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STATEMENT ON THE RENAMING OF HARNEY PEAK

Submitted to the

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE BOARD OF GEOGRAPHIC NAMES

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This brief provides historical context to the ongoing debate over the renaming of South Dakota's highest mountain, Harney Peak. It first examines the personal history of General William Selby Harney, for whom the mountain has been named for some 160 years. It makes a clear case for why, no matter what the people of South Dakota decide to *rename* Harney Peak, the mountain should unequivocally be *unnamed*. The essay then explores several alternative titles and advocates returning the mountain to its original Lakota name, *Hinhan Kaga.* Changing the mountain's name to *Hinhan Kaga* honors regional Native Americans. It also offers a subtle but significant recognition of South Dakota's willingness to engage with the troubled nature of our collective past and strive toward a more historically informed and culturally aware future.

I

William Harney's name should no longer be inscribed on the Black Hills landscape. First and foremost, Harney's connection to the peak that bears his name is only tenuous. A military topographical engineer, Lt. Gouverneur K. Warren, named Harney Peak during his three military-sponsored field expeditions between 1855 and 1857. In all likelihood, Warren named the mountain after Harney in an expression of what the historian Roderick Nash calls the "explorer's prerogative:" Warren saw a landmark that lacked a name in the Euro-centric world of which he was a part, and without regard for the site's existing Native title, named it after a prominent non-Native leader. Given Warren's position and that Harney himself was arguably the most powerful non-Native on the northern plains at that moment in time it is unsurprising that the engineer named the largest mountain in site after his commanding officer. Yet there is little evidence to suggest that Harney ever set foot on the mountain, and probably only ever viewed its imposing silhouette from afar.[1]

Harney's actions before and during his time in the Black Hills were deplorable under any standard of human decency. While living in St. Louis in between army tours in 1834, Harney beat a slave child named Hannah to death with a piece of rawhide. It is unclear exactly what instigated this brutal murder. According to the historian George Rollie Addams, Harney grew irate with young Hannah—perhaps over a minor miscarriage of her duties—and flew into a violent rage. Harney was well known for his short temper, and according to his grand jury indictment, beat Hannah repeatedly on her "head, stomach, sides, back, arms, and legs." Broken and bruised, Hannah died the next day, as the local coroner wrote, from "wounds inflicted by William S. Harney." The attack was so vicious that Harney was indicted for murder.[2]

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1. See G.K. Warren, "Military Map of Nebraska and Dakota," March 4, 1860, in Frank N. Schubert, ed., *Explorer on the Northern Plains: Lieutenant Gouverneur K. Warren's Preliminary Report of Explorations in Nebraska and Dakota, in the Years 1855-'56'57* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1981); Jeffrey Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills: The Struggle for Sacred Ground* (New York: Viking, 2010), 83–84; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 273.

2. George Rollie Addams, *William S. Harney: Prince of Dragoons* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 47. See also Addams, p. 299, note 9, where he cites the St. Louis County Grand Jury Indictment dated July 28, 1834. The authors Bob Drury and Tom Clavin assert that Harney killed Hannah because she "had lost his house keys," but do not offer a citation for that information. See Drury and Clavin, *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud, An American Legend* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 135.

Following this attack, Harney fled to the Missouri countryside and then to Washington D.C. in order to escape arrest and a local community that had grown irate over his act. Even in the antebellum South, where slavery and violence against African Americans frequently went unnoticed and unprosecuted, Harney was charged with murder. His family and friends, moreover, warned him not to return to St. Louis for fear that vigilantes might exact their own retribution. This extra attention resulted from the brutality of Harney's act, as well as the fact that he had offended many local St. Louisans when—in another fit a rage some months prior—he assaulted a man for speaking ill of President Andrew Jackson, whom Harney staunchly supported. After several months, Harney returned to St. Louis only to find that much of the scandal surrounding Hannah's murder had subsided. He nonetheless requested and received a change of venue, and his trial went forth in nearby Franklin County.[3] As Addams writes, even though Harney was "clearly responsible for Hannah's death," he was found not guilty in October 1834 because—despite the initial uproar over his actions—"[w]hite society in the 1830s" ultimately "cared little about the death of a slave."[4]

Harney resumed his military career and furthered his blossoming reputation as a fierce Indian fighter. Over the years, Harney fought against the Seminoles in Florida and Sauk and Meskwaki warriors in Illinois during Black Hawk's War in the 1830s. He also served in the US–Mexico War in 1847. But it was his exploits at Ash Hollow along Blue Water Creek in what is now Nebraska that earned Harney the nicknames "Mad Bear" and "Woman Killer" by regional Lakotas.[5]

The wrath of Harney and those under his command reverberated across Indian Country, even in the broader context of the so-called "Indian Wars" of the nineteenth century. His 1855 actions stand in their ruthlessness alongside the atrocities committed at Sand Creek, Colorado in 1864 and Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1890.[6] In 1854, two Lakota bands engaged twenty-nine American soldiers under the command of Lieutenant John L. Grattan just east of Fort Laramie in what is now Wyoming. Grattan had been dispatched to arrest a group of Sicangu (also known as Brulé) Lakotas accused of killing a settler's cow. The Lakotas made several overtures to peaceably compensate the settler for the dead cow, but Grattan refused their efforts and ordered

3. See Addams, *William S. Harney,* 47–51.

4. Addams, *William S. Harney,* 51.

5. On Harney's military service and his exploits at Blue Water Creek more generally, see Richmond L. Clow, "Mad Bear: William S. Harney and the Sioux Expedition of 1885-1856," *Nebraska History* 61 (1980): 132–151; Addams, *William S. Harney*; Ostler, *Lakotas and the Black Hills,* 43–51; Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 41–43; Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun and Josephine Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes: A Lakota Woman Tells Her People's History*, ed. Emily Levine (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 54–67; Richard J. Stachurski, "Harney's Fight at Blue Water Creek," *Wild West* 15, no. 6 (April 2003); Paul N. Beck, *The First Sioux War: The Grattan Fight and Blue Water Creek, 1854–1856* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2004); R. Eli Paul, *Blue Water Creek and the First Sioux War, 1854–1856* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

6. The US military massacred some two hundred Cheyenne and Arapahos, two thirds of whom were women and children, in an unprovoked attack at Sand Creek, Colorado, in November 1864. The US similarly killed at least two hundred Lakotas, most of whom were women and children, at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in December 1890. See Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013); Jerome A. Greene, *American Carnage: Wounded Knee, 1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014); Richard E. Jensen, R. Eli Paul, and John E. Carter, *Eyewitness at Wounded Knee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

his troops to attack. Surprised by the strength of the Indian opposition, Grattan ordered his men to retreat. The warriors pursued and killed them all. This incident has been called the "Grattan Massacre," and was but one of several skirmishes that occurred on the Northern Plains between 1853 and 1855. As the historian Jeffrey Ostler writes, Americans harbored "an attitude of righteous innocence" about the incident, in which non-Native opinion unfairly held that "Lakotas were certainly in the wrong." This sentiment persisted despite Grattan's refusal to hear repeated Lakota peace entreaties.[7]

Following the Grattan incident, the Army sent six hundred soldiers under Harney's command to arrest the Lakota leaders deemed responsible for Grattan's death. Their other objective, as the Sicangu Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun—who was born at Fort Laramie in 1857—recalled in her memoir, was "to punish the Indians."[8] Harney, who according to Ostler "had a reputation for treating 'friendly' Indians with compassion," nonetheless "took a hard line against those he saw as enemies of the United States."[9] Indeed, during his march from Fort Kearney toward Blue Water Creek, Harney made his intentions clear: "By God," he said, "I'm for battle—no peace."[10]

Indeed, on the morning of September 2, 1855, Harney's forces caught up with the Sicangus, who were camped along Blue Water Creek. Harney ordered his men to prepare an assault on "those d—ed red sons of b—es, who massacred the soldiers near Laramie last year." He commanded his troops not to spare even one Native, and the soldiers obliged.[11] Despite peace overtures by Little Thunder and other Sicangu leaders (Iron Shell is said to have raised a white flag of surrender even before the fighting began), Harney's attack killed eighty-six Lakotas, more than forty of whom were women and children.[12] Aided by two Howitzer machine guns, the soldiers launched their assault then pursued on horseback. First-hand accounts shared with Bettelyoun describe the carnage:

> Men, women, and children were shot right down and lay strewn on the prairies everywhere, trampled under the feet of the sharp-shod cavalry horses. The wounded ones were trying to crawl away to places out of the way. Some succeeded in falling into the cutbanks of the Little Blue River. Some of the women crawled under the overhanging weeds and grasses along the banks. Some were wounded and were bleeding; children's cries had to be subdued. They had no time to bind up their wounds. Groans from the dying could be heard. The hoofbeats of the soldiers sounded right above them.[13]

Lt. Gouverneur K. Warren—the army topographical engineer who would later name Harney Peak after his commanding officer—was at Blue Water Creek and similarly described the

7. Ostler, *Lakotas and the Black Hills,* 44.

8. Bettelyoun and Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes*, 54.

9. Ostler, *Lakotas and the Black Hills,* 44.

10. Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848 –1865* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 115, quotation 1.

11. Ostler, *Lakotas and the Black Hills,* 45, quotation 1.

12. Schubert, "Explorer on the Northern Plains," xiv, quotation 7. See also Ostler, *Lakotas and the Black Hills,* 45 and Bettelyoun and Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes*, 62.

13. Bettelyoun and Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes*, 62.

gruesome scene. "[W]ounded women and children crying and moaning, horribly mangled by bullets," lay sprawled across the ground.[14] According to historian Frank N. Schubert, Warren, who had tended Lakota wounded after the slaughter, held mixed feelings about the massacre. On one hand, his official report declared that the battle taught the Sicangus "a useful lesson, which they will not soon forget," and encouraged his commanders to continue fighting Lakotas in order to demonstrate American military power. In his private writings, however, Warren revealed his distaste for the violence at Blue Water Creek: "I was disgusted," he wrote, "with the tales of valor in the field" boasted by his comrades. There "were but a few" soldiers, he continued, "who killed anything but a flying foe."[15] After the initial attack, according to a group of Lakota women who would live to tell of their experiences, it was Harney who "with great difficulty, stopped [his] soldiers from making a complete slaughter," instead ordering them to take more than seventy survivors prisoner.[16]

Together, the Grattan and Blue Water Creek incidents are called the "First Sioux War." They helped ignite a series of military conflicts that would span several decades across the Northern Plains. These included, among others, Red Cloud's War and the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and culminated with the murder of famed Oglala leader Sitting Bull at Standing Rock Reservation and the massacre of several hundred Lakotas at Wounded Knee in December 1890.[17] By that time, the federal government had parceled vast tracts of land stretching from the Missouri River to eastern Wyoming and northern Nebraska—which the US promised to the member nations of the *Oceti Sakowin* (commonly called the "Great Sioux Nation") in the treaties of 1851, 1854, and 1868—into reservations that were, and are, a mere fraction of their former size.

Harney, however, would not participate in these conflicts. Following Blue Water Creek he was reassigned to Florida and with the onset of the Civil War, was pushed into semi-retirement in 1863. He continued to serve "light duty" in an administrative capacity throughout the decade. Beginning in 1865 Harney "assumed the role of Indian friend and advocate" on three peace commissions—including the meeting that produced the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. That agreement reserved all of what is now western South Dakota to the member nations of the *Oceti Sakowin*. It would be broken by white settlers and the US Government less than a decade later in what Supreme Court Justice Harvey Blackmun called a "ripe and rank case of dishonorable dealing" unmatched in American history.[18] Addams argues that Harney's vast experience and wide personal connections in Indian Country led him to argue for equitable treatment of Native peoples at the various negotiations of the Indian Peace Commission. Harney even managed part of the reservation for more than a year, and may have also made amends with some former Lakota enemies.[19]

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14. Ostler, *Lakotas and the Black Hills,* 45. For the quotations used here, see p. 202, note 24.

15. Schubert, "Explorer on the Northern Plains," xvi, quotations 1 and 2.

16. Bettelyoun and Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes*, 58.

17. On the legacies of the Grattan Fight and the Massacre at Blue Water Creek, see Beck, *The First Sioux War;* and Paul, *Blue Water Creek.*

18. Addams, 240. For Blackmun's quote, see Frank Pommersheim, *Braid of Feathers: American Indian Law and Contemporary Tribal Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 204.

19. On Harney's time with the Indian Peace Commission, see Addams, *William S. Harney,*, 242–273

II

Broad consensus suggests that if Harney Peak is renamed, it should be done so in a way that honors the American Indians who inhabited the Black Hills prior to non-Native settlement.[20] While many Native groups have significant historical and cultural ties to the region, Lakotas have the strongest historical, cultural, *and* legal ties to the Black Hills. Lakota oral traditions and creation stories tie them to the region, while archaeological evidence places their arrival in the mid-seventeenth century. By any count, then, Lakota presence predates non-Native settlement in the Black Hills by at least a century and a half.[21] Along with the other nations of the *Oceti Sakowin*—Lakotas have legal claim to the land as set forth in the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, which included the Black Hills. Finally, Lakotas presently make up the majority of the Black Hills' Native population. It is both fitting and logical, then, that Harney Peak's new name speak to and honor the region's Lakota inhabitants, both past and present.

Some have suggested that Harney Peak should be renamed "Black Elk Peak" (or *Hehaka Sapa,* the Lakota translation of that title) after Nicholas Black Elk, a prominent Oglala Holy Man who lived from 1863 to 1950. Black Elk was certainly a visionary and venerated leader whose life transcended many of the major historical developments of his lifetime. Indeed, Harney Peak itself already resides within a specially designated "Black Elk Wilderness" area. According to his conversations with John G. Neihardt—a non-Indian who edited Black Elk's words and published them in *Black Elk Speaks*—the Oglala leader prayed often at Harney Peak. Without question, Black Elk was an individual whose character, actions, and personal connection to Harney Peak—unlike Harney himself—make him an excellent candidate for the high honor of being forever inscribed on the Black Hills' highest mountain.

This thoughtful and respectful nod is of kind intent, but does not comport with Lakota custom. Very few geographical features bear the names of individual Lakotas, the most prominent of them being Crazy Horse Memorial, which was named in 1948 by a non-Native sculptor, Korczak Ziolkowski and Sicangu/Oglala leader Henry Standing Bear. Another would be the long plateau covering the western edge of the Pine Ridge Reservation, known as Red Shirt Table, which was named for the Oglala leader Red Shirt. Yet Crazy Horse and Red Shirt Table are outliers in the broader pattern of Lakota place names. For example, the following well-known landmarks all have Lakota names: *Mato Tipila* is officially called "Devil's Tower;" *Pte Tatiyopa* is known as "Buffalo Gap;" *Mato Paha* is called "Bear Butte;" *Pe Sla* is also known as "Reynolds Prairie;" and *Wasun Niya* is "Wind Cave."[22] As these Lakota names suggest, there is no long-standing precedent for naming

20. See for example Kevin Woster, "Black Elk Family Joins Effort to Change Harney Peak Name," *KELOLand TV*, September 19, 2014, www.keloland.com/newsdetail.cfm/black-elk-family-joins-effort-to-change-harney-peak-name/?id=169609, accessed April 14, 2015; Seth Tupper, "Lakota Elder Wants Harney Peak Renamed," *Rapid City Journal,* September 16, 2014, http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/lakota-elder-wants-harney-peak-renamed/article_f9827a0e-1301-500a-a830-fb9325a3511f.html, accessed April 22, 2015.

21. Ostler, *Lakotas and the Black Hills,* 6–7.

22. "Reservations in South Dakota," map created by the Center for American Indian Research and Native Studies, 2013; "En Route: Lakota Lands and Identities," presentation prepared for the "Classroom on Wheels," Rapid City Area Schools Office of Indian Education and Rapid City Public School Foundations, June 9–13, 2014, slides in author's possession.

landmarks after individual Lakotas. Therefore, renaming Harney Peak after any one Lakota—even one as venerated as Black Elk—would be inappropriate.

A recent online petition has offered another alternative name for Harney Peak, based on an effort to respect a variety of Native peoples who have connections to the Black Hills. The document calls for renaming Harney Peak *Opahata'I*, and claims that doing so will reflect the mountain's role as the "center of all that is" in a variety of Native traditions.[23] In his edited examination of *Black Elk Speaks*, the anthropologist Raymond DeMallie points out that Black Elk himself once referred to the Black Hills as "the heart of the earth" and Harney Peak as the "center of the earth."[24] While Harney Peak is certainly important to Lakota cosmology and oral traditions, the phrase "[the] center of everything that is" usually refers to the Black Hills as a whole, not Harney Peak. The term *Opahata'I,* moreover, does not appear in either of the two most trusted Lakota/English dictionaries.[25] Questions about its genesis have aroused some suspicion that the term may be a recent linguistic construction, thereby making it a less desirable alternative name than Harney Peak's original Lakota moniker, *Hinhan Kaga.*

The most suitable replacement name for Harney Peak, then, is *Hinhan Kaga,* or "The Making of Owls." According to the Sicangu poet and educator Lydia Whirlwind Soldier, Lakota oral tradition connects the peak to tribal ceremonies. The mountain "is called Hinhan Kaga because of the rock formations that appear to look like owls . . . it is a sacred site already know[n] to the Lakota," and her "people go to Hinhan Kaga every spring to pray. It is a time of gratitude for the return of Thunder and the return of the renewal of life."[26] *Hinhan Kaga* offers a simple return to a traditional place name that predates non-Native contact and comports well with Lakota tradition. It is therefore the best option for replacing Harney Peak's current title.

Finally, recognizing the mountain as *Hinhan Kaga* fits with a recent international trend toward returning geographical locations to their indigenous place names. The Alaska Board of Geographic Names, for example, re-designated North America's highest mountain, *Denali*, in 1975. Although the federal government still officially calls Denali "Mount McKinley," the US changed the name of "Mount McKinley National Park" to "Denali National Park and Preserve" in 1980.[27] In another case from the other side of the world, Australia officially ascribed the dual name "Ayers Rock/Uluru," to an internationally-known landmark in 1993, in order to better

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23. "DIA FYI: Register Your Opinion on the Possible Renaming of Harney Peak," online petition forwarded via email to the author, April 1, 2015.

24. See Raymond DeMallie, ed., *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 310 (on the Black Hills) and 295 (on Harney Peak).

25. Perhaps the two most oft-used Lakota/English dictionaries are Eugene Buechel and Paul Manhart, *Lakota Dictionary: Lakota-English/English-Lakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002) and *New Lakota Dictionary Online* (Lakota Language Consortium, 2014), http://www.lakotadictionary.org/nldo.php, accessed April 20, 2015.

26. Lydia Whirlwind Soldier in correspondence with the author, April 13, 2015. See also James LaPointe, Legends of the Lakota (San Francisco, Cali.: Indian Historian Press, 1976), 87–92; Ronald Goodman, *Lakota Star Knowledge: Studies in Lakota Stellar Theology, 2nd Edition* (Rosebud, S. Dak.: Sinte Gleska University, 1992), 12. See also Amos Bad Heart Bull and Helen Heather Blish, *A Pictographic History of the Oglala Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 289. Bad Heart Bull and Blish drew a famous map of the Black Hills, but it does not list a name for Harney Peak.

27. Olmstead Center for Landscape Preservation, "Cultural Landscape Report for Park Headquarters, Denali National Park and Preserve: Site History, Existing Conditions, Analysis, and Treatment," prepared for the National Parks Service, US Department of the Interior (Boston: 2008), 3.

reflect the name regional Aboriginal peoples gave it prior to non-Native arrival.[28] Efforts to return Native landmarks to their indigenous place names are underway in many corners of the globe, and replacing Harney Peak with *Hinhan Kaga* would complement this important trend. In so doing, South Dakota will send a message of awareness and reconciliation to its own residents, as well as the millions of visitors who enter the Black Hills each year.

III

The debate over Harney Peak's name has little to do with matters of "political correctness," as has been repeated many times by opponents of the proposed name change. Quite the opposite, this decision can and must hinge on the extent to which we citizens of the twenty-first century can reconcile the actions and legacy of a nineteenth century man with the core values we hope represent South Dakota (and the United States) both in Harney's time and now.

Summing up Harney's life and legacy, the historian Addams casts a balanced judgement. He notes, on the one hand, that Harney "[s]hould be remembered for his courage and boldness in combat and his innovative [military] tactics," as well as "his familiarity with [N]ative people, his contributions to the work of the Indian Peace Commission" and "his advocacy for fair treatment of Indians within the context of federal Indian policy," both of which came later in his life. But Addams also emphasizes the many negative aspects of Harney's character and the raw facts of his personal story. Harney "should be remembered for his quick temper, foul mouth, violent nature, vindictive bent, and callous behavior . . . for abusing soldiers and committing a murder," and finally, "for his impulsiveness, arrogance, quarrelsomeness, and obstinacy."[29]

These latter critiques are central to any discussion of Harney's character and the extent to which South Dakotans should consider his actions a reflection of the message we send to our residents, children, and the millions of visitors who drive past or ascend Harney Peak each year. On one hand, we must remember that Harney was—as those who defend him frequently state—a man of his time. Indeed, he worked as a soldier and did what he considered to be his duty. And he did it with horrifying alacrity. He even served in what some consider a less destructive capacity—and probably befriended some individual Native people along the way—toward the end of his career.

But these facts can no longer paper over Harney's violent history. Harney Peak is named for one man, who was remarkably violent even by the standards of his own time. In the end, it is Harney's actions—and his alone—that we must evaluate as we consider striking his name from our landscape. South Dakotans should remember that when visitors see Harney Peak emblazoned upon maps, road signs, and trail heads, they receive a subtle but significant message about the extent to which our residents are willing and able to think critically about our past and its relationship to the communities of our present. Continuing to call Harney Peak by its current name suggests a willful blindness of the dark legacies of history and a blurred inability to forge a clear, thoughtful, and positive future.

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28. See Robert Layton, *Uluru: An Aboriginal History of Ayers Rock* (Canberra, Australia: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2001), and Warren, "Military Map."

29. Addams, *William S. Harney*, 286.

Above all else, perhaps, South Dakotans must recognize that by holding public debates over the name of Harney Peak, the South Dakota Board of Geographic Names extends to William Selby Harney the second chance that he neither offered Hannah, the innocent slave child he brutally murdered, nor the eighty-six Sicangu men, women, and children who lay dead at Blue Water Creek as a result of the attack he planned and the orders he gave. For that reason alone, South Dakota's highest peak must no longer bear his name.