

1. Most Americans know the names of few women who lived on the frontier except perhaps for [Laura Ingalls Wilder](#). What did you learn about those women from reading about [Cynthia Ann Parker](#) and her contemporaries?
2. A Comanche male was “gloriously, astoundingly free,” but a Comanche woman was “a second-class citizen,” S.C. Gwynne says. [Page 52] Do you agree?
3. Gwynne says it’s hard to avoid making “moral judgments about the Comanches” when you read the memoir of [Rachel Parker Plummer](#), who was captured along with her cousin Cynthia Ann but soon separated from her. [Page 43] Rachel’s story involves gang rape, the torture and murder of her 7-week-old baby, and other horrific acts. What moral judgments, if any, did you make about the [Comanches](#)?
4. The stereotype of the “noble savage” has existed since the time of James Fennimore Cooper, and stereotypes may contain a germ of truth. [Page 51] Was there anything noble about the Comanches?
5. Gen. George Armstrong [Custer](#) became world-famous after his defeat by several tribes at Little Big Horn, and [Ranald Mackenzie](#) became obscure after his victory over the Comanches. [Page 2] Why do you think the two generals had different fates?
6. The U.S. government failed to end Comanche raids sooner partly because many Easterners believed that “the Indian wars were principally the fault of white men” and that “the Comanches and other troublesome tribes would live in peace if only they were treated properly.” [Page 223] Gwynne says they were wrong: No one who knew about the horrors of Comanche attacks “could possibly have believed that the tribe was either peaceable or blameless.” [Page 224] Did he persuade you of that?
7. Gwynne also argues that the U.S. “had betrayed and lied to Native American tribes more times than anyone could possibly count” [Page 230] and that the Office of Indian affairs was “one of the most corrupt, venal, and incompetent government agencies in American history.” [Page 230] To what degree, if at all, were Comanche attacks justified by how the government treated them?
8. *Empire of the Summer Moon* cuts back and forth between the stories of its major figures (Cynthia Parker and others captured in the 1836 raid on her family’s fort; her son, [Quanah](#), and her husband, [Peta Nocona](#); the Indian fighter Ranald Mackenzie; and others). How well does the cross-cutting work? Could follow the threads of the story easily or did you sometimes have to reread parts of the book?
9. Especially after the Civil War, the extreme violence of the Comanche attacks “amounted to what we would today consider to be political terrorism,” Gwynne says. Is it fair to compare the tribe to today’s terrorists?
10. *Empire of the Summer Moon* gives many example of Comanche brutality. The first pages of the book note, for example, after the Salt Creek Massacre, an Army captain reported seeing evidence of beheadings and victims whose “fingers, toes, and private parts had been cut off and stuck in their mouths.” [Page 4] Did Gwynne ever go too far or describe violence that seemed unnecessary to the story? Why or why not?