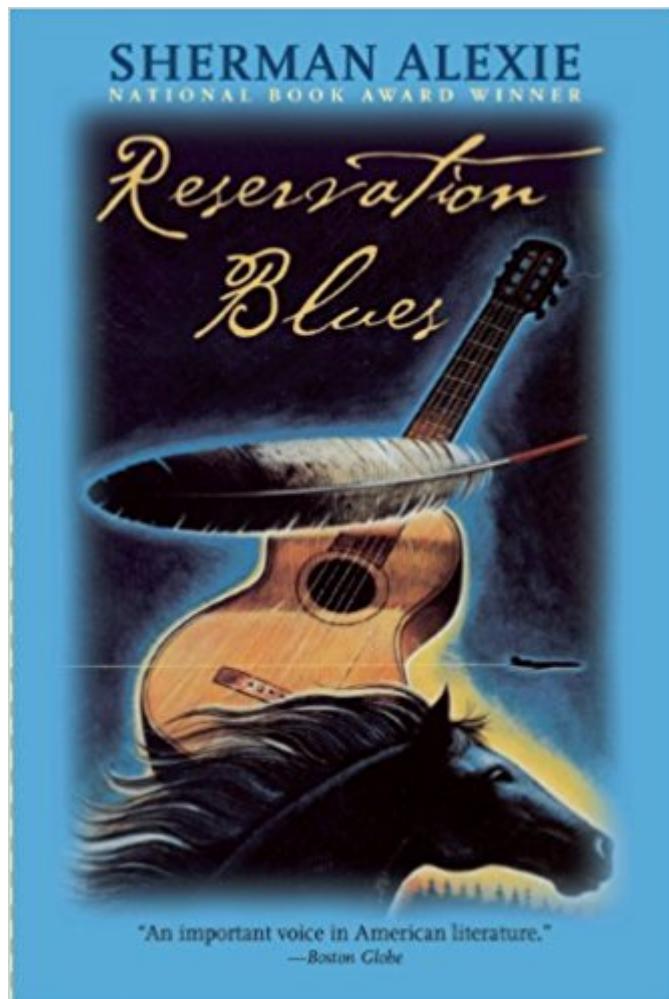


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# Reservation Blues



## Synopsis

"Many may remember the tale of Robert Johnson, the musician who sold his soul to the devil at the crossroads in exchange for being the best blues guitarist around. What many may not know is that after this tragic deal in Mississippi, Johnson ended up in a small town on the Spokane Indian reservation in Washington state—at least that's how author Sherman Alexie tells it. In his new book *Reservation Blues*, Alexie spins the fictional tale of Johnson's adventure at a new crossroads, this one in a small town called Wellpinit, Wash. It is here that he comes to seek out Big Mom, a local medicine woman, and, in so doing, leaves his famous guitar in the hands of misfit storyteller Thomas Builds-the-Fire. Builds-the-Fire, brought back from Alexie's last book, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, takes up Johnson's magical guitar and, along with Victor Joseph, Junior Polatkin and two Flathead Indian sisters named Chess and Checkers, goes on to build a reservation blues band that takes the Northwest by storm... As the band plays club after club, Alexie uses music as a crosscultural bridge, without compromising the cultural integrity of his characters. The band members seem to take on the gamut of problems faced by Indians on the reservation today, battling everything from alcoholism to violence, political corruption to sexual abuse. Ghosts from the past, both personal and historical haunt the musicians, serving both to hold them back and urge them on. It would seem that the scars of abuse run deep." (The Commercial Appeal, June 11, 1995)

## Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Grove Press; Reprint edition (February 7, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802141900

ISBN-13: 978-0802141903

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.8 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 169 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #17,601 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #23 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Native American Studies #36 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Literature & Fiction > Science Fiction #55 in Books > Literature & Fiction > United States > Native American

## Customer Reviews

The characters of Alexie's acclaimed short fiction (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in*

Heaven)-Thomas Builds-the-Fire, Victor, Junior, the habitues of the Spokane Indian reservation-return in this superb first novel, a lyric comic tale with magical realist overtones. A stranger arrives on the reservation carrying a magic guitar, which he's been given as part of his bargain with "the Gentleman" for blues immortality. Now he's trying to lose guitar, devil and deal. Taking the instrument off his hands, Thomas soon forms an all-Indian R&B band with Victor and Junior. The group, Coyote Springs, plays small clubs and bars and eventually goes on tour. They even attract their own groupies-white women Betty and Veronica and Indian sisters Chess and Checkers Warm Water. Will they succeed and, if they do, will they lose their souls? Alexie, a Spokane/Coeur D'Alene Indian, excels at creating colorful characters, and he fills his narrative with subtle and affectionate homages to other contemporary Native American writers (Jim Northrup, Thomas King et al.). Hilarious but poignant, filled with enchantments yet dead-on accurate with regard to modern Indian life, this tour de force will leave readers wondering if Alexie himself hasn't made a deal with the Gentleman in order to do everything so well. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Alexie follows up his story collection, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (LJ 9/1/93), with a first novel about an all-Indian Catholic rock band called Coyote Springs. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book, written 20 years ago, is one of the best books I've read in 2016. It's an excellent semi-autobiographical novel about life among modern Native Americans. It's entertaining, funny, sad, beautifully written, with an almost mythical beauty, but clearly it is a true reflection of the trials of Native Americans in the USA. There are so many other reviews which describe the book better than I can - so I'll stop here. But I highly recommend the book for young adults, and also for oldsters like me.

The story of Coyote Springs' struggles for an identity and purpose transcend time and place. Blending the sorrow of Blues music with evocative Native American lyrics, the heartbreak of institutional betrayal belies the traditional values and beliefs of the peoples of the Spokane Reservation. The band's struggles mirror the people's history of harvesting despair amidst the influences of anger, alcoholism, oppression, and religion.

Alexie brings yet another wonderfully poignant story of life on and off the "rez". With humor, this

story tells us more than tomes of history.

This book was a good read. If you have read "The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian" by Sherman Alexie (the same author as this book), then you may enjoy this book.

This is another great one from Sherman Alexie. He tells marvelous tales that fully describe the Native American experience. Of course Reservation Blues is sad but it is also a very funny book. I may get the Kipling quote a little bit wrong but here goes a fine rundown on Reservation Blues:"I have told the tale of our livesFor a sheltered peoples mirth.In jesting guise but yea are wiseAnd yea know what the jest is worth."

Coyote Springs is an Spokane Indian musical group that starts as a trio and becomes a quintet when sisters from the Flathead Rez join in at one of the gigs. Alcoholism, suicide and car problems are explored from the Native angle, along with job problems, commodity food and reservation entanglements.

This tale weaves Native American myths and magic with Catholic practicality to show the conflicting culture reservation Indians grow up with. It is harsh and unapologetic about the harm the white society did to the Indians and the harm that they do to themselves. Interesting and flawed characters are well portrayed and realistic. I recommend it to those who look for a story that is tragic yet somehow hopeful..

This book is just another in the insightful, down to earth stories Sherman Alexie tells so well. His books flow together like streams in the upper mountains and give me the same connection to the earth, humanity, and life.

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