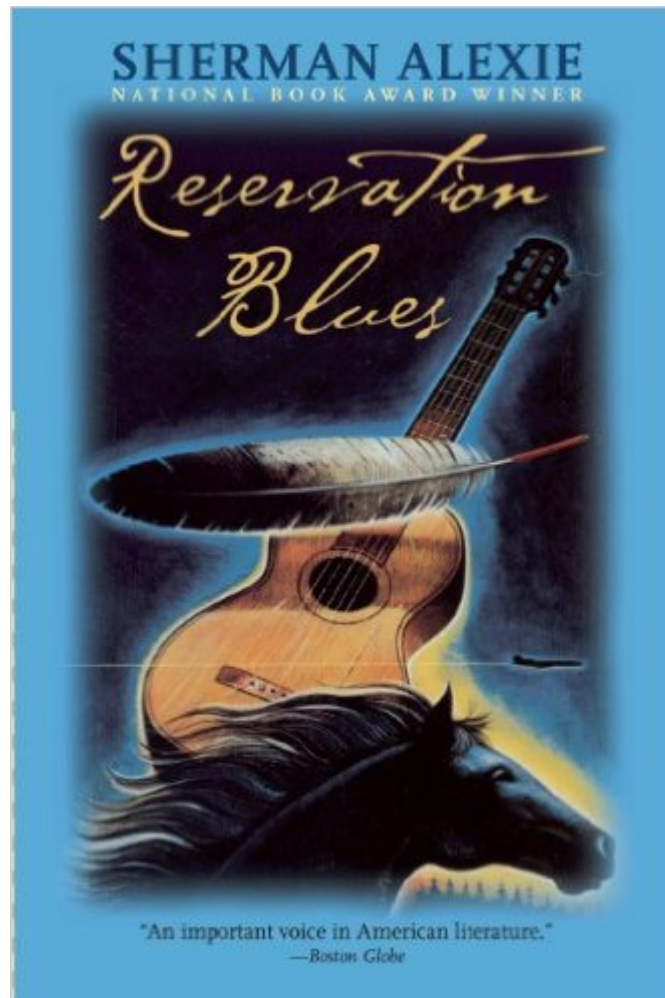


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# Reservation Blues



## 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

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## Customer Reviews

*Reservation Blues*, which won the American Book Award in 1995, is a touching look at modern life

on the Spokane Indian Reservation. When legendary blues guitarist Robert Johnson shows up on the rez with his enchanted guitar and a dark secret, Thomas Builds-the-Fire begins a journey of self-discovery and painful realization that will forever change him and his friends. After the magical guitar ends up in his hands, Thomas forms Coyote Springs, a band made up of two seemingly unmotivated drunks Victor and Junior, and two Flathead Indian sisters, Checkers and Chess. The book chronicles the bands' humble beginnings playing at the local bar on the rez to a hopeful encounter with record executives in New York City. It is within this context that Alexie is able to confront serious issues facing the Indian community today with his own subtle sense of humor. The straight forward plot is layered with metaphorical connections to a general Indian past, while each character is forced to confront haunting personal issues. For Thomas, it is the embarrassment of his alcoholic itinerant father. For Victor, it is the sexual abuse he faced at the hand of the reservation priest. For Checkers and Chess, it is a feeling of loneliness, the search for a "good Indian man," and being seen as outcasts on a reservation not their own. Ironically, their music is the only thing which gives them a feeling of power and inner strength, yet it is the opportunities provided by this music that alienate them from their own people. Alexie believes the problems facing Indians today are the same faced by their ancestors 100 years ago. An obvious example is the names of the record executives for "Cavalry Records," Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Wright, and Mr.

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