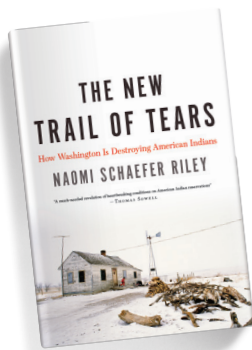


THE NEW TRAIL OF TEARS

How Washington Is Destroying American Indians



“A much-needed revelation of heart-breaking conditions on American Indian reservations”

—THOMAS SOWELL

If you want to know why American Indians have the highest rates of poverty of any racial group, why suicide is the leading cause of death among Indian men, why native women are two and a half times more likely to be raped than the national average and why gang violence affects American Indian youth more than any other group, do not look to history.

There is no doubt that white settlers devastated Indian communities in the 19th, and early 20th centuries. But it is our policies today—denying Indians ownership of their land, refusing them access to the free market and failing to provide the police and legal protections due to them as American citizens—that have turned reservations into small third-world countries in the middle of the richest and freest nation on earth.

The tragedy of our Indian policies demands reexamination immediately—not only because they make the lives of millions of American citizens harder and more dangerous—but also because they represent a microcosm of everything that has gone wrong with modern liberalism. They are the result of decades of politicians and bureaucrats showering a victimized people with money and cultural sensitivity instead of what they truly need—the education, the legal protections, and the autonomy to improve their own situation.

If we are really ready to have a conversation about American Indians, it is time to stop bickering about the names of football teams and institute real reforms that will bring to an end this ongoing national shame.



THE NEW TRAIL OF TEARS REVEALS:

American Indian kids have the worst educational outcomes in the country—despite the fact that the federal, state, and tribal authorities spend more per pupil than the cost of some of the country's most elite schools.

Only 51 percent of American Indian students in 2010 received a high school diploma (down from 54% in 2008).

Despite 100 million dollars a year in federal funding tribal colleges have abysmal success rates. The percentage of students who earn a two-year degree in three years or a four-year degree in six years is 20%.

The Tribal Institute of American Indian Arts in New Mexico spends \$504,000 for each degree it confers—more than MIT and Harvard.

The median age of American Indians is under 30 and by 2050 the population is projected to grow to 8.6 million—as much as 2% of the US population.

American Indians living on reservations don't have the property rights that other Americans have—their land is held in trust by the federal government, rendering it virtually useless.

An estimated one out of every four girls and one out of every six boys in Indian country is molested before the age of 18.

The Indian Child Welfare Act, which gives tribal authorities a say in child custody cases, has violated the rights of Indian children—who are American citizens—in the name of protecting tribal sovereignty.

Native Americans have some of the highest rates of fetal alcohol syndrome in the nation. Among some tribes, the rates are as high as 1.5 to 2.5 per 1,000 live births compared to 0.2 to 1.0 in the general population.

In 2011, the suicide rate for American Indian men ages 15–24 was 57% higher than for the general population. (Suicide is also the leading cause of death for Native American males aged 10 to 14.)

Indian reservations contain natural resources worth nearly \$1.5 trillion, or \$290,000 per tribal member. But “86% of Indian lands with energy or mineral potential remain undeveloped because of Federal control of reservations.

Violent crime on the country's 310 reservations is on average about 2.5 times as high as the national average.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY



NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY is a weekly columnist for the *New York Post* and a former *Wall Street Journal* editor and writer whose work focuses on higher education, religion, philanthropy, and culture. Her book, *'Til Faith Do Us Part: How Interfaith Marriage is Transforming America* (Oxford, 2013), was named an editor's pick by the *New York Times Book Review*. Ms. Riley's writings have appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, the *LA Times*, and the *Washington Post*, among other publications. She appears regularly on Fox News and Fox Business. She has also appeared on Q&A with Brian Lamb as well as the Today Show. She graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University in English and Government. She lives in the suburbs of New York with her husband, Jason, and their three children.

“Naomi Schaefer Riley is a sociologist’s journalist, and more. She takes empirical data seriously, is balanced and fair-minded, and writes superbly.”

—**CHRISTIAN SMITH**, author of *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*

“Riley, a former editor at the *Wall Street Journal*, is neither a cheerleader nor a scold... She brings a careful, nuanced and thoughtful approach to an often contentious subject.”

—**GUSTAV NIEBUHR**

“Engaging and incisive account—combining clear-eyed analysis with polling data and the details of more than a hundred interviews...”

—**W. BRADFORD WILCOX**,
The Wall Street Journal



PRAISE FOR

THE NEW TRAIL OF TEARS

“Clear evidence of the tragedy that results when individual property rights are equated with group rights.”

—AMITY SHLAES,
presidential scholar at the Kings
College and author of *Coolidge and
The Forgotten Man*

“I’ve grubbed in the data regarding American Indian poverty for years, but none of my numbers will have the effect of Naomi Riley’s investigation and prose. Through clear thinking and personal accounts, she articulates why this ignored minority remains in poverty and how they can escape it. *The New Trail of Tears* is a must read if you care about the plight of poor people, in general, and American Indians, in particular.”

—TERRY L. ANDERSON, author of *Unlocking
the Wealth of Indian Nations* and senior fellow at the
Hoover Institution, Stanford University

“*The New Trail of Tears* is a much-needed revelation of heart-breaking conditions on American Indian reservations—and of the attitudes, incentives, and politics that make the people living on those reservations even worse off than other low-income minorities, including American Indians living elsewhere in American society. This book is an insightful and much-needed introduction to a subject that deserves much more public attention than it gets, both for its own sake and for what it reveals about the political and ideological climate of our time.”

—THOMAS SOWELL

“*The New Trail of Tears* is a powerful antidote to the romantic nonsense about the history of American Indian groups that pervades our school curriculum today, and a stinging indictments of the paternalistic public policies that continue to keep most Indians mired in poverty even now. Written in lively and lucid prose, it is my candidate for the book-of-the-year on racial issues in the United States.”

—STEPHAN THERNSTROM, Winthrop Professor
of History Emeritus at Harvard University

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY



Why are American Indians poor?

It's in large part because they have no property rights. Their land is held in trust by the federal government which means they cannot get a mortgage and they cannot get equity.

Why are the educational outcomes of Indian kids so bad even with the significant government funding being contributed to the system?

They have no charter schools. Their Catholic schools are always being put down by tribal governments as being too white. The same is true for Teach for America fellows. And many of the parents simply don't realize that they could have a better system.

Who is in charge of law enforcement on reservations? Does this have a direct effect on the unusually high crime rate?

It's a combination of federal, state and tribal authorities, which has created huge problems for protecting the safety of individual Indians.

Why is child sexual abuse on reservations such a significant issue?

On some reservations, child sexual abuse has become a serious problem. As with other closed communities—Penn State, the Catholic Church, Rotherham, England—there is a tendency to circle the wagons and protect the perpetrators. Federal authorities have been reluctant to get involved—whistleblowers have been fired—because they don't want to be seen as infringing on tribal sovereignty.

Why don't Indians leave the reservations?

Many of them do, which makes the system on reservations even worse. Only the most poor, desperate and uneducated remain.



**Why is unemployment so high on the reservations?
How does Washington make it more difficult for
Indians to become involved in commerce?**

There is not much in the way of a private sector in part because the Bureau of Indian Affairs overregulates every aspect of commerce. If one Indian wanted to sell a piece of land to another Indian in Montana, a bunch of bureaucrats in Washington would have to approve it first.

What is the Indian Child Welfare Act and how does it protect Indian kids?

It doesn't. The Indian Child Welfare Act was passed originally because child-welfare workers were removing Indian kids from homes and giving them to white families simply because their birth families were poor. Today ICWA has meant that Indian parents (even those living off reservations) who want to give up children for adoption are prevented from doing so because the tribe wants them to be raised on reservations, even if they have a safe, loving family waiting for them elsewhere.

Why is the Violence Against Women Act not actually protecting Indian women from assault?

Indian women are assaulted at 2.5 times the rate of the typical American woman. Unfortunately VAWA will actually leave them more vulnerable because it puts more power in the hands of tribal courts, which regularly fail to protect the rights of victims and defendants.

What has been the effect of federal programs to help Indians get better housing, food, clothing and education?

In a word: it's been disastrous. We have created a culture of dependency on reservations—people on reservations regularly acknowledge this. Indian reservations are riddled with the same problems as inner cities—out of wedlock childbirth, teen mothers, drug addiction, absent fathers, violence, gangs, etc. The money that we are sending to reservations often gets diverted into Washington bureaucracies or tribal governments.

What can be done to change the situation?

The best hope for change is education reform. If we can offer parents an alternative—either through charter schools or private schools—to their current system, their children might have a better understanding of what is keeping them down. And they could realize what is needed to advocate for a better life.

There are also measures we could think about with regard to property rights. The Canadian government is debating something called the First Nations Property Ownership act, which would give tribes the underlying title to the land, but allowing individual members to own the land outright. Just like the land in Boston belongs to the city of Boston even if residents buy it and sell it among themselves.

AN EXCERPT FROM

THE NEW TRAIL OF TEARS



“With unemployment at more than 80 percent and alcoholism rampant, Pine Ridge is a hard place to grow up.”

You can drive for miles on the Pine Ridge reservation without seeing another human being. GPS doesn't recognize many of the addresses here in rural South Dakota. Of course, it's possible to drive long distances in the American West without coming upon a major town, but gas stations and convenience stores and fast-food restaurants usually pop up fairly often on the major roads. On Pine Ridge, though, if you don't fill up your gas tank at the right time, you might find yourself out of luck.

To say that this area is rural doesn't really begin to describe it. “Desolate” comes closer. On the first morning of my visit to Pine Ridge, I left my motel and drove toward a school I planned to visit. I traveled almost 40 miles before I saw a place to buy a cup of coffee. I'm told that there used to be a coffee stand at a shack in the motel parking lot, but the owners didn't get enough customers. A couple of locals told me that they couldn't get permission from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to put up a sign on the road.

About 3,000 people live in the Wounded Knee School District in Manderson, South Dakota. Manderson is in the middle of the Pine Ridge reservation, which makes up most of Oglala Lakota County (formerly Shannon County), the second poorest county in the United States. In 2013, the five police

officers assigned to patrol the area received a staggering 16,500 calls for emergency assistance. Sitting at breakfast with me in Rapid City, 100 miles away, Stacy Phelps pauses to let me do the math. Phelps, CEO of the American Indian Institute for Innovation – which has been brought in to “turn around” the Wounded Knee school, among others – wants me to understand the statistics that he's up against.

More than one of the men I interview ask me whether my husband wasn't concerned about me traveling through the reservation alone, particularly at night. A sign in my motel room requests that I use the rag provided rather than bath towels to clean my gun. Statistics are hard to come by, but as of 2009, there were 39 gangs on the reservation, involving more than 5,000 young men. The average life expectancy for men on the reservation is 48, and for women it's 52. Suicide and poor health are partly to blame for those numbers, but so is violence.

“The average life expectancy for men on the reservation is 48, and for women it's 52.”



With unemployment at more than 80 percent and alcoholism rampant, Pine Ridge is a hard place to grow up. The schools' first job, it has to be said, is to keep children safe. Since Phelps's team took over two years ago, there's general agreement that the school is a calmer place. When I walk through the halls of Wounded Knee – which goes from kindergarten through eighth grade – they're quiet. Although the area outside of the school is run-down, with trailer homes falling apart and trash strewn about, the inside of the school is clean, freshly painted, and bright. It also seems fairly empty – the school operates at less than half of capacity.

Alice Phelps, the newly installed principal and Stacy's sister-in-law, takes me to visit some of the classrooms, where teachers seem to be doing everything in their power to keep things under control. In a second-grade class, the teacher speaks to students in a soothing voice, telling them to “let go of the negative.” She asks them to “think about what we can do today to be successful – to make it into third grade.” Most of the dozen students seem to be listening while she offers instructions on how to write a friendly (as opposed to formal) letter. After going through the different choices for salutations, she tells them “We don't write mean things in a friendly letter.”

While Phelps and I watch the youngest children play in a kindergarten classroom, we talk about their home life. “One weekend a month, we have lock-in,” she explains.

“As of 2009, there were 39 gangs on the reservation, involving more than 5,000 young men.”

“Lock-in?” I ask, wondering what these innocent-looking kids have done to deserve this punishment.

Lock-in is not punishment, she assures me. It's when children stay at school all weekend for safety. Although the weekend is billed as a cultural enrichment event for the

children – they sing songs and play traditional games in the school's gym – Phelps tells me that it's timed to coincide with when government checks go out. These are the times when parents are most likely to drink and become abusive, she offers matter-of-factly. Indeed, Wounded Knee's families have earned such a bad reputation that other schools are afraid to send their kids here for basketball games and other community events, Phelps says, because “our parents are so violent and our kids are so disrespectful.”

The rhythm of life at Wounded Knee is actually surprisingly dependent on the timing of government subsidies. In the days leading up to food stamp distributions, Phelps finds that kids are particularly hungry and distracted, because there's not enough food at home. The school generally gives kids breakfast, lunch, and snacks, but when they come in on Mondays after a weekend at home, more than one teacher reports that the boys and girls are famished. Right after the food stamps come, many children are absent from school because they're traveling with their families to the other side of the reservation to do grocery shopping.

There are occasional violent incidents at the school. But Wounded Knee has had to learn to deal with them independently. Phelps will occasionally call the police, but she explains that there's usually something more urgent that the police officers have to attend to elsewhere. Nor does the school get much support from tribal child services. Children who are a danger to themselves or others might be removed briefly, but there aren't many alternative places to keep them. And so the school has to create its own support system as much as possible.

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