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“The Lakotas were self-governors, and the rules and regulations that governed the conduct of people and established their duties as individuals, families, and bands came from a great tribal consciousness . . .

Though each person became individualized—could be as truthful, as honest, as generous, as industrious, or as brave as he wished—could even go to battle upon his own initiative, he could not consider himself as separate from the band or nation. Tribal consciousness was the sole guide and dictator, there being no human agency to compel the individual to accept guidance or obey dictate, yet for one to cut himself off from the whole meant to lose identity or to die.

The Lakota word for this governing power of custom or tradition was *wouncage*, literally, ‘our way of doing.’

*Wouncage* constituted, for the Lakota people, the only authority. The manners of neighbor people might be similar, just alike in some respects or totally different, but, for the Lakota there could only be the ways of his people—could only be ‘our way of doing.’ Therefore it was hard for a person to get away from *wouncage*. In other words, it was harder to break laws than to keep them. Consequently, there were few law-breakers.”

Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [1933] 1978)

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