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MEDIA RELEASE

AUSTRALIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES: INSTITUTIONS, SOCIETY, CULTURE

The United States Studies Centre (USSC) at the University of Sydney today released the second half of a major survey on Australia and the United States – the most comprehensive ever conducted.

This part of the survey canvassed the attitudes of Australians towards a number of US institutions, various aspects of American society and culture and the influence of American culture on Australia.

Professor Murray Goot, Visiting Professor in the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, and one of Australia's leading opinion researchers, led the project. The research employed innovative survey techniques and looked at changes in attitudes since 1986. AC Nielsen (Surveys Australia) carried out the survey of 1, 213 Australians in July this year.

The majority of respondents expressed favourable views about: 'American science and technology' (89%); 'art and literature' (70%); 'personal freedom' (70%); 'economic opportunity' (67%); 'political freedom' (63%); and 'the standard of living' (59%).

However the majority expressed unfavourable views about: 'gun control' (85%); 'social equality' (62%); 'race relations' (61%); 'economic equality' (59%); and 'religion in American society' (54%).

Opinion was evenly divided about 'America's system of justice' and 'America's system of government', with little difference between those expressing a 'favourable view' (49% in each case) and those expressing an 'unfavourable' view on each question (44% and 45% respectively).

Compared with 1986, there was a decline in the proportion of respondents expressing 'confidence' in America's ability to deal 'wisely' (2007) or 'responsibly' (1986) 'with its own social and economic problems'.

In 1986, half (56%) of the respondents expressed 'a great deal' or 'fair amount' of confidence; in 2007, less than half (44%) did so.

The proportion in 2007 expressing confidence in America's ability to deal 'wisely with its own social and economic problems' (44%) was much lower than the proportion expressing confidence in the ability of the United Kingdom (75%), Australia (73%) and Japan (72%) to deal 'wisely with their own social and economic problems'.

Asked to judge 'the influence of American culture on Australia', the majority of respondents said they were 'not at all pleased' about the influence of 'American fast food' (67%) and 'the American language' (52%), but most were 'pleased' or at least 'somewhat pleased' about the impact of 'American television' (55%); 'American sport' (56%); 'American clothes' (60%); 'American films' (75%); and 'American music' (75%).

Invited to nominate, in their own words, something they 'liked' about the US, respondents mentioned things to do with the American people and culture (35%) or the countryside and the sights (21%), followed by various aspects of popular culture (17%). Their 'dislikes' focussed on the people and their culture (53%), political values and institutions (50%), and economic values and institutions (11%).

The survey also found that the proportion of respondents who have travelled to the US (35%) is much higher than it was 21 years ago (14%). While the proportions going on 'holiday' (71%) and on 'business' (21%) were unchanged, the proportion going to the US to 'study or teach' had declined from 14% in 1986 to 6% in 2007.

Releasing the survey today, the Acting Chief Executive Officer of the USSC, Professor Alan Dupont, said these findings along with the first part of the survey released in October completed a picture which showed that Australians are ambivalent about the US.

"What is striking is the loss of trust in US values and political institutions although this is balanced by a high level of respect for the excellence of US science and technology and a belief that the US remains a country of economic opportunity", said Professor Dupont.

He said that "confidence in the capacity of the US to wisely manage its own economic and social problems has declined significantly over the past twenty years. But Australians still give Americans high marks in the arts, literature and sport seeing them as positive cultural influences."

"Unfortunately, we understand less about American culture and society than we should because of stereotyping and a fall in the proportion of Australians travelling to the US to study or teach."

Details of these results and results from the first part of the survey are available on the USSC website: www.sydney.edu.au/us-studies.

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The aim of the United States Studies Centre is to deepen understanding of the United States by creating new knowledge on American culture, politics, business, government and society. The Centre's goal is to be the prime Australian source of information and commentary on the US, especially with respect to US-Australian relations. Postgraduate courses in US studies will commence in 2008.

The United States Studies Centre is funded from an endowment established by the Australian Government of \$25 million with additional funding from the University of Sydney, the NSW Government and the American Australian Association through contributions from business and private individuals.