For Immediate Release

83 Percent of U.S. Adults Fail Test on Nation’s Founding
Nationwide Survey Shows Stunning Knowledge Void, Yet Strong Desire to Learn More

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Dec. 1, 2009) – Who cares about the American Revolution? Should something that happened more than 200 years ago matter today?

These are among the questions raised by a recent national survey, sponsored by The American Revolution Center, which revealed an alarming lack of knowledge of our nation’s Founding history, despite near universal agreement on the importance of this knowledge.

The report, conducted in the summer of 2009 among a demographically representative random sample of U.S. adults, is the first comprehensive national survey of adult knowledge of the American Revolution and its ongoing legacy. It reveals that Americans highly value, but vastly overrate, their knowledge of the Revolutionary period and its significance. Asked to grade themselves on their knowledge, 89 percent believed they could pass a basic test on the American Revolution. However, 83 percent failed when tested on the beliefs, freedoms, and liberties established during the Revolution.

“The American Revolution defined what it means to be an American. It forged those principles that unite us as a nation,” says Dr. Bruce Cole, president and CEO of The American Revolution Center. “Unfortunately, those principles are fading from memory.” This is alarming, Dr. Cole explains, because rights and values undefined and misunderstood cannot be defended or taught to future generations. “Knowledge of the ideas upon which our nation is built is essential, to maintain the relevance and vibrancy of our government,” he says. “Many people are unaware that the everyday freedoms and liberties they enjoy – reading newspaper editorials, expressing a dissenting opinion while attending a public meeting, or worshipping at a religious institution of their choice – are the legacy of the American Revolution. For future generations to continue to enjoy these freedoms, we must know and preserve the promise of the American Revolution.”

Some noteworthy findings from the report, titled The American Revolution. Who Cares? Americans are Yearning to Learn, Failing to Know, include the following:

- Many more Americans remember that Michael Jackson sang “Beat It” than know that the Bill of Rights is part of the Constitution.
- 60 percent of Americans can correctly identify the number of children in reality-TV show couple Jon and Kate Gosselin’s household (eight), but more than one-third do not know the century in which the American Revolution took place (18th). Half of
those surveyed believe the Civil War (1861-1865), Emancipation Proclamation (1863), or War of 1812 occurred before the American Revolution (1775-1783).

- More than 50 percent of Americans surveyed wrongly attributed the quote, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” to George Washington, Thomas Paine, or President Barack Obama, when it is in fact a quote from Karl Marx, author of “The Communist Manifesto.”

Fortunately, the survey revealed that more than 90 percent of Americans – across all major demographic groups – think it is important for citizens to know the history and principles of the American Revolution, and that this knowledge be taught in schools.

The findings are a call-to-action for The American Revolution Center and for its efforts to address this “historical amnesia.” The non-partisan, not-for-profit organization plans to construct The Museum of the American Revolution in historic Philadelphia. This will be the first national museum to tell the entire story of the American Revolution and its enduring legacy. The organization already has launched a website with informational resources on the American Revolution, offering lesson plans and other educational materials.

For more information about the survey, or about the mission and activities of The American Revolution Center, visit www.AmericanRevolutionCenter.org.

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