written have typed and labeled me still further. I have really done better work in other history fields than many of the people who have specialized in them, but because my books about Indians have been so outstanding, people assume that I am ignorant of all other subjects. I am writing

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[35]ADT, 20 November 1981, 13-14; ADT, 16 February 1984, 3; ADT, 8 June 1984, 11.

[36]Angie Debo to E. E. Dale, 5 May 1938, box 12, folder 31, ADC.

[37]Angie Debo to E. E. Dale, 24 March 1941, box 12, folder 31, ADC.

> so fully because I hope you can help me. I know that people who can hold the attention of a college class and inspire students to enter into research and writing are not too plentiful even in the overcrowded history field, and it seems to me there should be a place where my talents could be used. I am not desperate or discouraged, for I can always find things to do, but I am not satisfied to waste the best of my gifts.[38]

Debo's situation was typical among women academics during the depression. For the first time, women's colleges began hiring men over women with the prevailing notion that men had families to support. In order to keep their faculty positions, women often remained single. Furthermore, Jacqueline Goggin contends that prior to 1940, white male historians offered little support to women colleagues. "In fact," Goggin maintains, "the records of the American Historical Association and history departments, and the personal papers of male and female historians reveal that discrimination against women deterred them from realizing fully their scholarly and professional potential as historians."[39] Debo's historical reputation relies almost exclusively on her scholarly publication record. One can only imagine the possibilities if she had trained graduate students and they in turn continued her work on a much larger scale.

Beginning in 1934, as Debo has indicated, she devoted herself to writing. With many academics splitting their time between a challenging teaching schedule and publications, Debo "severed [her] institutional connection" and focused exclusively on her research and writing. "I didn't do anything except write," she reflected in 1983,

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[38]Ibid.

[39]Goggin, "Challenging Sexual Discrimination," 770, 776.

"except once in a while if I needed money and had to work for a time to earn a little."[40] Debo continued publishing other important studies on Native Americans, including the controversial, and to Debo, "most important" work, *And Still the Waters Run*.

Debo supported her research and writing by living at home in Marshall with her parents, receiving grant support, and part-time employment. During the latter part of the 1930s and early 1940s, Debo worked on two WPA projects. The first project, Grant Foreman's "Indian and Pioneer Papers," was a compilation of oral history interviews from Oklahoma's older Indian population and early homesteaders. Debo had met Grant and Carolyn Foreman, both contributors to the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* and avid Oklahoma history enthusiasts, while working on the research for her Choctaw history. "I was badly in need of work back in those depression days," Debo has recalled. She contacted Grant Foreman and asked if he had any employment opportunities for her on his WPA project. He responded affirmatively and she began working as an editor of the of the Indian-Pioneer Papers beginning in January 1937.[41]

During the final years of the 1930s, Debo's financial situation became increasingly more desperate and she had to borrow from her life insurance policy to support herself. While employed on the Foreman project, she received another grant from the Social Science Research Council to write a book on the Creeks. She quit her job after receiving this research support. Her situation was compounded further as she waited for publication of *And Still the Waters Run*. She had completed the manuscript in 1936,

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[40]ADT, 17 August 1983, 1.

[41]ADT, 4 May 1983, 8-9.

but it would not be published until 1940 by Princeton University Press. Desperate for a job, Debo became director of the Oklahoma guide under the Federal Writers' Project in 1940.[42] The guidebook series was a nationwide effort by the WPA designed to stimulate travel. In Oklahoma, the project enabled professional writers like Debo to participate in a New Deal program along with other less skilled researchers. Although Debo was probably grateful for the employment opportunity, she was quite critical of the Federal Writers' Project:

> They were creative projects of the depression. But I do not think that they were as effective in helping people as some of the other white collar projects because it assumed there were unemployed writers over the country. Actually, there aren't any unemployed writers. Everybody that can write writes. It might be the depression period when they can't get anything published, but anyhow he writes, and when he wants a job he has to take a job at something else besides writing.[43]

Her work with the guidebook series resulted in the publication of *Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State* which she co-edited with John M. Oskison in 1941.[44]

During the 1940s Debo published a steady succession of books, articles, and book reviews on Indian history and Oklahoma history. Her books included *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital* (1943), *Prairie City: The Story of an American Community* (1944), *Oklahoma, Foot-loose and Fancy-free* (1949). Debo's reputation as a popular historian of Oklahoma history grew during this period because many of her works appealed to the

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[42]ADT, 4 May 1983, 6.

[43]Ibid., 7.

[44]Angie Debo and John M. Oskison, *Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State*, comp. by Writers' Program, Work Projects Administration, State of Oklahoma (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941).

general public rather than an exclusively scholarly one. Moreover, her book reviews for the *New York Times Book Review* supplemented her income and increased her visibility as an historian on a national scale.

In 1947 Debo gained an institutional affiliation but it was not as a faculty member in a teaching capacity. Rather, she worked as curator of maps at Oklahoma A&M, later Oklahoma State University. "When I worked during those last years at Oklahoma State University, both the president, and the head of the library, Mr. Low, gave me plenty of time to write," Debo has explained. "They wanted me to write. They wanted somebody on the faculty who did write and publish. So I spent more time writing."[45] Debo wrote to Dale telling him about the position she had accepted at the Oklahoma State University library and the university's support of her research. Dale replied that he agreed with her conclusion that "library work will interfere less with your writing than work in the department of history." Debo also filled a temporary one-year position in the Oklahoma State University history department for a professor on leave. And although Dale apparently did not actively promote Debo's career as a professor, from what one can conclude from the evidence, he closed his letter to Debo by stating, "I have always pointed to you as my outstanding student in the field of historical literature."[46]

Although a strong mentor-student relationship existed between Dale and Debo, major differences in their approach to history may help explain Dale's reluctance to promote Debo's career in the profession. As Richard Lowitt has indicated, Dale did not

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[45]ADT, 17 August 1983, 1.

[46]E. E. Dale to Angie Debo, 12 April 1947, box 12, folder 31, ADC.

want to offend prominent Oklahomans in his publications. Although he lectured on the graft and corruption that had taken place in Oklahoma history, stripping Indians of their lands as one example, Dale would not publish these statements. Dale's selective interpretation of history differed from Debo's need to "discover the truth and publish it." Debo's *And Still the Waters Run*, in particular, demonstrates a book which "names names," something that Dale would never publish himself. For instance, in 1923 when the Agricultural History Society actively solicited his manuscript on the range cattle industry in Oklahoma, Dale was reluctant. Many of the cattlemen in his narrative were still living at the time and their "curious intrigues and diplomatic struggles for grazing rights in the Indian Territory" included graft and corruption. Dale agreed to publish the manuscript only after consulting several of the cattlemen and revising the manuscript to their satisfaction.[47] This type of historical writing, specifically Dale's reluctance to offend prominent Oklahomans, deeply conflicted with Debo's approach to research and writing.

Oklahoma State University proved to be supportive of Debo's research. While on staff at the library, the Indian Rights Association asked Debo to survey the fullblood settlement of the Five Tribes for a pamphlet issued by the association. During one summer, the university continued to pay Debo's salary as she traveled throughout the state conducting her research for the project which would become *The Five Civilized*

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[47]Lowitt, "Regionalism at the University of Oklahoma," 170.

Tribes of Oklahoma: Report on Social and Economic Conditions published in 1951.[48] After retirement from Oklahoma State University in 1955, Debo continued to write, lecture, and research. She served as a board member of the Oklahoma chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union and the Association on American Indian Affairs.[49]

In recent years, Angie Debo has become a feminist symbol among some women historians. In the 1988 PBS film, "Indians, Outlaws, and Angie Debo," the producers Barbara Abrash and Martha Sandlin make the case that Debo was denied access to an academic career in history primarily because she was a woman and her topic of choice, Indian history, was not popular at the time.[50]

Moreover, in an oral history series in the 1980s, two feminist scholars, historian Glenna Matthews and lawyer Gloria Valencia-Webber, interviewed Debo on poignant questions such as career choices, the controversial nature of her research topics, her approach to Indian history, and the decision not to marry or have children. Debo acknowledged that she made a conscious choice to pursue her career over her desire for a family. She maintained a rigorous writing schedule and was not willing to give this up. "I couldn't have done both," she stated in a 1983 interview, "I had to choose. I have never regretted the choice I made. One can't have everything. If there are two things that

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[48]Angie Debo, *The Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma: Report on Social and Economic Conditions* (Philadelphia: Indian Rights Association, 1951).

[49]"Autobiographical Sketch," 2.

[50]*Indians, Outlaws, and Angie Debo*, produced by Barbara Abrash and Martha Sandlin, 58 min., Institute for Research in History, 1988, video.

conflict, one has to choose. I chose and I haven't regretted it."[51] She also commented that while teaching at West Texas State Teachers College in Canyon other women were told that they would be released from their teaching positions if they married. Debo reiterated that she had to choose between her career and marriage during the 1920s and 1930s, and she chose her career.[52] And then with the success of her dissertation, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, and her commitment to a writing career, she claimed it was "absolutely impossible for me to have done the kind of writing that I did and to have had a home and a husband and children, because I would spend months at some place where I was doing research."[53] Her parents supported her commitment to a strenuous writing schedule and they understood that she could not be disturbed during her scheduled writing time in her study at the family home in Marshall. "I sat at that typewriter and wrote," she remarked. "I couldn't have done that kind of writing . . . and have maintained the responsibilities and the creative opportunities of marriage. I just couldn't have done that. So it had to be a choice for me, first because of the rules, and later . . . because of my own schedule."[54] When asked if she has any regrets about this pivotal decision in her life, Debo noted that "I have never regretted that choice, although I know I lost [from the decision not to marry and have children], but I would have lost something that actually meant more to me [her professional writing career] if I had

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[51]ADT, 15 August 1983, 7.

[52]Ibid.

[53]Ibid., 8.

[54]Ibid., 7-8.

chosen differently."[55] Pulling together Debo's thoughts on her private life in connection with her publication record, we can make some assumptions. Debo would not speak out publicly about gender discrimination, but she would write quite passionately about the injustices of American Indians. Debo had sustained injustices herself but she would not complain about them. "Stoic cheerfulness" is Leckie's interpretation of Debo's activism on behalf of Native Americans. "Imbued with her parents' stoic attitude towards hardship and their dedication to maintaining the 'Oklahoma spirit,'" Leckie explains, "Debo could express her outrage over the treatment of others in a way that would have been unacceptable for herself."[56]

Although she was a productive scholar, she had difficulty securing a tenure-track position as a history professor. After years of struggle, Debo decided to pursue a career as a professional writer and keep the hope of an academic position within view. When comparing herself with her mentor Dale, Debo stated that Dale had more opportunities than she did because he was a man. "It was blocked for me," she said.[57] Perhaps gender discrimination within the profession was the overriding factor which prevented Debo from receiving a professorship. Or it might have been her commitment to social justice and her disbelief in acquiescence to politicians and administrators which marked her as a potential threat to some Oklahoma leaders during her day.

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[55]Ibid., 11-12.

[56]Shirley A. Leckie, "Angie Debo, Pioneering Historian," paper delivered at the Western History Association Conference, Lincoln, Nebraska, October 1996, 7.

[57]ADT, 12 December 1981, 4.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ANGIE DEBO'S *AND STILL THE WATERS RUN* AND OTHER OKLAHOMA TEXTS

Angie Debo fought against the injustices of American Indians at the hands of the federal government through the power of the written word. "I have written the worst things about Oklahoma that anybody else has ever written that ever touched a typewriter," she said during a 1984 interview at home in Marshall, Oklahoma, "and yet nobody seems to blame me for it. Nobody seems to hold it against me."[1] With her typewriter as her weapon, she wielded tremendous influence as a scholar whose foremost goal in writing was "to discover the truth and publish it."[2] As an historian, she did not hesitate to expose prominent citizens who exploited American Indians for their own gain if that was what the records revealed. While this appears courageous and perhaps naive, her stalwart position on the history of Indians in the United States, particularly in Oklahoma, uncovered a darker side of American history that many other historians were reluctant to pursue.

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[1]Angie Debo, interviews by Glenna Matthews and Gloria Valencia-Webber, from 1981-1985, transcripts, Angie Debo Collection, Oklahoma State University Library, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 12 December 1981, 12 [hereafter cited as ADT].

[2]*Angie Debo: An Autobiographical Sketch, Eulogy and Bibliography* (Stillwater, OK: The College of Arts and Sciences and Department of History, Oklahoma State University, 1988), 2.

Debo was schooled in the progressive tradition of Frederick Jackson Turner, whose frontier thesis and the notion of progress as the wheel that turned American history dominated the field. Edward Everett Dale, Debo's mentor and a Turner student, embraced the Turnerian tradition and instilled it in his students. Debo experienced frontier life firsthand during her youth in Marshall, Oklahoma, and was therefore captivated by Turner's narrative of American history as one of progress. But she soon began challenging some of the underlying assumptions of Turner's and Dale's view of American history. Both Dale and Debo viewed Oklahoma history as a microcosm of the larger narrative of American history, but the parallels ended there. For Dale, Oklahoma history told a story of "the conquest and development of the American Wilderness."[3] At times Debo inverted the Turnerian education she had received from Dale in her writings on American Indians and Oklahoma history. Where Dale saw a wilderness to be tamed and developed, Debo saw instead the "wilderness of civilization," or white settlement on Indian lands, as the burden of Oklahoma history.[4]

Debo authored ten books including six on American Indians and three others on Oklahoma history. Clearly, she was a regionalist writer. Robert L. Dorman, in his study of the regionalist movement in the United States during the interwar period, accepts Debo as a key figure in the regionalist movement. He breaks the movement down further,

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[3]Edward Everett Dale, "The Spirit of Soonerland," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 1 (June 1923): 169.

[4]Robert L. Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 172-74.

classifying Debo along with novelists John Joseph Mathews (Osage) and D'Arcy McNickle (Salish-Kootenai) as "Indian subregionalists." These writers, Dorman argues, viewed American history from the "Indians' side of the frontier" and, during the 1930s, they commenced writing a new narrative of American history from this vantage point. Their texts did not uphold Turner's notion of the frontier as a terrain of progress. Rather, these Indian subregionalists emphasized conquest, oppression, and conflict.[5]

During the 1930s there was a general lack of interest in the history of American Indians. Historians who did research native peoples tended to approach their subject largely from a non-Indian perspective, focusing on federal Indian policy. Long before the revisionist histories were published by the New Western historians or the New Indian scholars, Angie Debo was involved in the process of "self-criticism." As an Oklahoman, raised in the homesteading tradition and schooled in the Turnerian tradition, Debo sought a detachment from her heritage. Rather than writing laudatory histories of Oklahoma and its people, Debo observed the damaging effects that the conquest of the American West had left in its wake. As Howard Lamar indicates, she was consistently critical of political corruption, grafters, Sooners, and the mistreatment of American Indians throughout her writings. The ability to interpret Oklahoma history from this more self-critical vantage point is one of the legacies of Angie Debo.[6]

Working on her doctorate at the University of Oklahoma with Dale in the early

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[5]Ibid., 169.

[6]Howard R. Lamar, "The Creation of Oklahoma: New Meanings for the Oklahoma Land Run," in *The Culture of Oklahoma*, ed. Howard F. Stein and Robert F. Hill (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 43, 47.

1930s, Debo examined the history of the Choctaws from the Choctaw viewpoint. At a time when most historians of Native Americans wrote from a non-Indian perspective based largely on government documents, she included traditional sources but also incorporated oral history, tribal records, and anthropological studies.[7] In selecting a topic, Dale had pointed her to the university's recent acquisition of the Choctaw Council manuscript collection dating from 1869-1910, sources that had never been previously examined. Admitting that she "didn't know anything about the Choctaws," she began pouring over the council papers and learning the intricacies of the Choctaw National history and its relationship to the federal government.[8] By using the manuscript collection, Debo was able to reconstruct the history of the Choctaw people through their documentary record. The result was an invaluable contribution to the new series, "The Civilization of the American Indian" published by the University of Oklahoma Press.

The University of Oklahoma Press was established in 1928, due in large part to the efforts of the university president William Bizzell and the first press director Joseph A. Brandt. Bizzell and Brandt realized that Oklahoma's Indian population was the largest in the country and wanted the University of Oklahoma to serve as the center for the preservation of native heritage. This series remains special to Native American historians because it was launched and sustained at a time when the historical profession showed a

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[7]Shirley A. Leckie, "Angie Debo, Pioneering Historian," paper delivered at the Western Historical Association Conference, Lincoln, Nebraska, October 1996, 4.

[8]ADT, 12 December 1981, 4.

general lack of interest in American Indian history.[9] Brandt had ambitious plans for the University of Oklahoma which included establishing the university as the center for Indian Studies in the United States. As part of this effort, Dale's new course in 1930, "The American Indian," was the first Indian history course in the nation to be offered at the university level. Brandt also envisioned a special building on campus which would house an Indian museum, research center, and meeting rooms for the Indian studies program. Although many of Brandt's plans were not actualized, his new series on American Indians offered a press that was interested in manuscripts on Indian topics at a time when many presses were reluctant to follow suit.[10] Debo maintained that her dissertation would "still be lying on a shelf in the library collecting dust" had the University of Oklahoma Press not published it.[11]

The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, published in 1934, offered the first study of the Choctaw Nation from the end of the Civil War to the close of the tribal period and the beginning of statehood in 1907.[12] In consultation with the University of Oklahoma Press, Debo added three chapters at the beginning of her manuscript which provided the reader with the ethnology of the Choctaws, relying heavily on ethnologist

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[9]Steven Crum, "Bizzell and Brandt: Pioneers in Indian Studies, 1929-1937," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 66 (Summer 1988): 178-91.

[10]Richard Lowitt, "Regionalism at the University of Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 73 (Summer 1995): 150-71.

[11]ADT, 17 June 1983, 1-2.

[12]Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934).

John R. Swanton's *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians* (1931). This insertion proved highly significant for an historical work, for she was creating one of the first representations of ethnohistory. Ethnohistory offers an interdisciplinary approach of history and anthropology to the study of American Indians by combining the documentary evidence of the historian and the fieldwork of the ethnologist in an effort to tell a fuller, more complete story by using a variety of sources and methods. As Debo described it, this was a story that should be "told from the inside, from the Choctaws' own account."[13] At the time she did not think of her treatment as something new, but later researchers point to *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* as one of the early examples of an ethnohistorical approach.

The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic received the John H. Dunning Prize of the American Historical Association as the most important contribution to studies in American history in 1934. Rennard Strickland has pointed out that although Debo was the only professional historian in Oklahoma to win the prestigious Dunning Prize, she never obtained a tenure-track position.[14] Debo noted this discontinuity between her publishing record and lack of professional status asserting, "Whatever discrimination I have had was in getting a position in a history department at a college or university."[15] Certainly, gender played an instrumental role in Debo's lack of an institutional affiliation,

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[13]ADT, 12 December 1981, 5-6.

[14]Rennard Strickland, "Oklahoma's Story: Recording the History of the Forty-Sixth State," in *Oklahoma: New Views of the Forty-Sixth State*, ed. Anne Hodges Morgan and H. Wayne Morgan (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 261.

[15]ADT, 20 November 1981, 9.

but this statement was as close as she ever came to explicitly citing gender as a limiting factor in her career.

In general, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* received positive reviews. The obvious exception was Muriel Wright's review of the book in the Chronicles of Oklahoma. In this thirteen-page book review, Wright maintained that *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* was not an "authentic history" of the Choctaws.[16] The content of this review has been previously examined in the Wright section of the dissertation. By the early 1970s new Choctaw leadership disagreed with Wright's evaluation of the book. The Principal Chief Harry J. W. Belvin of the Choctaw Nation praised the book as "one of the most inspiring and accurate histories of the Choctaws that I have ever read."[17]

Debo continued publishing other important studies on Native Americans, including the controversial, and to Debo, "most important" work, *And Still the Waters Run*, an examination of the effects of forced liquidation of tribal lands and government on Oklahoma's Five Tribes.[18] With the success of her first book fresh in her mind, Debo left her unstable teaching position in Canyon, Texas, and returned to her home in Marshall to begin a new research project. But the road to publication for this manuscript was not as smooth as *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic.* She enjoyed researching topics in

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[16]Muriel H. Wright, "Book Review on The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 13 (March 1935): 108.

[17]Harry J. W. Belvin, Principal Chief, Choctaw Nation, to Angie Debo, 19 January 1971, folder 32, box 1, ADC.

[18]Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984).

which she had limited knowledge and was curious about the liquidation of the Five Tribes. She insisted that she did not select this topic for a "romantic reason," rather she needed a topic and viewed this one as a natural extension of her first book. She began her research rather innocently and was shocked at what she uncovered. "I didn't know that all of eastern Oklahoma and Oklahoma in general," Debo later recounted, "was dominated by a criminal conspiracy to cheat these Indians out of their land after their own tribes were broken up into individual allotments." She claimed that had she known about these injustices from the outset, she probably would not have tackled the topic.[19]

Debo surveyed the history of the Five Tribes in Oklahoma from 1890 to 1936, and specifically discussed the events leading to the termination of tribal governments and allotment of tribal lands. She referred to the "orgy of exploitation" by whites as "almost beyond belief" and concluded that the policy of the United States in liquidating the Five Civilized Tribes was a "gigantic blunder."[20] Not only did Debo expose the schemes of grafters to profit from the Five Tribes' resources, but she went one step further and "named names" of the grafters.[21] Threatened by libel suits from prominent Oklahoma businesspeople and politicians mentioned in the manuscript, the University of Oklahoma Press deemed publication too risky. Debo maintained that one of the most unhappy experiences of her life was the time she spent conducting the research for *And Still the Waters Run*. It seemed as if everything she uncovered, all of the available evidence, was

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[19]ADT, 12 December 1981, 12-13.

[20]Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, x-xi.

[21]ADT, 12 December 1981, 9.

"slimy." Furthermore, as the story unfolded, she discovered how her childhood role model, Kate Barnard, the Commissioner of Charities and Corrections from 1908 to 1914, was destroyed by influential Oklahomans bent on profiting from the allotments of Indian orphans.[22]

Politics, power, and censorship spring to the fore where books like *And Still the Waters Run* are concerned. Many of the men and women mentioned as grafters in Debo's book had attained high social status, becoming prominent politicians, businesspeople, and community leaders – in other words, Oklahoma's elite – by the 1930s. These people had helped contribute to the state's development, not to mention the fact that many of them were major donors to O.U. A book calling into question their moral standing among Oklahoma's elite triggered alarm in the university administration. Two factors resulted in the cancellation of Debo's contract with the University of Oklahoma Press. First, President Bizzell and his assistant, Morris L. Wardell, a member of the history department, considered the threat of libel very real. They encouraged Brandt not to publish the manuscript. Second, Brandt believed that political groups inside the university and in the state legislature would shut down his young press if he published this controversial manuscript. By mutual agreement, Brandt and Debo terminated the contract.[23]

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[22]Ibid., 8.

[23]Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, x-xi; Suzanne H. Schrems and Cynthia J. Wolff, "Politics and Libel: Angie Debo and the Publication of *And Still the Waters Run*," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 22 (May 1991), 194; Lowitt, "Regionalism," 162-65; ADT, 12 December 1981, 8.

The decision not to publish *And Still the Waters Run* under the "Civilization of the American Indian" series devastated Brandt. He felt a moral obligation to publish the manuscript. In a letter to President Bizzell, Brandt maintained that the manuscript "is honest in intention and execution, it is history and not expose, although its dealing with recent events sometimes gives it the appearance of expose. It has all moral right on its side."[24] When Brandt left Oklahoma to become director of Princeton University Press four years later, he immediately contacted Debo and asked to publish the work.

Debo was disappointed with the lukewarm reception for *And Still the Waters Run* in 1940. The delay extinguished any hopes Debo had of attracting a wide readership for her book. With the onset of World War II, the liquidation of the Five Tribes – and Indian topics in general – did not capture the country's interest. Perhaps if the book had been published during the mid-1930s as expected, during John Collier's "Indian New Deal," the public response to this work would have been greater. Debo received favorable scholarly reviews, but lost the wider readership. She hoped more people could become educated on the injustices that Indians faced in the development of the United States, a theme repeated throughout American history: "Break up their land so that you can get it in shape [so] that the white people can grab it."[25]

Once again Muriel Wright took a strong position against Debo's work – this time bu refusing to acknowledge the appearance of *And Still the Waters Run*. While national

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[24]Joseph A. Brandt to William Bizzell, 20 July 1937, box 32, University Press Collection, Western History Collections.

[25]ADT, 12 December 1981, 12-13.

journals such as the *American Historical Review*, the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, and the *Journal of Southern History* reviewed Debo's book, the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* did not.[26] The name of the president of the Oklahoma Historical Society, Robert Williams, former governor of the state and federal judge, appeared in *And Still the Waters Run*. Perhaps Wright did not review it in the *Chronicles* out of deference to Judge Williams.[27]

And Still the Waters Run and many of Debo's other works could be positioned within the Progressive interpretation of history which focused on economics in American society. Dorman argues that she emphasized conflict, class polarization, and the "oligarchic forces" associated with capitalism and industrialization as did other Progressive historians – Turner, Vernon Parrington, Charles Beard, and John Hicks.[28] Yet Debo moves beyond these historians, questioning the notions of progress in American history and the celebration of westward expansion, by considering that history from an Indian perspective. Debo's reading of the evidence called the Progressive historians' own notion of progress into question, in Dorman's words, "equating

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[26]Grant Foreman, Review of *And Still the Waters Run by Angie Debo*, *American Historical Review* 46 (July 1941): 936-37; Grant Foreman, Review of *And Still the Waters Run* by Angie Debo, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27 (March 1941): 636-37; Dan E. Clark, Review of *And Still the Waters Run*, *Journal of Southern History* 7 (August 1941): 574-75.

[27]David Baird and Danney Goble, *The Story of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 431; David Baird, interview by author, 26 November 1996.

[28]Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces*, 170.

assimilation not with Progress, but with power."[29]

Debo wrote *And Still the Waters Run* during the depths of the depression. The narrative clearly defines the winners and the losers. Debo juxtaposes the financial greed of the grafters with the tremendous economic and political loss of the Five Tribes. Dorman views this book as a "depression-era parable of the systematic exploitation of the powerless by the powerful."[30] On one side were influential whites and a few assimilated, or mixed blood, Indians representing the powerful "grafters," and on the other, the powerless victims, traditional Indians of the Five Tribes. The grafters upheld a philosophy, according the Debo, "in which personal greed and public spirit were almost inextricably joined. If they could build their personal fortunes and create a great state by destroying the Indian, they would destroy him in the name of all that was selfish and all that was holy."[31] She called this effort to strip the Indians of their surplus lands following allotment a "criminal conspiracy."[32] Again appealing to depression-era rhetoric, Debo argued that the once prosperous Five Tribes "were almost stripped of their holdings and were rescued from starvation only through public charity."[33]

Debo expected to receive criticism from the grafters themselves, but Oklahomans in general remained quiet. She thought she "wouldn't have a friend in Oklahoma" when

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[29]Ibid., 174.

[30]Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces*, 172.

[31]Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, 93.

[32]ADT, 12 December 1981, 7.

[33]Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, x.

the book appeared. Instead, she heard not one word of criticism. "I still don't know whether grafters don't read," she mused, "or whether they were afraid to tell the whole story, and tell a lot more than I had space to tell in the book."[34] Oklahoma's native peoples generally reacted favorably to *And Still the Waters Run* and her other books.[35] But there were a few exceptions. Debo called these people who disputed her interpretation of Indian history and the development of Oklahoma including Muriel Wright, "successful Indians, leaders of the white man's society."[36] According to Debo, they resented "any allusion to the unhappy situation of the fullbloods who were cheated out of their property . . . ."[37] But overall, Oklahomans accepted the claims made by Debo in *And Still the Waters Run* as part of their history. "A good many Oklahomans will accept severe criticism if it's true," she stated.[38]

Of all the books she has written, Debo contended that *And Still the Waters Run* was her most important book. The sensitive subject matter needed to be researched, interpreted, and published so as to make the historical events surrounding the liquidation of the Five Tribes available for public consumption. In addition, Debo was attracted to subjects that other Oklahoma historians did not want to tackle and this surely was such a

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[34]ADT, 12 December 1981, 12.

[35]Ibid., 13.

[36]ADT, 16 December 1981, 2.

[37]Ibid.

[38]ADT, 8 April 1983, 13.

topic.[39] Rennard Strickland describes Debo's treatment as "piercingly honest." Most shocking in her research, he notes, was that "otherwise honest and law-abiding judges, public officials, and citizens silently stood by and watched when their action might have saved a significant portion of the Indians' patrimony."[40] Debo wanted the public, particularly Oklahomans, to read this book and become informed on injustices made against native peoples as part of the legacy of Oklahoma history. She did not want another generation of Oklahomans to remain passive; rather she called for an educated public who would become aware of the darker aspects of Oklahoma's past.

While Debo awaited publication of *And Still the Waters Run*, she received another grant from the Social Science Research Council to write a history of the Creeks. She selected the Creeks because they were the most conservative people of the Five Tribes and, she claimed, other historical accounts were largely inaccurate. Debo wanted to write an accurate history of the Creeks. She called it *The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians*.[41] "If I had called it the *History of the Creeks*," Debo recounted, "nobody would have been interested in it at all."[42] Clever title changes such as this one would perhaps draw a larger percentage of interested readers. She continued to pursue Indian topics even though she maintained that no one was interested in Indian history

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[39]ADT, 12 December 1981, 12-13.

[40]Strickland, "Oklahoma's Story," 238.

[41]Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941).

[42]ADT, 16 December 1981, 7-8.

during the 1930s and 1940s.

In her Creek history Debo recorded the "internal life of the tribe," to examine native peoples from the inside, a recurring theme that set Debo's work apart from her contemporaries. She acknowledged the work of Grant Foreman, who studied the removal of the Creeks to Indian Territory, and Annie Heloise Abel, who studied the Creeks during the Civil War, but her source material offered a new glimpse of this "internal life." Debo relied again on Swanton's ethnological work to describe the Creeks, joining it to other sources, including tribal records, Creek newspapers such as the *Indian Journal* and the *Muskogee Phoenix*, government documents, court records, and travelers' accounts. Of particular importance was her use of the elderly Creeks' oral histories recorded through a Works Progress Administration project under Foreman's leadership. She relied on their oral histories "for purposes of interpretation." Through these sources, she proceeded to tell the story.[43]

Debo's interpretation emphasized the persistence of the Creek spirit. Although the Creeks had achieved some degree of "civilization," she argued that "their greatest strength always lay in their native steadfastness." The Creeks successfully adopted the white man's ways with respect to attire, agriculture, livestock, education, and Christianity. But, Debo argued, "the attempt to replace their group loyalties with the white man's individualism brought a [spiritual collapse] from which they never fully recovered." She concluded that after all of the civilizing efforts made by missionaries and Indian agents, the Creeks "remained to the end [essentially unchanged,] and their

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[43]Debo, *Road to Disappearance*, ix-x.

hope of survival still rested upon the unyielding tenacity of their native traits."[44] These arguments by Debo regarding the Creeks seem contradictory – statements regarding the sustenance of the Creek spirit and yet a spiritual collapse – but they speak to the complexity of Indian-white relations. Mary Jane Warde explains in her biography of the late nineteenth-century Creek diplomat, George Washington Grayson, that Creeks often adopted food, clothing, religious beliefs, and language from other Indian and Euro-American and cultures. These cultural borrowings did not make Grayson or others any less Creek. In fact, Warde argues, Grayson assumed many aspects of white culture as a strategy to maintain Creek community.[45]

In 1966, when *The Road to Disappearance* was reissued by the University of Oklahoma Press, Debo remarked that this book represented her most difficult research. Whereas other "more articulate tribes" she had researched had more visible histories, the Creeks were "a conservative people" who kept to themselves. Their inner history was hidden until I uncovered it," she boasted.[46] Michael D. Green praises Debo's study of Creek history. "One cannot begin even a peripheral study of Creek history," Green states, "without early and continued excursions into Angie Debo's *The Road to Disappearance.* Her analysis of Creek history . . . remains the standard by which other scholars must

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[44]Ibid., viii.

[45]Mary Jane Warde, *George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation, 1843-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 252.

[46]Ibid., x.

measure their work."[47]

Prairie City (1944) and *Oklahoma: Foot-loose and Fancy-free* (1949), demonstrate Debo's versatility as a writer of subjects other than Indian history.[48] Written in a casual style and intended to appeal to the general reader, both texts describe what Debo thinks it means to be an Oklahoman.

Debo's *Prairie City*, a fictional city based on her hometown Marshall, tells the story of the initial development, sudden rise, and eventual decline of an American farming community from the 1890s to the 1940s. Debo's life is interwoven in this rural story. She and her family arrived in Oklahoma Territory by covered wagon in 1899. They came to Oklahoma for the chance to farm their own land. Debo began teaching in rural schools at sixteen. As a result, the life of the pioneer was deeply imbedded in her own life experience. In fact, today the Marshall community gathers annually to celebrate "Prairie City Days," to honor both the town and Debo.

This book represents a departure from Debo's usual historical treatments, in this case entering the realm of historical fiction. "The whole epic sweep of American history," Debo posited in the preface to *Prairie City*, could be recovered in the story of this frontier community.[49] Twenty-five years later, Debo remained convinced that Prairie

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[47]Michael D. Green, *The Creeks: A Critical Bibliography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 17.

[48]Angie Debo, *Prairie City: The Story of an American Community* (New York: Knopf, 1944; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); Angie Debo, *Oklahoma: Foot-loose and Fancy-free* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949; reprint, 1987).

[49]Debo, *Prairie City*, vii.

City's history "is the history of the United States in microcosm."[50] This beautifully written narrative covers the land runs with cities growing overnight, the importance of the railroad, the development of government and statehood, the depression years and World War II. This story also encompasses the full range of pioneer life, from times of prosperity, such as the discovery of oil and increased land value, to times of depression, such as when family farms were forced into foreclosure. *Prairie City* is based on research ranging from county records to census statistics to oral histories.[51]

The second work, *Oklahoma: Foot-loose and Fancy-free*, again is a departure from Debo's more scholarly works. This book is an interpretation of the Oklahoma spirit written in an engaging style. During the 1940s, Debo was extremely critical of Edna Ferber's *Cimarron* and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* for their inaccurate portrayals of Oklahomans. These two books, according to Debo, "are only the most conspicuous of the books named for Oklahoma, but rooted in nowhere."[52] In this work, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, Debo critiques Ferber and Steinbeck and counters with her more accurate depiction of the character of Oklahoma's people. In order to describe this character, she covers topics ranging from physical geography to agriculture to athletics to oil to artists. Debo insisted that the Oklahoma character was different from the character of neighboring states such as Kansas, Texas, or Colorado. She believed that the state's historical experience, which included both the legacies of Oklahoma's Indian

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[50]Ibid., xii.

[51]Ibid., vii-viii.

[52]Angie Debo, "Who Writes Truth," 1974, 5, folder 41, box 20, ADC.

history as well as the "pioneer spirit" of the land run years, influenced the character of the people. Debo established Oklahoma history as America in microcosm in *Prairie City* and reiterated here the theme that "all American traits have been intensified in Oklahoma," as America's last frontier.[53]

But Debo's interest in American Indian topics continued to consume her. In 1967 Debo taught a course at the University of Oklahoma for teachers of Indian children entitled, "The United States and Its Original Inhabitants: An Indian Interpretation," as part of the National Defense Institute. As she stated in her syllabus, this course approached American history "from the Indian point of view."[54] Upon completion of the course, many of Debo's students requested her lecture notes. Encouraged by the success of the course, Debo revised her course notes into *A History of the Indians of the United States* published by the University of Oklahoma Press in 1970.[55]

A History of the Indians of the United States became a "modest bestseller," in Debo's words, with royalties exceeding those of her other books. In its first year of publication, Debo received $8,400.00 – no small sum for a history textbook. She was pleasantly surprised. The book continued to sell well, indicating that the resurgence of Native American activism and self-representation during the 1960s and 1970s generated

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[53]ADT, 8 April 1983, 12; Debo, *Foot-loose and Fancy-free*, ix.

[54]"A Proposal to the U.S. Office of Education for an NDEA Institute for Advanced Study," University of Oklahoma, 6 May 1967 to 21 July 1967, Fred Harris Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

[55]ADT, 16 December 1981, 12-13; Angie Debo, *A History of the Indians of the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970).

far more interest in native topics than had been the case in the 1930s and 1940s.[56] Whereas in the earlier decades, the University of Oklahoma was unique in its interest in American Indians, by the 1960s universities around the country were offering courses in American Indian history and people wanted to learn more about native peoples.

Native American scholars have referred to Debo's work to support their own historical claims. For instance, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn refers to Debo's book in her discussion of the 1990s movie blockbuster, *Pocahontas*. She notes the dilemma of looking to one Indian to speak as the representative for all Indian people. She chides Indian activist turned actor, Russell Means, for his comment that *Pocahontas* represented the "finest movie to ever come out of Hollywood about Indian people." Scholars have debated the historical authenticity of Pocahontas and would not agree with Means. Cook-Lynn turns to Debo's *A History of the Indians of the United States* for verification. Debo maintained that the Pocahontas story was "filled with errors and fantasy," and it "need not be retold except to assuage the United States' national conscience."[57]

In 1976, at the age of eighty-six, Debo completed *Geronimo*, the last of her book projects.[58] Debo began the preliminary research for *Geronimo* in the 1950s, reading extensively in Apache history. She drew on the work of ethnologist Morris Opler, who

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[56]ADT, 16 December 1981, 15-16.

[57]Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, "American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story," in *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians* ed. Devon A. Mihesuah (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 115.

[58]Angie Debo, *Geronimo: The Man, His Time, His Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976; reprint, 1989).

worked among the band in the 1930s, for background material regarding the social organization and culture of the Chiricahua Apaches. In addition, she interviewed elderly Chiricahua Apaches, including Geronimo's son and granddaughter. As one example of the misinformation and "sensationalism" the general public assumed was true about this great warrior, Debo said she had grown up in Kansas and Oklahoma hearing stories about the "blanket of human scalps" which adorned Geronimo's neck. Later on in her studies, she learned that Apaches did not scalp. Debo's intention was to set the record straight and write a revisionist biography of Geronimo. But her obligations to other writing projects caused the Geronimo project to be shelved for over twenty years.[59]

What compelled Debo to pursue the tenuous career of freelance writing, particularly on the subject of American Indians which she claimed people were not interested in reading? She answered some of these questions in a 1951 lecture entitled, "Indian History from an Author's Point of View," which was presented at the Ohoyohoma Club, a Native American women's club, in Tulsa. For Debo, Indian history enticed her to such a degree that she continued to write it, even against her "practical judgment." She found something deeply satisfying in revising Native American topics that had been misrepresented in prior accounts – in erasing "falsehoods from the popular mind." Debo also found "universal human experiences" in her research on Indians which she broadened into "universal lessons" for the public at large.[60] In the preface to *The*

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[59]ADT, 16 February 1984, 5.

[60]Angie Debo, "Indian History From an Author's Point of View," 1951, folder 19, box 20, ADC.

Road to Disappearance, a history of the Creeks, Debo wrote that "in [the white man's] philosophic moods he may appraise his own civilization and see a reflection of his own problems and failures in the history of their tiny republic."[61] As Catherine Lavender maintains, white women writers such as Debo studied native cultures in order to critique their own.[62]

At the age of ninety-one, Debo reflected on her long career as an historian and writer. She stated that her special talent as a writer was the result of divine guidance. She maintained that although she had no regrets about writing, she never enjoyed writing the way she enjoyed teaching.[63] She taught at the West Texas State Teachers College for ten years, taught intermittently in the Oklahoma State history department, and taught special courses at the University of Oklahoma and throughout the Southwest, but she never attained the tenure-track position at a research institution and never trained graduate students. Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., the director the American Native Press Archives at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, attended one of Debo's Oklahoma history courses at Oklahoma State University in the early 1950s. He pursued history as his profession due in large part to Debo's influence in class. One can only imagine how much stronger her influence would have been had she trained graduate students.

Debo maintained a quiet self-awareness regarding the importance of her

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[61]Angie Debo, *Road to Disappearance*, ix.

[62]Catherine Jane Lavender, "Storytellers: Feminist Ethnography and the American Southwest, 1900-1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado-Boulder, 1997).

[63]ADT, 20 November 1981, 16.

scholarship on Oklahoma's Indian population. She began her career during a period of general indifference regarding Indian history, and only toward the latter part of her career did Indian history became increasingly popular both in scholarly circles and among the general public. Yet, Debo steadfastly maintained her position as an Indian historian throughout the ebb and flow of Indian history. Her interpretation of the Five Tribes in particular has influenced Oklahoma history immeasurably.

Debo described herself as a common person from a homesteading background. She considered herself fortunate that Indians seemed to be able to talk to her – because she was a good listener. Class was also a factor as well. Full-bloods who generally expressed more traditional native views shared commonalities with Debo's simple life.[64] For instance, Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell, a Cherokee full-blood, complimented Debo on her interest in educating non-Indians about Indian people. "[You] have done so much through your writings and speeches," Mitchell wrote after attending one of Debo's public lectures, "to bring about a better understanding of Indians to non-Indians."[65] Some Indians of mixed heritage, such as Muriel Wright, who expressed a more assimilationist position, tended to disagree with Debo's interpretation of Indian history in Oklahoma. Thus, not all Indians in Oklahoma revered or agreed with Debo. She remained cautious about claiming any appreciation from Indians.[66]

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[64]ADT, 17 June 1983, 18-20.

[65]Mrs. Robert C. Mitchell (Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell) to Angie Debo, 2 May 1973, folder 44, box 20, ADC.

[66]ADT, 16 February 1984, 7-8.

Some historians, however, have discovered major significance in Debo's work. Shirley Leckie credits Debo with paving the way for the "new Indian history" and being an early representative of ethnohistory. In Debo's writings, Leckie finds that "Indians remain actors, rather than reactors, and, most of all, agents, no matter how predominant the power of whites."[67] Richard Lowitt praises Debo's ability to critique the people of her state with apparent objectivity. Her books often portrayed Oklahomans in an "unfavorable light" if that is what the evidence revealed.[68]

Beginning in the 1980s, Debo received more attention as an historian of native peoples. Two feminist scholars recorded her oral history in a series of interviews, her papers were deposited at Oklahoma State University and microfilmed, and a film entitled, "Indians, Outlaws and Angie Debo," documented her career.[69] In addition, the people of Oklahoma recognized Debo as their state's prominent historian when they mounted her portrait in the state capitol. Debo is certainly now one of the most visible of the "hidden scholars," of the some 1600 women writers who researched American Indians in the Southwest. These women worked on the fringes of their respective professions, and most did not attain permanent employment at the university level but supported themselves as freelance writers. As their life histories and texts are being reclaimed and remembered by

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[67]Shirley A. Leckie, "Angie Debo, Pioneering Historian," public lecture at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 29 March 1999, 6-7.

[68]Lowitt, "Regionalism," 160.

[69]See Angie Debo, interviews by Glenna Matthews and Gloria Valencia-Webber, from 1981-1985, transcripts, Angie Debo Collection, Oklahoma State University Library, Stillwater, Oklahoma; "Indians, Outlaws, and Angie Debo," produced by Barbara Abrash and Martha Sandlin, 58 min., Institute for Research in History, 1988, videocassette.

women's historians and anthropologists today, a fuller, more complete history of writing about the American West can be told.[70]

[70]Nancy J. Parezo, ed., *Hidden Scholars: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).

CHAPTER EIGHT

WOMEN AS INTERPRETERS OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN WEST

This study illustrates both the influence and variety of women's scholarship in Oklahoma and the greater Southwest. While Alice Marriott has received some attention from literary scholars, the focus in this study is on her role in the shaping of Indian history, rather than the more typical literary perspective. Muriel Wright reveals a scholar whose influence has been nearly invisible outside of her home state of Oklahoma. Completing the study with a look at the life and writings of Angie Debo further demonstrates the crucial contributions women have made to Native American historiography. These writers carved a niche for themselves, they created careers for themselves – neither as "professors" in the traditional sense nor as amateurs, but a space in the middle, distinctly theirs. Their career pathways often took many turns, but one commonality was their interest in local history. In the case of Oklahoma history particularly, local history is often Native American history, as their writings indicate.

This concluding chapter introduces other western women who examined Native Americans through the lens of local history. It places Marriott, Wright, and Debo within the larger context of other anthropologists, public historians, and non-academic research historians of their time. After a brief examination of women's participation in the tradition of Indian reform, this chapter returns to the three themes which were outlined

from the outset in the first chapter – the notion of Indian perspective or "Indian voice," the correlation between local history and women as cultural preservationists at the local level, and educating non-native audiences on Native American people – in order to provide an explicit framework for understanding Marriott's, Wright's, and Debo's place within the tradition of western women writers.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many women were studying Native American cultures in the Southwest. Their work was part of a long reform tradition in the United States, particularly abolition, which then served as a springboard for women to take up the cause of American Indian reform.[1] Lydia Maria Child, better known for her abolitionist novels, wrote her first novel *Hobomok*, an American Indian novel, in 1824.[2] Helen Hunt Jackson's *A Century of Dishonor* (1881) helped to encourage passage of the Dawes Act, although, as Shirley Leckie maintains, this was not her intention.[3] Passed in 1887, the Dawes Act called for the end of tribal landownership in exchange for individual allotments in severalty. Jackson was not necessarily a proponent of acculturation, but Leckie maintains, "by publicizing the plight of Indians, Jackson's work helped Eastern humanitarians achieve passage of assimilationist

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[1]Mary Hershberger, "Mobilizing Women, Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle against Indian Removal in the 1830s," *Journal of American History* 86 (June 1999): 15-40.

[2]Helen Carr, *Inventing the American Primitive: Politics, Gender and the Representation of Native American Literary Traditions, 1789-1936* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 169.

[3]Shirley A. Leckie, "Women Writers Who Explored the Legacy of Conquest Out on Their Own Frontier," paper delivered at the American Historical Association, Pacific Coast Branch Conference, Maui, Hawaii, 7 August 1999, 6.

policies."[4] Child and Jackson are just two of the many women who created the tradition of Indian reform. Alice Fletcher, as another example, supported the allotment policy. She balanced her interest in ethnology and policy reform as a special agent assigned by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to survey and assign allotments among the Omahas in Nebraska in the early 1880s. Her work continued with the allotment of the Winnebagos in Nebraska and the Nez Perce in Idaho in the late 1880s and early 1890s.[5] By the end of the nineteenth century, leaders of Indian reform organizations were often women. The Women's National Indian Association, for instance, which later became the National Indian Association played an important advocacy role for Indian welfare in the early twentieth century.[6]

Early women anthropologists and historians who studied western Native American communities were part of this larger tradition of Indian reform. Whether as wives who assisted their ethnologist husbands collect data on American Indian women and children or as single women who perhaps discovered fewer gender limitations in the West than in the East, many women converged in the Southwest and explored their fascination with the "primitive." Primitivism "is a source of authority," according to Leah Dilworth, "because the primitive is imagined as a state somehow previous to

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[4]Ibid.

[5]Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 25-28.

[6]Carr, *Inventing the American Primitive*, 169.

modernity and therefore more real, more authentic."[7] Women anthropologists and historians joined other writers, artists, and tourists in this search for the "primitive" and "authentic" among native peoples in the Southwest.

During the first half of the twentieth century, women writers who studied Native Americans remained on the margins of their respective professions. As many as sixteen hundred women were researching and writing about native communities in the greater Southwest during this period, but we are only beginning to learn about them in recent studies. Nancy Parezo calls such women "hidden scholars" who were often working on the fringes of the academic world as they pursued their topics of interest.[8] The three women in this study illustrate variations of this phenomenon, or degrees of invisibility – Wright invisible, Marriott partially visible to academics, and Debo the most visible. Their significance is embodied in the contributions they made to the historiography of Native American communities in Oklahoma while occupying different positions on the fringes of the academic world.

All three were born around the turn of the twentieth century and created careers for themselves during the late 1920s and 1930s. They experienced life on different "frontiers" as children. Debo and Marriott grew up in Oklahoma Territory and each recalled not having much interaction with American Indians. On the other hand, Wright, a Choctaw, grew up in Indian Territory. After 1907, when Oklahoma achieved statehood

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[7]Leah Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 4.

[8]Nancy J. Parezo, ed. *Hidden Scholars*, xiii.

with the merger of Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory, all three women spent their youths experiencing the opportunities that the new state provided. By the 1930s, all three were actively engaged in exploring Indian issues in Oklahoma. The primary issue was tribal land ownership and assimilationist policies. John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, introduced the "Indian New Deal," an attempt to alter the course of 150 years of assimilationist policies by the federal government codified under the Dawes Act of 1887. Called the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (IRA), Collier and others ended the allotment policy under Dawes and attempted to restore tribal landownership in order to encourage the revitalization of traditional cultural practices.

Different experiences led these three women to disagree on the new policies. Both Marriott and Debo supported Collier's "Indian New Deal" due to their personal experiences and perspectives. Marriott soon took a position as a field representative for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board and the board itself was created under Collier's program. Debo worked on the manuscript for *And Still the Waters Run* amid these national changes in Indian reform and with similar assumptions about the disastrous consequences of Dawes policy. Wright, on the other hand, represented one of many Five Tribes people who had benefitted from allotment and the program of "Americanization" or assimilation and considered a return to tribal landownership a step backward. Resistance to the Indian New Deal was so strong among the Five Tribes people of Oklahoma that initially the IRA did not even include them. Two years later, when Congress did include Oklahoma Indians under this legislation, most ignored it. In fact, of the 103,000 Oklahoma Indians eligible to organize under the IRA, 90,000 did not, and

they were primarily Five Tribes people.[9]

Muriel Wright was not alone as a proponent of assimilation during the 1920s and 1930s. Flora Warren Seymour (1888-1948) was one of the principal advocates for acculturation and assimilation. She had worked for the United States Indian Service for six years in the 1910s. In addition to her interest in Indian policy, she also studied law and was admitted to the bar in the District of Columbia and Illinois. In 1922, President Calvin Coolidge selected her as the first woman member of the Board of Indian Commissioners, a position she held until 1933 when Collier disbanded the board.[10] Seymour continued her sharp criticism of Collier's reform policy throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Beginning in 1924, Seymour wrote many articles defending her position, often criticizing John Collier's call for Indian policy reform. Collier campaigned for reform beginning in the early 1920s with his American Indian Defense Association and later as Commissioner of Indian Affairs during the Roosevelt administration. Seymour criticized Collier's emphasis on cultural pluralism and cautioned that her readers not be swayed by "the delusion of the sentimentalists."[11]

From the 1920s to the 1940s, Seymour and her husband visited the Indian reservations in the American West each summer. Her husband would take leave from his

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[9]W. David Baird, "Are the Five Tribes of Oklahoma 'Real' Indians?," *Western Historical Quarterly* 21 (February 1990): 13.

[10]Deborah Welch, "Flora Warren Seymour," in *Historians of the American Frontier: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. John R. Wunder (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 599-610.

[11]Ibid., 600.

work as an accountant to join his wife on these trips. He took many of the photographs which accompany her texts.[12] From these personal observations, Seymour defended her assimilationist position in numerous articles and books.

A primary theme in her work on Indians is the need to shift from "primitive" customs to embrace Euro-American culture. For example, *The Story of the Sioux Indians* (1924) argues that the Sioux, who were once warlike people, became peaceful farmers as a result of the Dawes Act in 1887.[13] Seymour claimed that a return to communal land holdings, as proposed by Collier, would not benefit those Sioux who had become independent land owners; rather it would only benefit those who had sold or lost their land. Seymour equated land ownership, Christianity, education, and health care – signs of assimilation – with "progress." "If we have wronged the Indian by what we have taken from him," she wrote, "we cannot right the wrong by taking from him what our civilization has given him."[14] This primitive-civilized dichotomy is a recurring theme in Seymour's work, and a dichotomous view shared by Muriel Wright.

Seymour also wrote histories of native peoples for children and a popular audience. In *Women of Trail and Wigwam* (1930), Seymour again presents the theme of assimilation in her story of Seneca women rejecting their "primitive" culture in exchange

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[12]Ibid., 602.

[13]Flora Warren Seymour, *The Story of the Sioux Indians* (Girard, KS: Haldeman-Julius Co., 1924).

[14]Flora Warren Seymour, "Delusion of the Sentimentalists," *The Forum* 71 (March 1924): 274.

for the "civilized" cultural benefits of Euro-American culture.[15] Her western biography series for children included two volumes on Indian women, *Bird Girl: Sacagawea* (1945) and *Pocahontas: Brave Girl* (1946).[16] She portrays Sacagawea and Pocahontas as positive examples of Indian women's participation in westward expansion, paving the way for assimilation.

One theme that emerges from a comparative study of women writers who studied American Indians in the West is the idea of Indian perspective or voice.[17] If the writers were to speak to one another today, they would no doubt debate the issue of the Indian voice. Several of these writers are non-Indian yet they claim to be writing from an Indian perspective. Others use ethnohistorical methods as a way of interpreting available evidence from an Indian point of view. The native scholars mentioned in this survey are members of the communities they study, so would they tell a more accurate account or portray a "purer" Indian perspective or speak more authoritatively with their native voices?

Women writers including Angie Debo, Alice Marriott, Ruth Underhill, Eve Ball, and Mari Sandoz all claimed to be writing from an Indian perspective or an Indian voice.

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[15]Flora Warren Seymour, *Women of Trail and Wigwam* (New York: The Woman's Press, 1930).

[16]Flora Warren Seymour, *Bird Girl: Sacagawea* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1945); Flora Warren Seymour, *Pocahontas: Brave Girl* (New York: Bobbs-Merill Co., 1946).

[17]R. David Edmunds, "Native Americans, New Voices: American Indian History, 1895-1995," *American Historical Review* 100 (June 1995), 737-38.

At the same time, native writers such as Muriel Wright, Ella Deloria, and Rachel Eaton approached their work as cultural mediators, working and living within two cultures, and did not make such claims. They did, however, indicate that they often wrote about their cultures to educate the larger Euro-American culture, and thus made claims for authenticity that resemble others' claims for an Indian voice.

By comparing Marriott's *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso* to Ruth Underhill's *The Autobiography of a Papago Woman*, the question of ethnographic authority and the pursuit of a native point of view becomes clear.[18] Luke E. Lassiter makes an important point regarding ethnographic authority. Although an ethnographer may intend to create a text which explores the dialogue between ethnographer and consultants, the end result is often a monologue about "the native point of view" written for a "nonnative" audience. "Control of this conversation," Lassiter concludes, "rests solely with the ethnographer."[19] Therefore, as the following discussion demonstrates, the anthropologist of the 1930s and 1940s may have claimed she was merely the recorder of an American Indian autobiography, however, the final draft of the manuscript was often reshaped or modified by the anthropologist to conform with the anthropologist's objectives.

Ruth Underhill produced the first published Southwestern woman's autobiography, Maria Chona's *Papago Woman*, in 1936. In her examination of this text,

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[18]Alice Marriott, *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1948); Ruth M. Underhill, *The Autobiography of a Papago Woman* (Manasha, WI: American Anthropological Association, 1936).

[19]Luke E. Lassiter, *The Power of Kiowa Song: A Collaborative Ethnography* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 236.

Catherine Lavender argues that Underhill told the story of one woman, Maria Chona, and presented it as typical of all Tohono O'Odham (Papago) women. Underhill applied Ruth Benedict's method of selecting an outstanding individual and determining the culture's values and history from her life story. As Lavender puts it, "Underhill set out to present Chona not only as a Papago woman, but as *the* Papago woman.[20] This approach, selecting one woman and presenting her story as typical of a culture, was a common practice during the 1930s and 1940s. While anthropologists today find many flaws with such a method, this method of describing Native American cultures in the Southwest to nonnative readers was acceptable as an ethnographic device.

Marriott immediately embraced Underhill's methods. She read *Papago Woman* in 1936 while conducting fieldwork with the Kiowas and called it her "Bible."[21] This book influenced and shaped Marriott's own studies. For example, in *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso* (1948), Marriott's presentation of the exceptional individual, Maria Martinez, as an authentic representative of her culture thus continued an important Southwestern literary and ethnographic tradition begun by Ruth Underhill in *Papago Woman.*[22]

A final parallel between Marriott and Underhill rests with their strong sense of place and awareness of the surrounding landscape as a literary device. In *Papago*

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[20]Catherine Jane Lavender, "Storytellers: Feminist Ethnography and the American Southwest, 1900-1940 (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado-Boulder, 1997), 201.

[21]Alice [Marriott] to Darlings, 13 July [1936], folder 4, box 20, AMC.

[22]Alice Marriott, *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1948).

Woman, Underhill begins her story with Maria Chona's childhood home among the Tohono O'Odham in southern Arizona and northern Sonora, Mexico, and Chona's relationship with place consistently remains in the background throughout the text.[23] Marriott borrows this device in *Maria*. The book opens with Maria Montoya Martinez as a young girl working for her mother as a "trader" – trading her mother's cheese for other goods – in the San Ildefonso Pueblo. This provides Marriott with the opportunity to take the reader on a tour of the pueblo and its people. Marriott continues to embrace the pueblo at the center of her narrative about Maria and her pottery. Both biographies, then, recrafted the stories of Maria Chona and Maria Martinez to fit the Western literary genre which adheres to linear chronology.

Marriott used experimental ethnographic models in her writings during the 1930s and 1940s. Such models, which included openly autobiographical texts of an ethnographer's experiences among Indians, became more popular in the 1960s and 1970s. In this way, Marriott's writings anticipated later ethnographic approaches. While Marriott's chief contribution to the field of anthropology was her focus on gender, she was hardly the first to do so; instead, she was an extraordinarily successful employer of techniques pioneered by others such as Underhill. Acknowledging those debts and continuities do not lessen the significance of Marriott's work, but illustrate the ways in which she more fully consummated trends and traditions which had emerged in the

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[23]See Gretchen M. Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands, *American Indian Women: Telling their Lives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 49; Helen Carr, *Inventing the American Primitive: Politics, Gender and the Representation of Native American Literary Traditions, 1789-1936* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 242-43.

region.

Eve Ball (1890-1984) took a different approach in her writings, utilizing oral history to present American Indian perspectives. She wrote six books and more than one hundred articles on frontier and Indian research in the Southwest for *True West* and *Frontier Times*, popular periodicals on the American West. Ball recognized the importance of oral history long before it became a widely used methodology by professional historians. She began interviewing the Mescalero and Chiricahua Apaches living on the Mescalero Apache Reservation near her home in Ruidoso, New Mexico, in the 1930s and 1940s.[24] Prior to living in Ruidoso, Ball was an educator, receiving her M.A. in education in 1934 at Kansas State University. She had always been intrigued by the Southwest and moved to New Mexico after a career in elementary and secondary education.

The process by which Ball first became acquainted with her Apache neighbors is telling. Apache women would pass by Ball's home on their way into town and ask for water. Soon Ball provided lemonade and cookies for her guests along with a comfortable place to sit in the shade. Word spread throughout the reservation of Ball's welcoming home and her interest in preserving their heritage through oral history interviews.[25] *Indeh, An Apache Odyssey* (1980) is a compilation of interviews made by Ball with sixty-seven Apaches from the Mescalero Indian Reservation. As Ball states in the preface,

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[24]Kimberly Moore Buchanan, "Eve Ball," in *Historians of the American Frontier: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. John R. Wunder (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 46-55.

[25]Lynda A. Sanchez, "Eve Ball," *New Mexico Magazine* 59 (April 1981): 26.

"this is not an attempt to write a definitive history – many people and events aren't known by informants – lost forever – nobody was sufficiently interested in securing it while there were living participants and witnesses to relate their experiences."[26] It took Ball several decades to get her books published, due to the reluctance of presses and academics to accept the inherent value of oral history. Only in recent decades has oral history become a more acceptable methodology. Her interviews with the nephews of Geronimo and Victorio inspired Ball to tell Apache history from "*their side of the fence.*"[27] Prior to Ball's work, most of the research on Apaches had been written from a non-Apache perspective.

Angie Debo corresponded with Ball while researching and writing *Geronimo.* Ball provided helpful guidance and research materials for Debo.[28] In fact, there are parallels between the two writers. Both writers positioned themselves as writers of "truth" and told their narratives, they claimed, from an Indian perspective.

Other women such as Muriel Wright, Grace Raymond Hebard, Mari Sandoz, and Louise Phelps Kellogg worked as public historians, protecting local history for future generations often as leaders of their state historical societies. Wright worked as an institution builder at the Oklahoma Historical Society, preserving both American Indian

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[26]Eve Ball, *Indeh, An Apache Odyssey* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), xix.

[27]Sanchez, "Eve Ball," 27.

[28]Angie Debo, *Geronimo: The Man, His Time, His Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976).

history and settler history through her active historic preservation program and role as editor of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* from the 1940s to the 1970s. The *Chronicles of Oklahoma* served as Wright's vehicle through which to promote her interpretation of Oklahoma history, an interpretation emphasizing the positive aspects of state history.

As we examine the life of Muriel Wright and all of her efforts to promote and shape Oklahoma history, we can also look one generation prior to Wright at an earlier champion of state history, Grade Raymond Hebard (1861-1936). Hebard wrote "highly romanticized" books depicting Wyoming history which appealed to a statewide readership.[29] For example, *The History and Government of Wyoming* (1904), sustained eleven editions. Other works include *The Bozeman Trail* (1922) and *Sacajawea* (1933).[30] Her career path as a civil engineer brought her to Wyoming where she worked as a draftsman in the land office of the U.S. Surveyor General at Cheyenne in the 1880s. During this time, she also actively campaigned for women's suffrage and was on the committee of three women which petitioned for women's suffrage in Wyoming in 1889. Two years later, Hebard served as secretary and trustee for the board of trustees of the University of Wyoming at Laramie. She taught courses in political economy and served as department head until her retirement in 1931. Simultaneously, Hebard worked as the university librarian and with this title she acquired an extensive collection on Wyoming history and the American West. Finally, Hebard was the first woman admitted to the

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[29]Jennifer Scanlon and Shaaron Cosner, "Grace Raymond Hebard," in *American Women Historians, 1700-1990s* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1996), 107.

[30]Grace Raymond Hebard, *The Bozeman Trail* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1922); Grace Raymond Hebard, *Sacajawea* (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1933).

Wyoming bar in 1898.[31] As Virginia Scharff argues, an evaluation of Hebard as a "good historian" is not the point. Perhaps Hebard romanticized her accounts, but she took a sincere interest in preserving the history of her state and shared this information with the public at large.[32] She exemplifies this tradition of "hidden scholars" throughout the American West, women who were educated, enjoyed the western landscape, studied native peoples, and shared their findings with the general public.

Grace Raymond Hebard represents the many women who preserved their state and local histories at the turn of the century. Hebard's varied careers and experiences represent many unmarried and mobile women who settled in the West during the early twentieth century. Hebard took great interest in her genealogy, similar in many ways to Muriel Wright's interest in family. Both women were powerful forces in their state's efforts to preserve and promote state history. Both, in fact, worked tirelessly in historic preservation marking, preserving and inscribing meaning to historic sites. In Wyoming, Hebard researched and marked such sites as the Oregon Trail and Fort Laramie.

Like Muriel Wright, other women created careers for themselves in state historical societies. Frederick Jackson Turner described Louise Phelps Kellogg (1862-1942) as one of his most important students, yet her career remained in the State Historical Society of

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[31]Susan Horan, "Guide to Grace Raymond Hebard Papers," 2, Grace Raymond Hebard Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming; Scanlon and Cosner, "Grace Raymond Hebard," in *American Women Historians, 1700-1990s*, 107-8.

[32]Virginia Scharff, "What if Molly Had a Ph.D.? Women Professors and the Civilizing of Wyoming," paper presented at the American Heritage Center Symposium, "Schoolmarms and Scholars: Women Educators of the American West," 19 September 1998, American Heritage Center, Laramie, Wyoming.

Wisconsin rather than academia. According to Dwight L. Smith, Kellogg was the mainstay in the development of the state's historical society and its journal. Her greatest disappointment, however, was that she never received an academic appointment at the University of Wisconsin.[33] If Kellogg was indeed one of Turner's promising students, how then could her career remain relegated to the historical society rather than the academy? It would appear that gender played a role in this decision.

At Wisconsin, Kellogg received competitive graduate scholarships and worked as Turner's assistant. The American Historical Association published her dissertation, "The American Colonial Charter: A Study of English Administration in Relation Thereto, Chiefly After 1688" and awarded it the Justin Winsor Prize.[34] She received her Ph.D. in 1901. Upon graduation, Kellogg received a research post in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. She served an important role at the historical society as so many other women did during this period. Grace Raymond Hebard and Muriel Wright are only two examples of such women who along with Kellogg collected, catalogued and preserved state history. In addition to her interest in local history, Kellogg participated in national historical organizations. She became the first woman president of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, now the Organization of American Historians, in 1930.

In another example, Mari Sandoz (1896-1966) worked as a researcher at the

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[33]Dwight L. Smith, "Louise Phelps Kellogg," in *Historians of the American Frontier: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. John R. Wunder (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 352.

[34]Louise Phelps Kellogg, "The American Colonial Charter: A Study of English Administration in Relation Thereto, Chiefly After 1688," (Annual Report, American Historical Association 1903, 1:187-341); Smith, 352.

Nebraska State Historical Society during the 1930s and 1940s.[35] This was a common avenue of employment for women who shared an interest in historical research and writing. Prior to her work at the historical society, beginning in 1922 Sandoz enrolled as a special adult student in creative writing at the University of Nebraska after several years of teaching in rural schools and a failed marriage. In addition to research, she taught creative writing courses at the University of Colorado, Indiana University and the University of Wisconsin.[36]

Again, the deep regional connection is evident in Sandoz's novels and illustrate her ties to the landscape of the Great Plains. Sandoz grew up on a farm in Nebraska, the eldest of six children. Like Angie Debo, Sandoz's upbringing was filled with the emotional joys of pioneering as well as the accompanying hardships. Sandoz's temperamental father, as described in *Old Jules* (1935), brought instability and abuse into their home, and Sandoz makes it clear that physical abuse against women was commonplace in frontier communities.[37]

The Great Plains remained the backdrop for all of her novels and nonfiction.

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[35]William E. Unrau, "Mari Sandoz," in *Historians of the American Frontier: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. John R. Wunder (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 575-85.

[36]William E. Unrau, "Mari Sandoz," in *Historians of the American Frontier: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. John R. Wunder (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 575-85.

[37]Mari Sandoz, *Old Jules* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1935); Melody Graulich, "Violence Against Women: Power Dynamics in Literature of the Western Family," in *The Women's West*, ed. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 113.

Describing a regional setting was important to Sandoz. During the research for *Crazy Horse* (1942), for instance, Sandoz visited Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations and the battle sites to visualize the historical setting.[38] Similarly, Sandoz spent five weeks on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Montana during her work on *Cheyenne Autumn* (1953).[39] When Sandoz described the U.S. Army's effort to "tame" the West from the 1860s to the1880s, she tended to position herself on the Indians' side of the story and depicted U.S. military leaders as callous and inhumane. Although her works have enjoyed popularity among the general public, critics point to fictional embellishment in her nonfiction and the absence of documentation. Her literary success was not immediate. For example, *Old Jules* was rejected by more than twelve publishers before Little, Brown accepted it in 1935.[40]

Many women during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s wrote popular histories of the American West, particularly on Native Americans, intended to appeal to the general public. As a non-academic research historian Debo was part of this tradition. Her books from the 1930s and early 1940s, including *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* and *And Still the Waters Run*, demonstrate Debo's role as a precursor of ethnohistory. Not only were her books readable and popular, but they also incorporated Debo's

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[38]Mari Sandoz, *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942).

[39]Mari Sandoz, *Cheyenne Autumn* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953).

[40]Unrau, "Mari Sandoz," in *Historians of the American Frontier*, 576, 581-82.

deliberate "Indian-centered" perspective. Many of these women had a literary background which enhanced their popular appeal. Alice Marriott and Ruth Underhill, for instance, both received undergraduate degrees in English and English literature. Critics often discounted their texts as "too literary." In addition, both Marriott and Underhill made connections between Indian women and non-Indian women which made their works popular with a non-academic readership.

Often these writers supported themselves through freelance writing, small research grants and part-time employment. Most remained single throughout their lives, and those who married quite often divorced. In many cases, popular writers did not have the professional credentials that came with advanced graduate training in history or anthropology. Nonetheless, these histories contributed to the representations of native peoples during this period. Freelance writers such as Alice Marriott, Mari Sandoz, Angie Debo, and Eve Ball were compelled out of financial necessity to attract a loyal public who would purchase their books. In a similar vein, women such as Muriel Wright, Louise Phelps Kellogg, Mari Sandoz, and Grace Raymond Hebard worked as preservers of culture, protecting local history for future generations often as leaders of their state historical societies.

Few Native American women participated in what Joan M. Jensen calls the "anthropological literary tradition" during the early decades of the twentieth century. Ella Cara Deloria (1899-1971), a Yankton Dakota, seems to have been an exception.[41]

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[41]Joan M. Jensen, *One Foot on the Rockies: Women and Creativity in the Modern American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 117.

Deloria grew up on Sanding Rock reservation, in South Dakota. Her father had converted to Christianity and became an Episcopal priest. Deloria was educated in mission boarding schools before attending Oberlin College in 1911. She transferred to the teachers' college at Columbia University, took courses from Franz Boas, and completed her degree in 1915. She taught for a number of years at Haskell Institute, a Bureau of Indian Affairs school in Kansas.[42] Surveys of Deloria's life and writings do not indicate that she received advanced graduate degrees in anthropology, yet training with Boas and Ruth Benedict at Columbia together with her fieldwork, qualify her as an anthropologist, just as Alice Marriott's fieldwork qualified her.[43]

Deloria resigned from Haskell Institute to devote more time to her ethnographic fieldwork on the Sioux. She conducted interviews with elders at Standing Rock, Pine Ridge, and Rosebud reservations on Siouan language and culture. This fieldwork produced *Dakota Texts* (1932), a collection of folk tales and legends, and *Dakota Grammar* (1941), which she co-authored with Boas.[44]

Ella Deloria was a cultural mediator, according to Beatrice Medicine, who "stood

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[42]Beatrice Medicine, "Ella Cara Deloria," in *Women Anthropologists*, ed. Ute Gacs, et al. (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1988), 45-50.

[43]Ibid.; Raymond J. Demallie, "Ella Cara Deloria," in *Native American Women* vol. II, ed. Barbara Sicherman, et al. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University), 183-85; Janet L. Finn, "Ella Cara Deloria and Mourning Dove: Writing for Cultures, Writing Against the Grain," in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 131-47.

[44]Ella Deloria, *Dakota Texts* (New York: G. E. Stechert and Co, 1932); Ella Deloria and Franz Boas, *Dakota Grammar* (Memoirs of the National Academy of Sciences 23, Second Memoir. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941).

within and outside her own culture."[45] Although she was a member of her community, she was also able to become an observer of her community through her role as a native anthropologist. Deloria also assumed a rather precarious role in her relationship with Boas. She struggled to balance her identity as an anthropologist in her own right with her utility to Boas as an informant. The difficulty of Deloria's position becomes clear in a letter to Boas: "To go at it like a white man, for me, an Indian, is to throw up an immediate barrier between myself and my people."[46]

Deloria used her position as a native anthropologist to educate the predominantly white general public. She viewed her "mission" in the following way: "To make the Dakota people understandable, as human beings, to the white people who have to deal with them."[47] *Speaking of Indians* (1944), according to Medicine, Deloria wrote primarily for a white audience.[48] In the text, Deloria displays her Christian beliefs, but she also discusses traditional Dakota spirituality, as seen in her discussion of the sun dance.[49] As Janet L. Finn argues, the intention of women like Deloria was "to write for cross-cultural understanding by writing against the grain of dominant representations of

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[45]Medicine, "Ella Cara Deloria," 47.

[46]Ella Deloria to Franz Boas, 11 July 1932, quoted in Finn, "Ella Cara Deloria and Mourning Dove," 140.

[47]Ella Deloria to H. E. Beebe, 1952, quoted in Finn, "Ella Cara Deloria and Mourning Dove," 132.

[48]Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (New York: Friendship Press, 1944).

[49]Medicine, "Ella Cara Deloria," 48.

Native Americans."[50]

Deloria supported herself through part-time museum employment, small research grants, lecturing and consulting work as many women anthropologists and historians did during the early twentieth century. The importance of Deloria's work was not always recognized. For example, *Waterlily*, a novel about a young Dakota women's experiences on the plains in the late nineteenth century, was completed in 1944, but not published until 1988.[51]

Although the focus of this discussion centers on non-academic research historians, we must also consider those women historians who found teaching opportunities at women's colleges and others who obtained tenure-track positions at research institutions. Annie Heloise Abel (1873-1947), for example, received her Ph.D. in history at Cornell University in 1905. She began teaching history at Wells College the same year. She joined the faculty at the Woman's College of Baltimore as an instructor, associate professor, and professor and head of the department by 1914. She then taught at Smith College in 1915 and served as associate professor and professor until 1922. In the midst of heavy teaching loads, Abel produced three works on the Five Tribes during the Civil War and Reconstruction: *The American Indian as Slaveholder and Secessionist: An Omitted Chapter in the Diplomatic History of the Southern Confederacy* (1915), *The American Indian as Participant in the Civil War* (1919), and *The American Indian Under*

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[50]Finn, "Ella Cara Deloria and Mourning Dove," 132.

[51]Ella Deloria, *Waterlily* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

Reconstruction (1925).[52]

In a second example, Rachel Caroline Eaton (1869-1938), a Cherokee born in Indian Territory, graduated from the Cherokee Female Seminary in Tahlequah in 1887. She returned to the Cherokee Nation to teach in the public schools and at the Cherokee Female Seminary before attending graduate school. She received her M.A. in 1911 and her Ph.D. in 1919 from the University of Chicago.[53] Unlike Angie Debo, who had also attended Chicago for her master's degree during the early 1920s, Eaton had no difficulty securing employment at the college and university levels. She was head of the history department at State College for Women in Columbus, Missouri, professor of history at Lake Erie College in Paineville, Ohio, dean of women and the history department head at Trinity University in Wacahachie, Texas, and superintendent of schools in Rogers County, Oklahoma. The majority of her books focused on Cherokee history and Oklahoma history. Her dissertation was published as *John Ross and the Cherokee Indians* (1910). Muriel Wright called Eaton the "first [Oklahoma] woman of Indian descent to achieve distinction as an educator and writer of history."[54]

Erna Gunther (1896-1982) and Viola Edmundson Garfield (1899-1983) were both cultural anthropologists at the University of Washington. Gunther became a specialist in

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[52]Jennifer Scanlon and Shaaron Cosner, "Annie Heloise Abel," in *American Women Historians, 1700-1990s* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1996), 1-2.

[53]Jennifer Scanlon and Shaaron Cosner, "Rachel Caroline Eaton," in *American Women Historians, 1700-1990s* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1996), 65-66.

[54]Muriel H. Wright, "Rachel Caroline Eaton, 1869-1938," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 16 (December 1938): 509.

the ethnology, ethnobotany, and ethnohistory of Native Americans of the Northwest Coast. She was also instrumental in promoting public appreciation for Northwest Coast Indian art. As an undergraduate at Barnard College, she took courses with Boas. After she married Leslie Spier, a fellow student of Boas, Spier accepted a position at the University of Washington and the couple moved to Seattle. During the 1920s, Gunther completed the M.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia with Boas.[55]

Gunther was unable to obtain permanent faculty status at the University of Washington until after she and Spier separated in 1930. Spier negotiated a faculty position for her when he resigned from the university. Coincidentally, the divorce worked in Gunther's favor, because married women at the university were removed as part of the budget cuts of the early 1930s. For twenty-five of her forty-three years at the University of Washington, Gunther served as chair of the anthropology department. She was also the director of the Washington State Museum on campus.[56]

Garfield was also a student of Boas. Her research focused on the Tsimshian of British Columbia and Alaska, and the totemic art of the north Pacific Coast. Prior to graduate studies, Garfield worked as a teacher for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. She married Charles Garfield in 1924.[57]

Although both anthropologists published regularly, Jay Miller notes that they

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[55]Pamela T. Amoss, "Erna Gunther," in *Women Anthropologists*, 133-39; Viola E. Garfield and Pamela T. Amoss, "Erna Gunther," *American Anthropologist* 86 (1984): 394-99; Jay Miller, "Viola Edmundson Garfield," in *Women Anthropologists*, 109-14.

[56]Amoss, "Erna Gunther," 134.

[57]Miller, "Viola Edmundson Garfield," 109-10.

were criticized by colleagues for their efforts to promote native art with the public. "This was considered to be lacking in scholarly dignity for serious academics," Miller maintains.[58] Gunther was an advocate of Indian rights. She opposed the federal policy of terminating Indian treaty status. On the local level, she helped Indian women organize the Seattle Indian Women's League which maintained a gallery for native artists to sell their art.[59]

Although Gunther was an advocate for Indian rights, she did not assume a public role regarding women's rights. She considered herself, however, a role model for younger women and did support other women academics.[60] This was a typical view of professional women during the 1920s and 1930s.

Many women writers who focused on local history witnessed a greater appreciation for their state and regional studies. Dorothy O. Johansen (1904-), for example, specialized in the history of the Pacific Northwest. She received her B.A. from Reed College in 1933, followed by her M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Washington. After completing her M.A., Johansen taught at Reed where she became full professor in 1958.[61] When asked about some of the major changes in the study of history that she had observed during her career, Johansen turned to regional history. "I think a

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[58]Ibid., 135.

[59]Garfield and Amoss, "Erna Gunther," 397.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Jennifer Scanlon and Shaaron Cosner, "Dorothy O. Johansen," in *American Women Historians, 1700-1990s* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1996), 122.

certain respectability has come to regional history, or local history, which didn't used to be part of it."[62] She coauthored a popular textbook entitled, *Empire of the Columbia: A History of the Pacific Northwest* (1957), with Charles M. Gates. The textbook went through several editions and was finally discontinued in the early 1980s.[63]

A continuing trend among some women writers was their unwillingness to champion women's issues in their writings. Many of them focused on American Indian issues and championed self-determination, but were reluctant to examine gender with the same scrutiny. If anything, these women wanted to be treated as equals with men, and disregarded their gender as part of such a strategy. When asked if her career had been satisfying to her, Johansen replied yes. "I was one of the few women in the profession," she stated, "[and] I refused to acknowledge the fact that I was any different from the men with regard to teaching and to my field of history." When asked to elaborate, she said: "I've never thought of myself as a woman teaching history. I am an historian teaching history; my sex doesn't have a thing to do with it."[64]

The role of gender remains a central theme in this discussion of women in two disciplines largely controlled by men. With the increasing participation of women in higher education beginning in the late nineteenth century, more women entered the professions of history and anthropology but gender discrimination persisted in both

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[62]Dorothy O. Johansen, interview by Linda Brody, 12 May 1980, transcript, 29, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon [hereafter cited as Johansen OH].

[63]Dorothy O. Johansen and Charles M. Gates, *Empire of the Columbia: A History of the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Harper, 1957); Johansen OH, 22-25.

[64]Johansen OH, 37.

disciplines. University employment tended to be a haven for men, with women's career paths destined for women's colleges, government, historical societies, museums and freelance writing. But the general trend among these women was to study native peoples as a means of offering a general social critique rather than commenting specifically on gender discrimination based on personal experience. In order to fulfill the professional research styles of the time, women often assumed methods and narrative styles which men had created. "Women could speak," Jensen maintains, "but only in an echo of the male voice."[65] This is only a generalization, however, for some women such as Grace Raymond Hebard and Alice Marriott, consciously challenged such stringent gender roles. Many of the writers under consideration here wanted to be evaluated for their work, not their gender. Debo and Wright, for example, did not champion gender as category of analysis in their texts.

These women writers, as historians and anthropologists, carved a niche for themselves as interpreters of the American West and its native peoples. Many of them positioned their interpretations from an Indian perspective or claimed to represent Indian voices. These varying perspectives, from the assimilationist position of Flora Warren Seymour and Muriel Wright to the oral history approach of Eve Ball and Angie Debo to the more literary styles of Mari Sandoz, Ruth Underhill and Alice Marriott, present the complexity of women as interpreters of the West. They, above all, shared the common desire to write about Indian communities chiefly for a non-native readership. For these

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[65]Jensen, *One Foot on the Rockies*, 118.

women historians and anthropologists, writing was their own instrument, their voice.

Alice Marriott, Muriel Wright, and Angie Debo took three different paths on their journeys through the American West. Marriott was an ethnologist who spent time observing Native American communities, whether during government employment with the Indian Arts and Crafts Board or on her own as a freelance writer. Her academic training extended no further than a bachelor's degree and some graduate work, and some anthropologists – especially those with doctorates – may not consider her work scholarly. Barbara A. Babcock and Nancy J. Parezo have included her in their studies of women anthropologists in the American Southwest in which her fieldwork and publications have merited her a place.[66] Wright made a career for herself at the Oklahoma Historical Society as the editor of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* and as a crucial member of the society's historic preservation program. From her position as a public historian at the historical society she wielded extensive power. She determined which sites in Oklahoma were considered historically significant and at the same time she determined the journal's content. Debo attained the doctorate in history and secured a position at a teacher's college in Texas. Through the choices that she made, Debo returned to her hometown of Marshall, Oklahoma, and spent the greater part of her life as a non-academic research historian, primarily writing about American Indian issues. Marriott, Wright, and Debo participated in the larger tradition of western women writers during the first half of the

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[66]Barbara A. Babcock and Nancy J. Parezo, *Daughters of the Desert: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest, 1880-1980* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988); Nancy J. Parezo, ed., *Hidden Scholars: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).

twentieth century and made significant contributions in the disciplines of anthropology and history as precursors to later models of experimental ethnography, Indian history with agency, and ethnohistory. They were western women who examined Native Americans through the lens of local history.

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