

Lakota Culture 101: Wacinko

In Lakota culture there is a certain trait about tribal men that should be understood by non-Lakotas, especially women, and more especially white women who might want to enjoy a relationship with a real Lakota man. It's what's referred to in Lakota language as "wacinko."

"What is Wacinko," you ask? It's pronounced "wah-cheeng-ko," and to the Sioux man it is a honed art form. The women wacinko, but can be readily cutesy-talked out of it. Besides, women, it seems, can't go very long under any circumstances without talking. But a man's wacinko can go for hours or days. It involves a freezing silence, a virtual arctic front. The wife or girlfriend is usually the target, and sensing it, has to guess what she did to offend him, imagined or real. To ask, "What did I do?" or "Was it something I said?" only results in a further drop in the lower lip and a corresponding drop in ambient temperature.

It could be called a "pout," but Lakota men don't pout. They wacinko. And if you are a male, never, ever suggest to a Lakota man that he is pouting, especially if he's a big man. That's a no-no, a sometimes deadly one.

The purpose of the wacinko is to drive a person batty, usually spouse or friend; and it works best on non-Lakotas. Experienced Lakota women usually just consider themselves lucky for the silence. They have learned that the best defense against a wacinko is to ignore it, and to go about business. That often will bring a man out of his wacinko and then the problem can be addressed and resolved.

I'm on the receiving end of a 32-year wacinko, which has got to be a record. The year was 1973, in the "Moon of Appropriations Hearings," according to the NCAI calendar. My erstwhile friend took offense at something I did or said, and hasn't spoken a word to me since. I would give that person's name, but that would only be giving him honorable recognition. He's a Lakota, and to the Sioux, the glory of that kind of record is something akin to the Nobel Prize. I have never learned what I did to offend him, and I'm sure that he has forgotten what it was. But that adds even more to the honor of the thing; to have wacinkoed so long that the reason has been forgotten.

Strangers or enemies are seldom wacinkoed. That was tried early on when white men first showed up in Lakota territory. All the stony silence resulted in was the stereotype of the stoic Red Man, depicted in wood carvings guarding the entrance to cigar stores. Our forefathers learned long ago that you can't be subtle with the white man – with them, spears and arrows were the only way to make your point.