

All I See Is Violence

Angie Elita Newell

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In the multigenerational historical novel All I See Is Violence, the indomitable Plains Tribes face war and the complexities of race, identity, and generational trauma.

Angie Elita Newell's potent historical novel *All I See Is Violence* covers a war for land, identity, and justice.

Covering the tumultuous Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, also known as Custer's Last Stand, the book showcases the perspectives of General Custer; Little Wolf, a pregnant Native American woman who played a pivotal role in Custer's demise; and Nancy, a more contemporary descendant of Little Wolf who grapples with the ongoing challenges faced by Native Americans in 1976, highlighting the intergenerational impact of historical atrocities and the fight for recognition. Through the generations, the Plains Tribes remain determined and resilient despite the hardships they face, including land theft, deceitful treaties, and brutal conflicts culminating in genocide. There are also stories of love, family, and resistance: Nancy defends her interracial relationship against vicious racism; her son Timothy is active with the American Indian Movement in their fight for justice.

The book's characterizations are somewhat archetypal. General Custer—who is referenced using multiple nicknames, muddying the text—is constructed as a representative of the banality of war planning. Through him, distant bureaucrats manipulate the lives of others for financial gain. Their desire for wealth and power prompts Custer's pursuit of gold in the Black Hills of the Dakota Territory. At his opposite, Little Wolf exemplifies her people's spiritual connection to the land. And Nancy, who researches her ancestral history to learn to make decisions about her future, wrestles between her desire to start fresh with a mild-mannered white man, Joshua, and social expectations to stay with her imprisoned husband and the father of her four sons, George. Joshua is present most as a foil for bombastic and violent George, though; his contributions are otherwise lackluster, including his passionless exchanges with Nancy.

Little Wolf's observations of the world around her infuse the otherwise straightforward prose with life: she observes dappled ponies, enchanting summer festivals, and hawk-feather adornments with care. Elsewhere, the book's descriptions are more matter-of-fact, as where they cover poverty on the reservation via Nancy, who sees rats scurrying through homes.

The plot is dense, covering three different perspectives in three quite different contexts. The exposition is packed tight into each chapter, with over a century of history recounted in just over three hundred pages. But the pacing is uneven, and the transitions between time periods and perspectives are abrupt. Custer and Little Wolf live at the same time period and discuss the same places and people, which sometimes obscures whose perspective is being shown. Still, all three storylines conclude in unexpected ways that assuage their individual suspense.

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KAITLYN CURLEE (September 30, 2023)

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