MISSION US “A CHEYENNE ODYSSEY” GIVES MIDDLE GRADE STUDENTS A PLAINS INDIAN PERSPECTIVE ON WESTWARD EXPANSION IN THE UNITED STATES

Third mission in a series of online role-playing games helps students understand change and continuity in the lives of the Northern Cheyenne

New York, NY – THIRTEEN announces the launch of “A Cheyenne Odyssey,” the third interactive game in the Mission US series of captivating, digital role-playing games created to engage middle grade students in the exploration of U.S. history. “A Cheyenne Odyssey” debuts on October 16, 2013, and supports the study of westward expansion in the middle grade American history curriculum. The game engages students as they take on the role of a twelve-year-old Northern Cheyenne boy in the 1860s. Students can access the game via streaming and download through any Internet-connected computer at mission-us.org, making this history resource available to students in school, at home, in libraries and anywhere they access instructional content.

Mission US is produced by THIRTEEN Productions LLC in association with WNET with funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and additional support from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

“A Cheyenne Odyssey” taps into the ways 21st century students learn and explore content. Through immersive digital media and the engagement of gaming, students ‘live’ history and learn through experiences only this multimedia approach can deliver,” said Neal Shapiro, president and CEO of WNET.

In “A Cheyenne Odyssey” players take on the role of Little Fox, a fictional member of the Northern Cheyenne tribe. As players “live the life” of Little Fox, they experience sweeping changes and challenges and must choose how to react and adapt to the encroachment of settlers, the expansion of the railroads, the decline of the buffalo and the rise of the reservation system. Eventually Little Fox, now a grown warrior, will fight in the Battle of the Greasy Grass, known to non-Indians as the Battle of the Little Bighorn or Custer’s Last Stand. With each change and each choice, players learn about the persistence of the Cheyenne through national transformations.

“A Cheyenne Odyssey” is the first game to present the Northern Cheyenne perspective on real events our people experienced,” said Dr. Richard Littlebear, President of Chief Dull Knife College and advisor to the project. “However, this is much more than a game about the high and low points of our history. It teaches students how to make decisions and how to live with the consequences of those decisions, just as one has to do in real life.”

As students play “A Cheyenne Odyssey,” they gain insight and understanding of westward expansion and its impact on America’s native peoples, the economy, the landscape and environment. They interact with traders, railroad workers, soldiers and settlers who forged their way west to expand the United States. Accompanying curriculum activities and rich supplemental resources, including maps, visuals, artifacts, and more, deepen students’ understanding and perspectives about the historical context of the
period. The game also includes embedded “smartwords” to build vocabulary and support learners’ growing historical literacy.

Content for “A Cheyenne Odyssey” was developed by historians and educators at the American Social History Project (ASHP)/Center for Media & Learning, a research center at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, in close collaboration with representatives of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe at Chief Dull Knife College, a community-based and tribally-managed institution located on the Northern Cheyenne reservation in southeastern Montana. Dr. Littlebear and his colleagues consulted on educational content, scripting, design, and casting for the game. All actors voicing the roles of the Northern Cheyenne characters are Northern Cheyenne themselves, lending authenticity and accuracy to the production of “A Cheyenne Odyssey.” Jeffrey Ostler, Beekman Professor of Northwest and Pacific History at the University of Oregon, and Christina Gish Hill, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Iowa State University and author, Dull Knife Had a Family, provided additional advisory support for the game, which is informed by standards-aligned curriculum concepts and deeply grounded in scholarship. THIRTEEN worked with Electric Funstuff, an educational software company that specializes in using game design to create effective learning experiences, on the design, development, and production of the game.

Mission US addresses the pressing instructional need to engage middle grade students in the exploration, discovery, and understanding of U.S. history. The goal is to encourage students to care about history by assuming the roles of peers from the past. The first game in the series, “For Crown or Colony?” puts players in the shoes of a 14-year-old printer’s apprentice in 1770 Boston. “Flight to Freedom,” the second game, gives students an eye-opening experience as a fictional 14-year-old enslaved young woman in Kentucky in 1848.

Mission US has more than a half-million registered users and growing, including approximately 483,000 players and 27,000 teachers. The game series is part of a larger initiative by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), under its American History and Civics Initiative, to evaluate the potential benefits of digital history games for student learning. In 2011, Education Development Center (EDC) completed a major research study examining the use of Mission US by 1,118 seventh and eighth grade students in 50 schools across the United States. In the study, students demonstrated measurable gains in historical knowledge and skills. Summary findings are available at cpb.org/features/missionus. Mission US is also a featured project of CPB’s American Graduate program, an initiative to combat the nation’s dropout crisis.

Each game in the Mission US series includes a comprehensive collection of resources and materials for teachers and librarians. These include document-based questions (DBQs), an array of primary sources, activities, vocabulary builders, standards alignments, writing prompts and visual aids, as well as professional development videos showing teachers using the Mission US games with their students. The game is compatible with Internet-connected computers and with most interactive whiteboard programs. Support materials, like all the games in Mission US, are free.

The fourth mission in the Mission US series, “The Sidewalks of New York,” is planned for release in late 2014. This game will focus on urban life in the early 20th century, through the eyes of a young Jewish immigrant who settles on New York’s lower east side and becomes involved in the growing labor movement. Mission US also recently received a contract award from the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Small Business Innovation Research Fund (SBIR) to produce the fifth mission on the Great Depression, “California or Dust!” – which will be the first Mission US game released both online and as a tablet app.

Mission US was recently named a finalist in the 2013 Japan Prize Competition, honoring the best of educational media. It has also earned a 2013 Webby Award Official Honoree designation, a 2013 Common Sense Media ON for Learning Award and a Gold Medal from the International Serious Play Awards. Mission US is produced by THIRTEEN Productions LLC in association with WNET. Sandra
Sheppard, THIRTEEN’s director of Children’s and Educational Programming, is the executive-in-charge. Jill Peters serves as executive producer, with Michelle Chen, producer.

**About WNET**

In 2013, WNET is celebrating the 50th Anniversary of THIRTEEN, New York’s flagship public media provider. As the parent company of THIRTEEN and WLIW21 and operator of NJTV, WNET brings quality arts, education and public affairs programming to over 5 million viewers each week. WNET produces and presents such acclaimed PBS series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *PBS NewsHour Weekend*, *Charlie Rose* and a range of documentaries, children’s programs, and local news and cultural offerings available on air and online. Pioneers in educational programming, WNET has created such groundbreaking series as *Get the Math*, *Oh Noah!* and *Cyberchase* and provides tools for educators that bring compelling content to life in the classroom and at home. WNET highlights the tri-state’s unique culture and diverse communities through *NYC-ARTS*, *Reel 13*, *NJ Today* and *MetroFocus*, the multi-platform news magazine focusing on the New York region. WNET is also a leader in connecting with viewers on emerging platforms, including the THIRTEEN Explore iPad App where users can stream PBS content for free.

**About CPB**

CPB, a private, nonprofit corporation created by Congress in 1967, is the steward of the federal government’s investment in public broadcasting. It helps support the operation of more than 1,400 locally-owned and operated public television and radio stations nationwide, and is the largest single source of funding for research, technology, and program development for public radio, television and related online services.

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