

In a way, mass communication has opened Pandora's proverbial box. With the advantages of breaking news, on-line shopping, and keeping up with friends, comes the downside of misinformation, the spread of pornography, and criminals organized on a scale never imagined fifty years ago. To counter these negative things, police have been forced to embrace communication technology as well. But the extent to which they have done this depends on a less than healthy budget in many municipalities. Such is the case in this story, where the Indian police, who receive limited federal money and tribal funds, can't afford expensive information technology and can't rely on urban municipalities for much additional support.

And then, there is the problem of jurisdiction. If a non-Indian commits a crime on a reservation, he can be detained by tribal police, but must be handed over to outside authorities for trial. In contrast, an Indian is accountable to tribal police, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other outside authorities. Because of such disparity, it is unusual for a person to request tribal membership unless a historical agreement with the federal government allows each member to receive monetary compensation in perpetuity. (Most tribes require at least a twenty-five percent genetic origin with them and some require as much as fifty percent.) But that compensation is usually minimal, since reservation economy is the lowest in our nation.

Keel knows full well the hardship of life on a reservation, which he expresses in panic that his daughter might have to grow up there with her grandparents, if he and Lindsey are both killed in the line of duty. There, employment is typically at fifty percent or less, and alcoholism is almost twice the national average (ten percent versus six percent). Crime abounds as hardship pushes Indians to discover the inadequate resources of their tribal police. Again, violent crime is over twice the national average and three out of four tribal women have been assaulted in their lifetime, predominately sexual assault. This is why Keel says it is much worse for girls on the reservation than boys.

In 2021, the U.S. Department of Justice instituted the Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons Act to improve law enforcement response in Indian country. Annual review has shown improvement in isolated cases but overall success in lowering the number of missing or murdered Indians has yet to be achieved. This is why the concept of vigilante justice is mentioned in my story and why the private detective, Onawa Cosay, works outside the justice system. It is the natural response to ineffective policing in close-knit communities of proud people.

Food is another problem on reservations. Their geographic location reveals sinister plots in our history to isolate and reduce Native American populations. Although only a third of American Indians live on a reservation, nobody questions that their land is agriculturally poor. The Salt River in my story illustrates that even the limited water resources are polluted for farming. Hence the need for outside delivery of food, charity in most cases, since federal programs of nourishment are primarily focused on families at 135% or less of the national poverty level. Coupled with the higher cost of food on reservations, typically ten percent higher, it is no wonder that unemployed Indians resort to crime to make ends meet.

Equal opportunity programs do favor American Indians, with annual salaries around seven percent higher than the national average but these are jobs that are outside the reservations. And for this reason, so are two out of three American Indians, especially the younger generations. Keel tries to explain to Dee the reasons that big business doesn't come to Indian lands but the bottom line is that people who live there simply can't afford the products it offers. It is a question of profitability versus the risk of building on tribal land.

In one respect, however, tribal lands do attract a certain kind of big business, gambling. Because these areas have tribal sovereignty, states have limited ability to enforce anti-gambling laws. Casinos, bingo halls, and lotteries abound in tribal lands, ironically in communities that can least afford them. Native American leaders are well aware that gambling brings extensive social and economic hardship to their families, just as it does in the national population, but it is an evil they have decided to endure in order to bring outside money to their lands. It is a significant revenue stream, since tribal casinos don't pay U.S. taxes. One interesting side note is that the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988 prohibits betting on any type of event, so only games of chance can be found on reservations.

Because my story is fiction and I like happy endings, my criminals are brought to justice. But the reality is that this type of crime is widespread because of mass communication, with fifty-nine percent of cases originating from the internet. And the likelihood of conviction has dropped by fifty percent in the last five years because criminals can operate on the internet somewhat autonomously, with low visibility, and they have a method of payment, digital currency, that can't be monitored by law enforcement. Consequently, the sad truth is that our society will endure more and more of this type of crime.

