

# The Boy Scouts' Future

March 12, 2021 • Volume 31 • Issue 10

*Can an iconic movement endure in the 21st century?*

By Barbara Mantel



Boy Scouts warm themselves at a fire they built during a winter campout near Danvers, Mass. Outdoor activities have been central to Scouting since the movement was created in the early 20th century. (Getty Images/The Boston Globe/John Tlumacki)

More than 130 million youths have participated in the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) since its inception in 1910. But membership has been declining for nearly 50 years, and the organization may be fighting for its life. More than a year ago, it filed for bankruptcy protection after hundreds of men sued, alleging they had been sexually abused as children by adult BSA volunteers. Approximately 85,000 men have come forward since then, and the organization has put forward a proposal to compensate victims and emerge

from bankruptcy. But all parties may not be able to agree on a plan, leaving the Scouting community to wonder in what form the BSA will survive. Meanwhile, since 2013, the organization has begun admitting openly gay boys and adult leaders, transgendered youth and, most recently, girls into its flagship programs. The historic changes have sparked a feud with the Girl Scouts of the USA, the loss of many members to alternative Christian organizations and a fierce debate about what values the iconic organization should embrace.



Scouts commemorate Memorial Day in Los Angeles in 2014. The future of the Boy Scouts of America is in question as the organization grapples with a sex abuse scandal and declining membership. (Getty Images/Visions of America/Universal Images Group/Joe Sohm)

### The Issues

At the urging of a classmate, Andrew Moldoff joined a Boy Scout troop in central New Jersey in the sixth grade. The biggest selling point, says Moldoff, now age 25 and a private school teacher, was his friend's assurance that the boys ran the show, under the guidance of experienced scoutmasters and with little parental involvement.

"I thought, 'That sounds pretty cool,' plus a lot of my friends were in it," says Moldoff.

But it took time to adjust, especially to the weekend camping trips, where the boys would arrive at their campsite on dark Friday nights, often in the freezing cold and sometimes in the rain. Moldoff would borrow the scoutmaster's phone to tell his father he hated it and wanted to come home. Yet by the third or fourth trip, he was no longer calling. "It turned out to be a lot of fun," he says.

Moldoff was embracing a movement that has its roots deep in the early 20th century, a time when American society was more rural, more male-dominated, more segregated by race and gender and far less in thrall to the power and pull of mass popular culture.

---

Over the years, Scouting has attracted and helped mold a long line of Americans who went on to become famous, ranging from astronaut Neil Armstrong to hotel executive Bill Marriott to President Gerald Ford. <sup>1</sup> But it now faces what may be its greatest challenges: surviving a potentially devastating child sexual abuse scandal and maintaining its relevance in an America far different from the country in which it arose.

Indeed, of the initial group of Moldoff's friends who were in his troop, he was the only one to make Eagle Scout, the highest rank in Scouting. The others dropped out, he says, because they chafed at the uniform requirements, did not want to commit the time or joined sports teams that had weekend practice. In contrast, Moldoff says he "fell more in love with Scouting" as he moved up in leadership, from quartermaster to patrol leader and finally to senior patrol leader, in charge of the entire troop.

Scouting has had a huge impact on his life, says Moldoff, who majored in East Asian languages in college and taught English in China until the coronavirus hit. "The Scout Oath — friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent — I try to follow those every day," he says. "Sadly, my troop is no longer around. About three years ago, they had to close down because they didn't have enough new members."

### BSA Membership Halved Since 1974

Membership in the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) has fallen from its peak of more than 4 million members in the 1970s to just over 2 million in 2019.

#### Boy Scouts Membership, 1974 and 2019



Source: "Boy Scouts Reaching Out for Handicapped Members," *The New York Times*, Feb. 9, 1976, <https://tinyurl.com/47x56fc6>; "Boy Scouts of America 2019 Annual Report," Boy Scouts of America, accessed March 2, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/yc8jkdzs>

Since the creation of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) in 1910, more than 130 million youths have participated in its programs. <sup>2</sup> But its membership has been declining for decades — and now the organization may be fighting for its life. The BSA filed for bankruptcy protection in Delaware early last year as it faced

hundreds of lawsuits from men who accused former scoutmasters and volunteers of child sexual abuse and the organization of a decades-long coverup. The bankruptcy judge set a Nov. 16, 2020, deadline for alleged victims of such abuse to come forward in order to share in a victims' compensation fund — its size to be determined. About 95,000 claims were filed, 10,000 of which plaintiffs' lawyers say are duplicates. <sup>3</sup> The scope of the alleged abuse far exceeds the sexual abuse scandal in the country's Roman Catholic Church.

"First and foremost, we care deeply about all victims of child abuse and sincerely apologize to anyone who was harmed during their time in Scouting," the BSA said in an email to *CQ Researcher*. "We are outraged that there have been times when individuals took advantage of our programs to abuse innocent children."

In early March, the BSA proposed a plan to emerge from bankruptcy, promising to contribute, along with its local councils, an estimated \$500 million for the compensation fund. Lawyers representing abuse victims said the sum was grossly inadequate, and negotiations continue. <sup>4</sup>

In the midst of lawsuits and scandal, the Boy Scouts of America has been attempting to broaden its appeal. Over several years beginning in 2013, the iconic institution lifted its long-standing ban on openly gay boys and volunteers and transgendered youth. More recently, it has invited girls to become Cub Scouts and even Eagle Scouts. In addition, last summer, the BSA introduced a diversity merit badge as the Black Lives Matter movement took hold. But the changes have proved divisive within the Boy Scout community. <sup>5</sup>

"As gender blurring only increases, it is more important than ever that someone provides a safe environment where boys can be boys, and where their natural talents and tendencies can be affirmed, encouraged and developed by men who can offer a positive role model," said Mark Hancock, the CEO of Trail Life USA, a conservative Christian scouting organization begun in 2013 as an alternative to the Boy Scouts. <sup>6</sup>

At the end of 2019, the BSA received a blow when the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints severed its ties with the organization, a connection first established in 1913. The Mormon Church, as it is commonly known, did not mention specific Boy Scouts policies as the basis for its decision, but its leaders had expressed concern when the BSA lifted its ban on openly gay



---

adult volunteers. Until the split, Mormon boys made up nearly 20 percent of the BSA's youth members. Civic, faith-based and educational organizations, called chartered organizations, operate the BSA's troops, Cub Scout packs and other youth programs, and faith-based organizations have been the most important, sponsoring about 70 percent of BSA units. <sup>7</sup>

Some progressive members are also leaving the BSA for alternatives, saying that the membership changes came too late, its continuing ban on atheists as members is outdated and the sexual assault scandal has stripped the organization of its moral authority.

"For scouting to survive, the Boy Scouts of America may have to go," wrote Clay Risen, now a senior politics editor at *The New York Times* and an Eagle Scout. "While the Boy Scouts has done an admirable job of reform — owning up to its failures, admitting openly gay scouts and leaders, planning a compensation fund for victims — it still doesn't feel like enough." Risen has enrolled his children in the Baden-Powell Service Association, a 15-year-old, secular, mixed-gender organization with no chartered sponsors that focuses on scouting's traditional outdoor skills. It is named after Robert Baden-Powell, a British army general who is credited with founding the worldwide scouting movement in 1908. <sup>8</sup>



Protesters in Bethesda, Md., push for equality within the Boy Scouts of America in 2013. Starting that year, the BSA began lifting its ban on openly gay boys and volunteers and transgendered youth and started welcoming girls in 2018. (Getty Images/*The Washington Post*/Matt McClain)

Membership in the Boy Scouts of America peaked in the early 1970s at more than 4 million youths, but by 2019, the latest year for which data are available, that number had fallen to 2.1 million.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, there is more to its long-term membership woes than the sexual assault scandal and defections by those who disagree with its recent membership changes, experts say.

Barbara Arneil, a political scientist at the University of British Columbia, believes that the BSA's long-standing defense of traditional values — which she described as “God, Country and Masculinity” — in the face of a changing culture is responsible; in other words, its recent embrace of greater inclusiveness has come too late. The decade of the 1970s was a “critical juncture,” ushering in a generation whose values “sought to rectify the injustices associated with war, race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability,” said Arneil. The BSA rejected that generation's values, she said, triggering its slide in membership.<sup>10</sup>

But many youth organizations and activities, including Girl Scouts of the USA and team sports, have experienced declining interest in the past decade. Some observers cite a range of reasons, from busy family schedules to the lure of video games and other distractions on electronic devices. The Girl Scouts has 1.7 million girl members today, down from 2.9 million in 2003.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the Boy Scouts — like most organizations, workplaces and schools — has had to adjust to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. “We very quickly did due diligence to let troops know that there were certain forums that they should not be using” for remote meetings,” says John Paterakis, the volunteer chairman of the Big Apple District within the Greater New York Councils of the Boy Scouts of America. “And we made sure that things they used, like Zoom, had the appropriate protocols in place so that the meetings could be held properly and securely . . . that it wasn't subject to being bombed by outsiders or stalkers or what have you.”

Navigating how to get troops back outdoors has also been complicated, Paterakis says, and the district is requiring any troops that take camping trips to submit a written plan outlining safety protocols, including mask-wearing and social distancing details.

But possibly the biggest challenge has been recruiting new members amid the pandemic. “We are used to having big outdoor events where we present the benefits of Scouting to kids and we let them experience some of the things they'll learn,” including

---

putting up a tent and using a compass, says Paterakis. “As we pull out of this [pandemic], God willing, we’re going to need to redouble our efforts to get the word out about Scouting.”

As the debate about the merits of joining the Boy Scouts of America continues, here are some of the questions being asked by past and present members, parents, advocates and lawyers for victims of child sexual abuse, and other youth organizations:

### **Can the Boy Scouts survive its sexual abuse scandal?**

The Boy Scouts of America expresses confidence that the organization can survive its legal and financial troubles, but some lawyers and analysts are not so sure: They say the BSA’s fate rests on its Chapter 11 bankruptcy case — one of the biggest and most complex bankruptcies set in motion by a sexual abuse scandal in U.S. history. The number of claims runs into the tens of thousands, and the case is national in scope, unlike the bankruptcies declared by individual dioceses of the Catholic Church.

“The scandal is of epic proportions,” says lawyer Paul Mones, who represents hundreds of alleged Boy Scouts victims across the country.

The bankruptcy case suspends 275 sexual assault lawsuits filed against the Boy Scouts of America, many of them brought in the past several years as several populous states, including New York, New Jersey and California, made it easier for child sexual abuse victims to seek damages from abusers and organizations believed to have turned a blind eye. It also temporarily halts abuse lawsuits against BSA local councils and sponsoring organizations.

Most of the claims filed in the bankruptcy court refer to alleged assaults from the 1960s through the 1980s, which according to childhood trauma experts is not surprising because it can take decades for traumatized victims to come forward.<sup>12</sup> For example, Gill Gayle, now in his 50s, said the abuse by two scoutmasters in the 1970s “colored and informed every decision in my life.” He called filing the claim in bankruptcy court “gut wrenching.”<sup>13</sup>

The thorniest issue in the bankruptcy proceeding is determining the size and sources of the victims’ compensation trust fund. The BSA, local Scouting councils and sponsoring organizations have been negotiating how much each will contribute, and on March 1, the BSA proposed a plan “to provide equitable compensation to survivors and address its other financial

obligations so the organization can continue to serve youth for years to come.” The BSA added that it expects to emerge from bankruptcy protection in the fall. <sup>14</sup>

Under the proposal, the BSA would contribute assets — including a collection of Norman Rockwell paintings, a warehouse in North Carolina, some oil and gas interests and cash — estimated to be worth \$200 million. In its latest financial statement, the BSA said it had \$1.36 billion in assets. <sup>15</sup>

The 253 local councils, which are thought to have assets worth several times more than the Boy Scouts national organization, would contribute at least \$300 million. It is not clear how much additional money insurers or sponsoring organizations would contribute; the BSA says negotiations are continuing and more details will follow. Analysts say the bulk of the money for the total amount of the compensation trust will come from the Boy Scouts’ insurers. However, to reduce their liability, insurers are challenging the validity of thousands of claims. <sup>16</sup>

The BSA’s plan would need the approval of its creditors and of two-thirds of the men who have filed claims. <sup>17</sup> But Mones, who calls the proposed \$500 million contribution from the BSA and the local councils “insulting and insufficient,” says that is extremely unlikely.

So does attorney Michael Pfau, who represents more than 1,000 men who have filed claims in bankruptcy court. “The terms of this plan are unconscionable,” says Pfau. The BSA and the councils are not contributing enough of their assets, he says.

In exchange for making a “substantial” contribution to the compensation trust, the local councils would receive from the bankruptcy court a permanent release from lawsuits claiming past abuse, explains Mones. The same is true for chartered organizations.

“If local councils don’t receive these releases . . . they will be sued,” says Pfau. “There were 275 pending cases against the Boy Scouts before the bankruptcy, and unless some attorney committed malpractice, every one of those cases also named the local council.”

Ricky Mason, president of the Greater New York Councils and the lawyer representing a coalition of local councils in the bankruptcy process, said he is optimistic the various sides can reach an agreement. But if not, he said, “most and possibly all local councils may well cease to survive in their current form.” <sup>18</sup>



---

The Boy Scouts said Scouting will continue and that it is safer than ever. “Over many years, we have developed some of the strongest youth protection policies found in any youth-serving organization,” the BSA said in an email. Volunteers and staff must undergo mandatory youth-protection training, and at least two trained adults must be present with youth at all times. Adults may not be alone with a child, either in person, online or via text, and adult leaders and staff undergo criminal background checks, according to the Scouts’ email.

Thomas G. Plante, a professor of psychology and ethics at Santa Clara University who has worked with sex offenders for 40 years and is an expert on sexual abuse by the clergy, says the Boy Scouts’ policies are well thought out. But all organizations that engage with children must always be hypervigilant because “it is estimated that three to five percent of men are pedophiles,” he says, which means they are sexually attracted to prepubescent children. <sup>19</sup>

Plante says the Boy Scouts may want to consider conducting psychological evaluations to screen out abusers. “I’ve done about a thousand of these for Catholic, Episcopalian and Orthodox churches,” Plante says.

But Mones says he is unsure whether the Boy Scouts is safer today, because the organization will not release secret files, dating back to about 1920, on volunteers it has banned from the Scouts because of credible sexual abuse allegations.

The only such files that have been officially released to the public are from 1965 through 1985 and were provided in response to a court order. They contained accusations against 1,247 Scout leaders. <sup>20</sup>

“We know that the perpetrators in the files represent only a fraction of the perpetrators who abused children in Scouting,” says Pfau. “And I know this because in my cases probably 50 percent of the abusers . . . are not in the files.”

### **Are girls better served by the single-sex Girl Scouts than the mixed Boy Scouts?**

On Feb. 21, the Boy Scouts of America held a virtual celebration to honor the nearly 1,000 girls and young women who are the first female Eagle Scouts. Only 6 percent of Scouts attain this highest rank, which requires that they consistently exhibit leadership, earn

a minimum of 21 merit badges and complete a large community service project. <sup>21</sup>

Isabella Tunney, age 16, is one of the trailblazers, earning all 137 possible merit badges within two years. Quarantining during the coronavirus pandemic “helped a lot,” said Tunney, who lives in Minneapolis and used to watch with envy when her older brother left for Boy Scout camping trips. “I had a lot of time to spare.” <sup>22</sup>



Four teens in Tacoma, Wash., are among nearly 1,000 others nationwide recognized in a BSA ceremony in February for the inaugural class of female Eagle Scouts. Only 6 percent of all Scouts reach the highest rank of Eagle. (Getty Images/David Ryder)

The Boy Scouts of America allowed young girls to become Cub Scouts starting only in 2018 and older girls to join troops in 2019. Since then, more than 140,000 girls have joined. <sup>23</sup> To reflect the historic change, the BSA changed the name of its flagship program from Boy Scouts to Scouts BSA.

Cub Scout dens and Scouts BSA troops typically are single sex. But Cub Scout packs, which contain multiple dens, can be mixed-gender. And girl and boy troops can be linked when they are sponsored by the same chartered organization and engage in shared activities, says Megan Wright, scoutmaster of Troop 885, with 26 girls, in Omaha, Neb.

Before 2018, young women already participated in smaller, mixed-gender BSA programs, such as Venturing and Sea Scouting, which

---

serve 13- through 20-year-olds. The BSA says it brought girls into its core programs at the request of families, which wanted to focus their limited spare time on one organization for all their children and whose daughters, like Tunney, wanted to emulate their brothers.

“The BSA believes we owe it to families to structure our program offerings . . . in a way that fits into their busy lives,” it said in an email.

Wright says almost all of her first 13 recruits in February 2019 had brothers in the Boy Scouts.

The Girl Scouts of the USA reacted swiftly to the BSA’s decision to recruit girls. It sued the BSA in 2018 in federal court in Manhattan, where the Girl Scouts is headquartered. The suit alleged that “the marketing terms used by the Boy Scouts to recruit girls, such as ‘Scout Me In,’ had trampled the Girl Scouts trademarks, damaged their brand and confused the public” by leading some to think that it had merged with the BSA or ceased to exist, according to *Wall Street Journal* reporters who reviewed court documents. <sup>24</sup>

In subsequent court filings, the BSA called the lawsuit “utterly meritless,” accused the Girl Scouts of launching a “ground war” against it and moved to have the lawsuit thrown out. <sup>25</sup>

The Girl Scouts, which declined to be interviewed, has made a point of stressing since the dispute began that girls thrive best in all-girls organizations. “What can you do to raise a smart, confident daughter who’s equipped to succeed in this world?” the Girls Scouts asks on its website. “Make sure she’s getting some high-quality time surrounded by girls and girls only.” <sup>26</sup>

But some families say Boy Scout programs are a better fit for their daughters. In 2018, Brice Stubbs of Starkville, Miss., enrolled his then 6-year-old daughter Kara in the newly mixed-gender Cub Scout pack in town. “It’s definitely nothing against the Girl Scouts,” said Stubbs. “I just thought this program was better suited to my daughter” because she likes outdoor activities, which the Boy Scouts stress more, he said. <sup>27</sup>

Kimberly Yavorski says that is a misconception. Yavorski, from Ambler, Pa., spent 15 years as a Girl Scout leader and a Boy Scout volunteer as her now-adult daughters and son moved through the programs. “Girl Scout troops are supposed to be youth-led, they pick what they want to do, within reason,” says

Yavorski, and the girls in her troops were outdoorsy. “They wanted to go horseback riding. They wanted to go zip lining. They wanted to go white-water rafting. They wanted to go camping. And we did all of those things,” she says.

Others have said that the Boy Scouts is better at developing leadership skills because its highly structured requirements for moving up in rank allow younger and older Scouts to mix. “For this reason, boys and now girls are able to learn from their peers and, eventually, gain leadership skills themselves,” said Erin Dunne, a former Girl Scout and a commentary writer at the *Washington Examiner*. Girl Scouts, on the other hand, move together by age group. “Girl Scouts, limited to interaction mostly with girls their own age, never get the same leadership experience or opportunity to see older girls in such leadership roles.” <sup>28</sup>

The Girl Scouts say such arguments are false and that their programs stress leadership at every turn. <sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, Yavorski is mourning the camaraderie that used to exist between Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, especially at the local level. “The best of both worlds would be to just have the two organizations work together,” says Yavorski. “That would help the membership of both.”

### Can Boy Scouts become more diverse?

In June, the Boy Scouts of America issued a strongly worded statement condemning the killings of Black individuals by law enforcement that had prompted street protests.

“There is no place for racism — not in Scouting and not in our communities,” it said, adding that the Boy Scouts supports Black Lives Matter, the decentralized social movement against police brutality and racially motivated violence against Black people. “This is not a political issue; it is a human rights issue and one we all have a duty to address,” said the statement. <sup>30</sup>

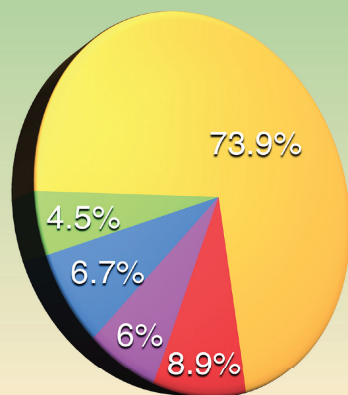
Just 6.7 percent of BSA youth members are Black, according to a BSA 2018 tally, compared to 12.7 percent of total eligible youth in the United States. Hispanic or Latino youth make up 8.9 percent of membership, compared to 19.5 percent of total eligible youth in the general population. <sup>31</sup> And the national organization explicitly excluded openly gay youth and adults for three decades, beginning in the 1980s, before changing its policy in 2013.



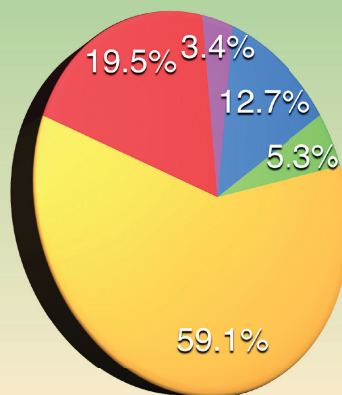
## Boy Scouts Membership Is Less Diverse than U.S. Youth Population

Just under 74 percent of all youth members of the Boy Scouts of America were white in 2018, while just under 9 percent were Hispanic or Latino and less than 7 percent were Black. Among all youths who make up the organization's potential membership, about 59 percent were white, more than 19 percent were Hispanic or Latino and more than 12 percent were Black.

**Youth Membership of Boy Scouts of America, 2018, by Race**



**Potential Youth Membership, 2018, by Race**



Note: Potential youth membership figures were published by Boy Scouts based on data from Experian Information Systems, Inc.

Source: "2018 Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report," Boy Scouts of America, p. 18, accessed March 2, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/7zx72zku>

● Black  
● Asian  
● White  
● Hispanic/Latino  
● Other Races

The Boy Scouts' statement also laid out a plan. The Boy Scouts would introduce a diversity and inclusion merit badge that would be required for the rank of Eagle Scout and would review all programs to ensure diversify and inclusion. BSA employees also would undergo diversity training, starting immediately. (In 2018, BSA had set up task forces to diversify its workforce.) And, in partnership with local councils, the Boy Scouts would review all of its property names, events and insignia to "ensure that symbols of oppression are not in use today or in the future." <sup>32</sup>

Benjamin R. Jordan, an historian at Christian Brothers University in Memphis, Tenn., says he believes the Boy Scouts means what it says. These newly announced policies hark back to past attempts at inclusion before the organization's conservative turn 40 years ago, Jordan says.

"Before the 1980s, there weren't specific policies against gay or trans members," although individual troops may have excluded

them, says Jordan. And in its first decades, the Boy Scouts reached out to marginalized groups, including immigrants, Catholics, Jews, African Americans and Native Americans, although troops and summer camps remained racially segregated into the 1960s, he says.

Others look at that history and are struck by the discrimination that continued rather than the BSA's good intentions. They remain skeptical of the Boy Scouts' commitment to diversity and its promise last summer to “*always stand for what is right and take action when the situation demands it.*” <sup>33</sup>

“I want to believe that’s true, but pretty much until now — you know, the moment when it’s convenient — there’s been very little bravery, very little action and very little standing for what is right on behalf of Black Scouts,” said Zaron Burnett III, an investigative journalist and contributing editor at *MEL*, a lifestyle and culture magazine. Burnett, who is Black, said he loved being a Boy Scout but always felt like an outsider. <sup>34</sup>



Boy Scouts march in the 2019 Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade in Orlando, Fla. The Boy Scouts of America has laid out a plan to become more inclusive, which includes diversity training and a requirement that Eagle Scouts earn a diversity and inclusion merit badge. (Getty Images/NurPhoto/Paul Hennessy)

The Boy Scouts' statement was not its first attempt last summer to stake out a position on diversity and inclusion. Two weeks earlier, it had released a brief statement reiterating its core values

---

of “helpfulness, bravery, common courtesy, and respect among all people” and stating its refusal “to accept violence or injustice toward another human being.” <sup>35</sup>

Criticism rapidly followed. More than 500 Scouts signed an online letter rebuking the BSA for never mentioning Black Lives Matter and anti-Black racism or announcing specific actions it would take. <sup>36</sup> Dwayne Fontenette Jr., 29, an Eagle Scout and volunteer who is Black, helped write the protest letter. “I was shocked and deeply disappointed that their original statement made no reference to the experiences of Black people, the pain that the Black community was feeling,” Fontenette said. <sup>37</sup>

When the Boy Scouts issued its second statement, Fontenette said, “It represented for me the first time in my scouting history where I feel like the organization saw me, and valued me completely.” But he added that the Boy Scouts of America has an “extraordinary amount of work to do to create an environment in which Black people have equal access and equal outcomes in scouting, and an experience in which we are made to feel as we belong.” <sup>38</sup>

Many Native Americans argue that local councils have their work cut out for them as well. For years, Native Americans have been objecting to Boy Scout ceremonies supposedly based on Indigenous folklore.

“Their idea of Native people is stereotypical and caricature,” said Marisa Miakonda Cummings, who is part of the Omaha Tribe and created a Change.org petition that garnered more than 1,300 signatures demanding a halt to such cultural appropriation. <sup>39</sup>

For example, two local councils in Missouri hold “Mic-O-Say” dance competitions with boys dressed in feather headdresses, leather leggings and face paint. However, Brick Huffman, CEO of the Boy Scouts’ Heart of America Council in Kansas City, Mo., defended the practice. The council “cherishes the rich traditions and culture of American Indian nations,” he said. <sup>40</sup>

Others on the local level are embracing change. About a year ago, the Big Apple District created a task force to bring Scouting to a broader community of people, says district chair Paterakis. Task force volunteers have held workshops with local leaders on how to promote diversity in their Scouting units, and Paterakis has been partnering with historic Black churches in Manhattan “to build our presence there.”

“We do have Scouts in minority communities,” including Inwood, Washington Heights and Harlem, says Paterakis. “We are trying to touch the whole of the borough of Manhattan,” he adds. “I don’t think we were doing a bad job. But we can always do a better job.” ■

## Background

### Scouting’s Beginnings

Founded in 1910, the Boy Scouts of America was part of a transatlantic scouting movement started by men in England and the United States who were concerned that “masculinity was in decline,” wrote historian Mischa Honeck.<sup>41</sup>

During the latter half of the 19th century, both countries had been rapidly changing from largely agrarian to urbanized, industrialized societies, igniting fears about the character of boys who no longer worked long hours on the family farm under parental supervision.

“Farming declined and urban work, with its shorter days and faster pace, did not offer the same safe, steady preoccupation for men and boys; instead, moralists feared, it fostered nervousness and drove men to vice,” according to historian David I. MacLeod.<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, employers wanted to hire educated youth, and high school enrollment skyrocketed. However, male critics accused the mostly female teaching corps of turning boys into ‘sissies,’ ” said Honeck.<sup>43</sup> In addition, schools offered few extracurricular activities, and adults feared that idle late afternoon hours after school tempted boys into juvenile delinquency.<sup>44</sup>

One of those concerned about the state of boyhood was British military hero Baden-Powell, who in 1908 published *Scouting for Boys*, inspired by an earlier field manual he had written for British soldiers. In addition to modified military tracking and observation lessons for youths, *Scouting for Boys* included a Scout motto, a nine-point code of conduct known as the Scout Law, an oath, a salute, a handshake and a slogan, all of which became a model for scouting worldwide.<sup>45</sup>



---

The book was a success, and Baden-Powell set up a Boy Scouts office in London to register Scouts and design a uniform. By the end of 1908, “there were 60,000 Scouts, and troops began springing up in British . . . [Empire] countries across the globe,” according to the History Channel. <sup>46</sup>

Young American males also read *Scouting for Boys*, and, along with adult leaders, formed troops. But “American Scouting was still an informal and decentralized activity as the first decade of the 20th century drew to a close,” said writer Chuck Wills, author of an official Boy Scouts history. “It would take the formidable energy and ability of one man — W.D. Boyce — and the hard work of a handful of his associates to turn Scouting into an organized national movement.” <sup>47</sup>



Robert Baden-Powell, a British army general, founded the Boy Scout movement in 1908. He published *Scouting for Boys*, which became a model for scouting worldwide. (Getty Images/Topical Press Agency/Stringer)

Boyce, a wealthy publisher of magazines and small-town newspapers who lived in Chicago, stopped in London in 1909 on his way to an African safari. While trying to cross a street obscured by the city’s famous fog, Boyce encountered a Boy Scout with a lantern. The Scout helped Boyce across the street and refused a tip, Boyce recollected decades later. While some believe the tale is myth, Boyce did visit the Boy Scout office on his return through London and collected literature and advice about starting a similar organization in the United States. <sup>48</sup>

On Feb. 8, 1910, Boyce filed incorporation papers for the Boy Scouts of America. With help from executives of the YMCA, he arranged for a merger with several smaller scouting groups, including the Woodcraft Indians and the Sons of Daniel Boone.

President William Howard Taft agreed to serve as honorary president and former President Theodore Roosevelt agreed to take the title of “Chief Scout Citizen.” <sup>49</sup>

By the fall, the BSA had received inquiries from roughly 150,000 boys in 44 states, Puerto Rico and the Philippines who wanted to become Scouts. BSA leaders hired 34-year-old lawyer James E. West as its chief scout executive. West went on to lead the BSA for more than 30 years. <sup>50</sup>

In 1911, the BSA published its first official full-length manual, *Handbook for Boys*. It included sections on natural history, animals and camping and formalized the organization’s structure: local councils overseeing groups of troops, troops led by an adult scoutmaster and patrols within troops led by Scouts. The handbook also included an oath and Scout Law, comprised of a 12-point code of conduct, the last of which was “A Scout is reverent.” <sup>51</sup>

From the beginning, the BSA held that “a belief in God was a prerequisite for good citizenship, and therefore a vital part of Scouting,” wrote Wills. “This policy, however, was expressed in resolutely non-denominational terms.” Many local churches sponsored troops, and, in 1913, the Mormon Church made the Boy Scouts its official youth program. In 1916, Congress granted the BSA a national charter, which gave it the sole right to the name “Boy Scouts.” <sup>52</sup>

### Internal Conflicts

The Boy Scouts of America became part of a global scouting movement, joining the newly formed International Scout Conference and the World Scout Bureau. BSA officials worked with their European counterparts “to develop worldwide standards for citizenship training consistent with their Western middle-class expectations,” wrote historian Honeck. Starting in 1920, highly decorated American Scouts attended quadrennial World Scout Jamborees. The jamborees held between the two world wars “reimagined youth as the architect of a new world built on peace and universal brotherhood,” Honeck said. <sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, some American parents were concerned that the Boy Scouts, with its emphasis on marching, drills, rank and a uniform, was a training ground for future soldiers. Immigrant parents, many of whom had bitter memories of military

---

conscription in their homelands, were particularly resistant to having their sons join. In response, the BSA added knee socks, shorts and neckerchiefs to the uniform “to soften its military features,” said Honeck. <sup>54</sup>



Boy Scouts participate in an activity at the first national Boy Scout jamboree in Washington in 1937. Attendance at national jamborees peaked in the 1970s along with Boy Scout membership. (Getty Images/The LIFE Picture Collection/Thomas D. McAvoy and Carl Mydans)

The jamborees’ notion of universal brotherhood and “the spectacle of white U.S. Scouts holding hands with boys of different color abroad also produced potentially powerful critiques of social and racial inequalities at home,” said Honeck. <sup>55</sup>

BSA administrators had quietly been allowing local councils to practice racial discrimination by deciding for themselves “whether and how to include African American boys,” wrote Christian Brothers University’s Jordan in his book about the early Boy Scouts. As a result, few councils in the South allowed African American Scouts. “Northern and midwestern Scout councils allowed some scattered African American troops, but they generally segregated them from white Scouts” and sometimes did not allow them to wear the official uniform, said Jordan. <sup>56</sup>

Under pressure from progressive volunteers, in 1926 the BSA formed the Inter-Racial Service to encourage local councils, particularly in the South, to recruit African American boys, although

into segregated troops. Nevertheless, “The costs of Scouting and racial discrimination in access to swimming pools, camps, and Scout uniforms blocked many African Americans from opportunities for advancement, leadership, and adventure made available to most white members,” said Jordan. Some Scout troops remained segregated into the 1960s. <sup>57</sup>

In 1930, the BSA created the Cub Scouts, for boys ages 9 through 11. Boys could join packs, which were divided into dens of between six to 10 boys and often led by a “den mother.” At age 12, the boys could graduate to the Boy Scouts. <sup>58</sup>

But then, as now, attracting and retaining older boys was a problem. In the 1920s, two-thirds of new Boy Scouts were ages 12 or 13, while older boys often dropped out. “Boy Scouts quit for many reasons,” said Honeck. For example, they became less interested in camping and hiking and more interested in team sports, or they lost interest in earning badges and promotion, he said. Around this time, Boy Scout officials began to keep records of adult volunteers considered ineligible to continue because of accusations of child sexual abuse. <sup>59</sup>

### Boom and Decline

In 1937, the Boy Scouts of America held its first national jamboree, in Washington, D.C., and the following year, Oklahoma businessman Waite Phillips donated 36,000 acres in New Mexico to the BSA and another 91,000 acres three years later. The BSA established a wilderness camp on the land and named it Philmont Scout Ranch in 1942. <sup>60</sup>

During World War II, Boy Scouts planted “victory gardens” to help conserve food; collected metal, paper, rubber and other raw materials for military use; distributed posters and pamphlets for the federal government’s Office of War Information and helped raise close to \$2 billion from sales to citizens of war bonds and savings stamps. <sup>61</sup>

“The community-oriented work performed during the war provided exposure to the public of the good works for which the BSA was capable” and helped membership climb, said geographer Matthew Finn Hubbard, who studied geographic trends in the Scouts’ membership. <sup>62</sup>

The postwar Baby Boom generation, whose earliest members reached Cub Scout age in 1954, and a prosperous economy



---

further propelled BSA membership. “Many men of the family were able to earn enough for their wives to stay at home and housewives were invaluable in coordinating the Scouting logistics for their children,” said Hubbard. “The national office was surprised at the rapid growth; the BSA found itself gaining 200,000 members per year during the height of the baby boom.” <sup>63</sup>

But the pattern within that growth reflected the appeal of Scouting for mostly younger boys and the difficulty of retaining older boys’ interest. “Cub Scouting was growing much faster than Boy Scouts,” said Hubbard. It became the BSA’s largest branch in 1956. <sup>64</sup>

In the 1950s and ’60s, as the civil rights movement to end institutionalized racism gained momentum, the public increasingly perceived Scouting as a largely white, middle-class program of the suburbs. In both urban and rural communities, it was becoming difficult to find churches, schools, clubs and other organizations with the financial resources to sponsor troops. A complex set of factors, including structural changes in the economy, led to rising unemployment and deteriorating municipal services for residents of urban centers, who were increasingly racial minorities. Rural America was also in crisis, as farming became more mechanized and corporate-controlled, and many family farms went bankrupt. <sup>65</sup>

“To combat these trends, the BSA’s National Council launched one of its most ambitious initiatives — the Inner-City Rural Program — in 1965,” wrote Boy Scouts’ historian Wills. The program focused on 18 urban and rural areas and tried new ways to organize troops, including meeting in storefronts and private houses and even in a roving Scoutmobile. The program had some success, but it was limited in scope and did not affect overall membership numbers, according to Hubbard. <sup>66</sup>

As the postwar cultural emphasis on “religion, patriotism, and vigorous masculinity” gave way to the counterculture and anti-Vietnam War movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the image of the Boy Scouts in the popular imagination shifted, said Jay Mechling, a professor emeritus of American studies at the University of California, Davis. These movements “threatened to make the Boy Scouts and conventional morality seem irrelevant to young people,” said Mechling. “The anti-militarism of the Sixties generation led many to sneer at the boys in Scout uniforms.” <sup>67</sup>

Demographics was not working in the BSA’s favor either. The end of the Baby Boom around 1964 meant the pool of potential

Scouts would shrink. Participation in the Boy Scouts of America peaked in the early 1970s. For example, in 1974, membership topped out at about 4.3 million Scouts. That number had declined to about 2.1 million in 2019. <sup>68</sup>

In the 1980s, American values shifted again, this time in favor of the Boy Scouts' traditional values of God and country. "A more conservative, patriotic culture emerged with the election of President Ronald Reagan," wrote Wills. "The organization as a whole was reenergized for a decade of positive advancement." Attendance at the national jamborees during the decade climbed slightly, reaching 33,000 in 1989. <sup>69</sup>



Former Eagle Scout James Dale, left, an assistant scoutmaster who was dismissed when it was discovered he was gay, leaves the Supreme Court after oral arguments in 2000 on a suit over whether the Boy Scouts could legally exclude gay members. The court ruled it could, but the organization reversed its ban in 2013. (Getty Images/Hulton Archive/Alex Wong)

### Cultural Change

In the 1990s, the Boy Scouts of America was the subject of several lawsuits challenging its ban on gays and atheists, part of a larger culture war "between an 'orthodox' side fighting in defense of traditional values and a 'progressive' side arguing for greater tolerance for the diversity of American customs and values," said Mechling. "Is the Boy Scouts of America a private organization, the courts asked themselves, and if so, does it have a right to limit its membership to those who subscribe to its announced values? Through the 1990s, different courts came to different conclusions on this question," Mechling wrote. <sup>70</sup>

But in 2000, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Boy Scouts of America, as a private organization that teaches values, was exempt from state laws that

---

bar anti-gay discrimination. Ten years earlier, the organization had dismissed highly regarded Assistant Scoutmaster James Dale from a New Jersey troop when it discovered he was gay; Dale then sued. The Supreme Court decided that the BSA's First Amendment right to express its views against homosexuality would be hampered if it had to hire gay leaders such as Dale. <sup>71</sup>

Nevertheless, after years of internal debate and growing pressure from within and outside the organization, in 2013 more than 60 percent of its volunteer leaders voted to end the BSA's long-standing policy of denying membership to openly gay youths. While some religious groups, such as the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ, applauded the repeal, some conservative churches threatened to break ties with the Boy Scouts. Meanwhile, gay rights advocates vowed to continue to pressure the BSA to allow openly gay volunteers and leaders. <sup>72</sup>

In 2015, the organization made that historic change, but with a significant exception: It allowed troops and packs operated by a religious body the option of continuing the ban. <sup>73</sup>

In 2017, the BSA announced that it would permit girls to join at all levels, beginning with Cub Scouts in 2018 and then Boy Scouts in 2019. To reflect the change, the organization announced in May 2018 that the Boy Scouts program would be renamed Scouts BSA once girls began joining. <sup>74</sup>

That same month, the Mormon Church announced it would sever its 105-year-old tie to the Boy Scouts of America and establish its own youth leadership and development program "that serves its members globally." Mormon Scouts represented nearly one-fifth of the 2.3 million youths in the BSA at that time. And in November 2018, Girl Scouts of the USA filed its lawsuit, claiming that the Boy Scouts' announced rebranding was causing the public to think that the Girl Scouts had merged with the BSA or no longer existed. <sup>75</sup>

Meanwhile, after nearly 100 years of trying to quietly deal with child sexual abuse in its ranks, the Boy Scouts of America faced a wave of public lawsuits that had begun in 2007, when a former Scout sued the BSA for sexual abuse he alleged he had suffered in the 1980s at age 12 by an assistant scoutmaster. In 2010, a jury awarded him \$18.5 million in punitive damages. <sup>76</sup>

In 2012, the Oregon Supreme Court ordered the release of some of the internal records that the BSA kept on volunteers banned from Scouting because of allegations of child abuse. The files,

previously available only to the jury and lawyers in the case, showed that Scouting officials often failed to report these adults to police or parents. By February 2020, the organization was facing hundreds of lawsuits for child sexual abuse, and it filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. In early March 2021, it proposed a preliminary plan for emerging from bankruptcy. <sup>77</sup> ■

### Current Situation

#### Abuse Questioned

Lawyers for the tens of thousands of men who have filed child sexual abuse claims in the Boy Scouts of American bankruptcy case are relying on the organization's liability insurers to contribute the bulk of the money that eventually will fund a victims' compensation trust. But in court filings and a remote hearing earlier this year, insurers affiliated with Chubb Ltd. and Hartford Financial Services have expressed doubts about the validity of thousands of those claims filed before the November deadline. <sup>78</sup>



Tim Kosnoff is one of the lawyers representing former Boy Scouts who have filed sexual abuse claims against the Boy Scouts of America. (Getty Images/Win McNamee)

The insurers accused some plaintiffs' attorneys and for-profit third parties that collected abuse reports after a television and social media advertising blitz of generating claims without proper vetting.

They said some lawyers signed claims on behalf of plaintiffs "with no evidence to show that counsel had knowledge of facts to support the claim." In October, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Laurie Selber Silverstein in Delaware allowed lawyers to sign claims that typically would be signed by plaintiffs but warned of potential mischief.

---

“And if we get a thousand signatures by an attorney on proofs of claim forms filed at the last minute, I think that raises questions,” she said. <sup>79</sup>

One attorney, Tim Kosnoff, who insurers said signed 750 claim forms, said his firm “didn’t file anything that looked facially like it was fraudulent.” Kosnoff said he signed forms on behalf of clients who had not been able to return signed forms by the deadline. “Do we let all these claims not be filed and they lose their rights forever?” he asked. <sup>80</sup>

The Boy Scouts of America is staying out of the scuffle involving insurers, plaintiffs and their lawyers. “We expect that any concerns regarding claim irregularities will be addressed and that the proposed trust will be used appropriately to equitably compensate abuse survivors,” the BSA said. <sup>81</sup>

Insurers have asked the judge for permission to request documents from a sample of 1,400 men and to question scores of them under oath. The insurers also would like to interview 15 plaintiffs’ attorneys who each signed hundreds of claim forms. An informal group of law firms calling itself the Coalition of Abused Scouts said the request “serves no legitimate purpose at this time other than for purposes of delay, harassment and intimidation.” <sup>82</sup>

“The legitimate claimants should welcome this discovery,” said James Ruggeri, an attorney for the insurers. “We want to make sure dollars are paid to those who deserve it.” At a remote hearing in mid-February, Ruggeri told Judge Selber Silverstein that the sheer number of claims raises an alarm about fraud. Prior to seeking bankruptcy protection, the Boy Scouts had been named in 275 lawsuits and told insurers it knew of another 1,400 claims. The 95,000 claims filed with the bankruptcy court represented an “unprecedented” explosion in claims, he said. <sup>83</sup>

## Changing State Laws

States are making it easier for victims of child sexual abuse to access the justice system. “For too long, civil and criminal statutes of limitations (SOL) — the arbitrary deadlines for filing claims — have been unfairly short,” Child USA, a think tank that studies child abuse and neglect, said in a report issued in February. “They have silenced victims, endangered children, favored perpetrators and held reckless institutions unaccountable. That is changing.” <sup>84</sup>



Extending the deadlines for child sexual abuse allegations or eliminating them altogether is necessary because the resulting physical and mental trauma often prevents victims from reporting the crime until they are adults, if at all, say sexual abuse experts. “The best science tells us that the average age for victims to come forward is 52 years old,” says Marci Hamilton, the CEO and legal director of Child USA.

This year, legislators in 29 states have introduced bills to modify their statutes of limitations: 16 bills would eliminate deadlines for filing criminal charges of child sexual abuse and 11 would extend them; 13 measures would eliminate deadlines for victims to file civil claims and eight would extend them; and 16 bills would open a window for or revive civil claims that had expired because of existing deadlines, according to Child USA. <sup>85</sup>

For example, in Colorado a victim of child sexual abuse currently has six years after turning 18 to file a civil claim against an alleged abuser and two or three years to file a claim against an institution, such as a church or a Scout troop. Proposed legislation would eliminate those deadlines and would be retroactive for sexual misconduct involving minors, regardless of when it happened. In 2015, Colorado eliminated the criminal statute of limitations for felony sex offenses against a child. <sup>86</sup>

**“For too long, civil and criminal statutes of limitations — the arbitrary deadlines for filing claims — have been unfairly short.”**

**— Child USA**

In Oklahoma, proposed legislation would eliminate the current age limit of 45 for adults to bring a civil lawsuit for damages from sexual abuse suffered before their 18th birthday. <sup>87</sup>

Meanwhile, opponents of such changes recently helped quash a bill in North Dakota. Introduced in mid-January, it would have suspended for two years, beginning on Aug. 1, the state’s statute of limitations to file civil claims against alleged sexual abusers. In February, the state House narrowly defeated the measure. <sup>88</sup>

The American Tort Reform Association, which represents businesses, municipalities and associations, opposed the bill. Cary Silverman,

---

an attorney representing the group, said statutes of limitations “serve a critical function,” protecting businesses and institutions accused of harboring sexual offenders from victims’ fading memories, lost records and the actions of previous leadership. <sup>89</sup>

In Pennsylvania, a recent technical snafu derailed an effort to change the state’s statute of limitations. A proposed amendment to the state constitution would give child sexual assault survivors a two-year window to file civil lawsuits, regardless of how long ago the alleged abuse occurred. It was supposed to go before voters this spring, but the Pennsylvania Department of State failed to advertise the ballot measure, as required. The department disclosed what it called a “simple human error” on Feb. 1, and Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar resigned. <sup>90</sup>

Last year, 30 states introduced legislation to revamp statutes of limitations for child sexual abuse, but the disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic slowed their momentum. Nevertheless, several states changed their laws, including New Hampshire, which eliminated its civil statute of limitations. And 23 states and the District of Columbia changed their statute of limitations “for the better in 2019,” Child USA said. <sup>91</sup>

## **Mormon Church Lawsuits**

Changes in Arizona’s statute of limitations for claims of child sexual assault have spurred the filing of several recent lawsuits against the Mormon Church. Last year, Arizona gave childhood victims until their 30th birthday — a decade longer than before — to sue their alleged abusers and organizations that may have covered up the abuse.

The state extended the age limit only until the end of last year, giving victims who had missed the age cutoff a one-time window to file a claim. Seven former Boy Scouts brought civil lawsuits against the Mormon Church, asking for a jury to award them an unspecified amount for medical expenses, pain and suffering and for punitive damages. <sup>92</sup>

The men’s allegations date from 1972 through 2009 and cover all of at least seven troops that the Mormon Church sponsored in Arizona. The lawsuits allege that church bishops told victims who had come forward to keep quiet while it investigated, meanwhile allowing accused troop leaders and Scouting volunteers to

continue working with boys, either in their current positions or in reassignments to another troop.

A church spokesman said the church has zero tolerance for abuse and denied that its leaders had access to Boy Scouts files of banned volunteers accused of abuse. <sup>93</sup> ■

## Outlook

### Future of the Boy Scouts

There is widespread discussion among members and others about what the Boy Scouts of America will look like in five years.

The Boy Scouts of America told *CQ Researcher* in an email: “Studies prove, and parents agree, that Scouting helps young people become more kind, helpful and prepared for life, and as long as those values remain important to our society, Scouting will continue to be invaluable to our nation’s youth. We are committed to ensuring that Scouting reaches even more youth and families — from all backgrounds — as we look to prepare the next generations of leaders.”

But Plante, the Santa Clara University psychology and ethics professor, says he is worried that the decades-long decline in membership will continue and eventually cause the Boy Scouts of America “to be so small and marginalized, you won’t even know it’s there.” Plante hopes the organization survives and thrives. “Where else do kids get any kind of training on ethics and character development these days? People aren’t as involved with churches as they used to be,” he says. In 2018, just half of Americans were members of a church, synagogue or mosque, down from 70 percent in 1999, according to a Gallup poll. <sup>94</sup>

Plaintiffs’ attorney Mones also expects the organization to shrink. “If they come out of [bankruptcy], they’re going to be more like other youth organizations,” Mones says. “It’s not going to be the largest, most prestigious youth organization in the United States anymore . . . because the cover was pulled off the [sexual abuse] scandal.”

---

However, Jordan, the Christian Brothers University history professor, predicts that the Boy Scouts' efforts to be more inclusive will slowly stabilize membership, which, he says, will be more diverse. "Supporting things like Black Lives Matter . . . and more diversity awareness in how they run the regular troop meetings and how they train local volunteers, Scout masters and council office leaders will gradually have the effects that they're hoping for," he says.

Jordan also expects that bringing girls into Cub Scouts and troops will, on net, enhance the BSA's membership levels. He hopes the Boy Scouts of America and the Girl Scouts of the USA will put aside their differences and develop joint programming at the national level "as you see in many other countries."

Scout leader Wright also expects girls to continue to join Scouts BSA troops like hers once the coronavirus pandemic fades. "The pandemic kind of threw a wrench in things a little bit, including recruiting into the Cub Scout program, both boys and girls, because that often happens in schools in the fall. And that wasn't really able to happen very much this year," Wright says. "But girls are looking for opportunities to get out and do just as much as boys are."

However, Wright is concerned that the problem the organization has had for decades of keeping teenage boys from dropping out of Scouting may also apply to girls as they progress from Cub Scouts to Scouts. "They get interested in other things, they want to do sports in school, they have boyfriends, they're babysitting. How do you fix that? I don't know," says Wright. "It's an age-old problem." ■

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Bryan Wendell, "Meet 111 Scouts Who Became Famous," Bryan On Scouting, Feb. 8, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/4np59yft>.

<sup>2</sup> "About the BSA," Boy Scouts of America, <https://tinyurl.com/289m6596>.

<sup>3</sup> Samantha Schmidt, "Boy Scouts must settle 95,000 abuse claims by next summer — or risk running out of cash," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 19, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/v5c2j5pd>; Laura Ly, "Boy Scouts of America files for bankruptcy. Hundreds of sexual abuse lawsuits are now on hold," *CNN*, Feb. 18, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/2yjh76vt>.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Kamb, "Seattle lawyers rail against Boy Scouts' bankruptcy plan to resolve sex abuse claims as unacceptable," *The Seattle Times*, March 2, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/yc2hxtdb>.

<sup>5</sup> Erik Eckholm, "Boy Scouts End Longtime Ban on Openly Gay Youths," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2013, <https://tinyurl.com/h8mredj>.

<sup>6</sup> David Crary, "It's Boy Scouts vs. Girls Scouts as BSA moves to admit girls," *The Associated Press/The Columbus Dispatch*, Oct. 12, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/t7knd56r>; Chuck Colbert, "Former Defense Secretary Gates to lead Boy Scouts," *Windy City Times*, Nov. 19, 2013, <https://tinyurl.com/drwpv6b9>.

<sup>7</sup> Samantha Schmidt, "Mormon Church breaks all ties with Boy Scouts, ending 100-year relationship," *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y7ah7un6>; "Chartered Organizations," Boy Scouts of America, <https://tinyurl.com/8j2s4dej>.

<sup>8</sup> Clay Risen, "Save Scouting. End the Boy Scouts," *The New York Times*, Feb. 18, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/2nz459z4>; "About BPSA," Baden-Powell Service Association, <https://tinyurl.com/56kynpbb>.

<sup>9</sup> "Boy Scouts Reaching Out for Handicapped Members," *The New York Times*, Feb. 9, 1976, <https://tinyurl.com/47x56fc6>; "Boy Scouts of America 2019 Annual Report," Boy Scouts of America, <https://tinyurl.com/mzjnah7j>.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Arneil, "Gender, Diversity, and Organizational Change: The Boy Scouts vs. Girls Scouts of America," *Perspectives on Politics*, March 9, 2010, pp. 54, 58, <https://tinyurl.com/y7ak8tuc>.

<sup>11</sup> "2019 State of Play: Trends and Developments in Youth Sports," The Aspen Institute Project Play, p. 1, <https://tinyurl.com/d2v6fya4>; "Facts About Girl Scouts," Girl Scouts of the USA, <https://tinyurl.com/fyddmbk>; and David Crary, "Girl Scouts promote 'girl power' to reverse membership decline," *The Associated Press/The Christian Science Monitor*, July 26, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/6hdc3u6w>.

<sup>12</sup> Marci A. Hamilton *et al.*, "Child Sex Abuse Statutes of Limitation Reform from 2002 to 2020," *Child USA*, Feb. 3, 2021, p. 4, <https://tinyurl.com/3fw2367z>.

<sup>13</sup> "Can the Boy Scouts survive a flood of sexual abuse claims?" *PBS News Hour*, Nov. 17, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/ybanvuzp>.

<sup>14</sup> "BSA takes critical step toward emergence by filing an amended Plan of Reorganization," Boy Scouts of America, accessed March 5, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/yb3b8msy>.

<sup>15</sup> Kamb, *op. cit.*; "Unaudited Consolidated Statement of Financial Position," The Boy Scouts of America, Dec. 31, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/ybbfnu6k>.



- 
- <sup>16</sup> “Opinion: After a jaw-dropping abuse scandal, should the Boy Scouts survive?” *The Washington Post*, Nov. 20, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/ya5rnwlu>; “BSA takes critical step toward emergence by filing an amended Plan of Reorganization,” *op. cit.*; and Sara Randazzo and Andrew Scurria, “Boy Scouts’ Liability Insurers Challenge Sex-Abuse ‘Claim-Mining,’ ” *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 25, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/epcw7fym>.
- <sup>17</sup> Kamb, *op. cit.*
- <sup>18</sup> Schmidt, “Boy Scouts must settle 95,000 abuse claims by next summer,” *op. cit.*
- <sup>19</sup> “Pedophilia,” *Psychology Today*, Feb. 22, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/yaa5a3qb>.
- <sup>20</sup> James Barron, “Nearly 8,000 Boy Scout Leaders Have Been Accused of Sexual Abuse Since 1944, Researcher Found,” *The New York Times*, April 23, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/nw379r74>.
- <sup>21</sup> “Nearly 1,000 Young Women Soar into History as the First Female Eagle Scouts,” The Boy Scouts of America, Feb. 18, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/y567je7d>.
- <sup>22</sup> David Crary, “Boy Scouts celebrate the first group of female Eagle Scouts,” *The Associated Press*, Feb. 20, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/2e8zatvv>.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> Peg Brickley and Andrew Scurria, “Boy Scouts’ Coed Recruiting Touched Off ‘Ground War’ With Girl Scouts,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 31, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/u84yd3cv>.
- <sup>25</sup> Larry Neumeister, “Girl Scouts in legal fight over recruiting after Boys counterpart becomes co-ed,” *Houston Chronicle*, Dec. 27, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/ybzh376m>.
- <sup>26</sup> “In a World of Boys’ Clubs, Give Her One of Her Own,” The Girl Scouts of the USA, <https://tinyurl.com/n8bas4dp>.
- <sup>27</sup> Isabelle Altman, “More scouting options for girls: Local Boy Scout, Girl Scout leaders discuss pros and cons of girls in Boy Scouts,” *The Dispatch* (Columbus and Starkville, Mississippi), March 2, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/23rjk82a>.
- <sup>28</sup> Erin Dunne, “Girl Scouts introduce new badges, but many girls will still join Boy Scouts instead,” *Washington Examiner*, July 20, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/wyhmfulx>.
- <sup>29</sup> “Journeys,” The Girl Scouts of the USA, <https://tinyurl.com/5hczcrka>.
- <sup>30</sup> “BSA’s Commitment to Act Against Racial Injustice,” Boy Scouts of America, June 15, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/wj49zp6w>.
- <sup>31</sup> “2018 Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report,” Boy Scouts of America, p. 18, <https://tinyurl.com/7zx72zku>.

- <sup>32</sup> “BSA’s Commitment to Act Against Racial Injustice,” *op. cit.*; “2018 Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report,” *ibid.*, p. 5.
- <sup>33</sup> “BSA’s Commitment to Act Against Racial Injustice,” *ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> Zaron Burnett III, “I Was a Black Boy Scout. The BSA Needs to Face Its Racist History,” *MEL*, <https://tinyurl.com/2yuk5tp4>.
- <sup>35</sup> “Becoming the Best Version of Ourselves,” Boy Scouts of America, June 3, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/8s25up5c>.
- <sup>36</sup> “A letter to the BSA Executive Board re Black Lives Matter,” June 11, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/57fuxt9k>.
- <sup>37</sup> Mihir Zaveri, “Boy Scouts Announce Diversity Merit Badge and Support for Black Lives Matter,” *The New York Times*, Nov. 15, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/yjef34d2>.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> Andrea Klick, “‘They know it’s wrong.’ Some call on Scouts to change use of Native American culture,” *The Kansas City Star*, Aug. 11, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/yw4r323k>.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> Mischa Honeck, “An Empire of Youth: American Boy Scouts in the World, 1910-1960,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, Spring 2013, p. 96, <https://tinyurl.com/4jrxt6>.
- <sup>42</sup> David I. MacLeod, “Act Your Age: Boyhood, Adolescence, and the Rise of the Boy Scouts of America,” *Journal of Social History*, Winter 1982, p. 5, <https://tinyurl.com/yalwqcgw>.
- <sup>43</sup> Mischa Honeck, *Our Frontier Is the World: The Boy Scouts in the Age of American Ascendancy* (2018), p. 23.
- <sup>44</sup> MacLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
- <sup>45</sup> “Boy Scouts movement begins,” History.com, <https://tinyurl.com/4exau4he>; Chuck Wills, *Boy Scouts of America: A Centennial History* (2009), pp. 32-33.
- <sup>46</sup> “Boy Scouts movement begins,” *ibid.*
- <sup>47</sup> Wills, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 37.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45, 46, 65-66.
- <sup>53</sup> Honeck, “An Empire of Youth: American Boy Scouts in the World, 1910-1960,” *op. cit.*, pp. 102-103.

- 
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.
- <sup>56</sup> Benjamin René Jordan, *Modern Manhood and the Boy Scouts of America: Citizenship, Race, and the Environment, 1910-1930* (2016), pp. 3, 6.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 11, 13.
- <sup>58</sup> Wills, *op. cit.*, pp. 89, 97.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97; "History of Scouting Abuse," AVA Law Group, <https://tinyurl.com/3cwnyr78>.
- <sup>60</sup> Wills, *ibid.*, pp. 107, 109, 111.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 116.
- <sup>62</sup> Matthew Finn Hubbard, "A Cartographic Depiction and Exploration of the Boy Scouts of America's Historical Membership Patterns," Masters' Thesis, University of Kansas, Nov. 22, 2016, pp. 54, 58, <https://tinyurl.com/yd6t9yvr>.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.
- <sup>64</sup> Hubbard, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
- <sup>65</sup> Wills, *op. cit.*, pp. 154, 156.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156, 157; Hubbard, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
- <sup>67</sup> Jay Mechling, "The Boy Scouts of America at 100," *The American Interest*, Nov. 1, 2010, <https://tinyurl.com/2y8rvf48>.
- <sup>68</sup> "Boy Scouts Reaching Out for Handicapped Members," *op. cit.*; "Boy Scouts of America 2019 Annual Report," *op. cit.*
- <sup>69</sup> Wills, *op. cit.*, p. 196; "Fact Sheet: History of the BSA Highlights," Boy Scouts of America, <https://tinyurl.com/cnnmcysv>.
- <sup>70</sup> Jay Mechling, "Excursus: The 'Problem' of Gays and Girls in the Boy Scouts" in *On My Honor: Boy Scouts and the Making of American Youth* (2001), p. 2.
- <sup>71</sup> "U.S. Supreme Court Ruling That Boy Scouts Can Discriminate is 'Damaging But Limited,' ACLU Says," ACLU, June 28, 2000, <https://tinyurl.com/s255v8yw>.
- <sup>72</sup> Eckholm, "Boy Scouts End Longtime Ban on Openly Gay Youths," *op. cit.*; Christina Ng, "Some Churches Say They'll Cut Ties to Boy Scouts Following Its Lifting Ban on Gay Scouts," *ABC News*, May 28, 2013, <https://tinyurl.com/59h393y8>.
- <sup>73</sup> "Boy Scouts to repeal ban on gay leaders, with limitations," *PBS News Hour Weekend*, July 26, 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/mtuzmvfu>.

<sup>74</sup> “Mormons cutting ties with Boy Scouts, ending long alliance,” *The Associated Press/CBS News*, May 9, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/5b87kuf8>.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*; Tara John, “Girl Scouts sue Boy Scouts over name change,” *CNN*, Nov. 7, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/5d4rswa6>.

<sup>76</sup> “History of Scouting Abuse,” *op. cit.*; “Jury verdict hits Boy Scouts with \$18.5 million in punitive damages,” *CNN*, April 24, 2010, <https://tinyurl.com/49ws48yf>.

<sup>77</sup> Kamb, *op. cit.*; “History of Scouting Abuse,” *op. cit.*

<sup>78</sup> Randazzo and Scurria, *op. cit.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Andrew Scurria and Peg Brickley, “Boy Scouts Sex-Abuse Lawyers Decry ‘Intimidation’ From Insurers,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 8, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/5y92728r>; Randall Chase, “Insurers Question Claims Process in Boy Scouts Bankruptcy,” *The Associated Press*, Feb. 17, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/yahtnce7>.

<sup>83</sup> Chase, *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Hamilton *et al.*, *op. cit.*

<sup>85</sup> “2021 SOL Tracker,” Child USA, <https://tinyurl.com/2y9vrtwf>.

<sup>86</sup> “SB21-073: Civil Action Statute Of Limitations Sexual Assault,” Colorado General Assembly, <https://tinyurl.com/22ftp7kt>; Michael Karlik, “Following latest clergy abuse revelations, lawmakers still committed to statute of limitations reform,” *Colorado Politics*, Dec. 2, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/9k6j5ufp>; and Shaun Boyd, “Statute Of Limitations In Sexual Assault Civil Cases Could Be Eliminated,” *CBS Denver*, Dec. 20, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/2k4zpw69>.

<sup>87</sup> “Bill To Remove Age Limitations On Child Sexual Abuse Crimes Passes House Committee,” Oklahoma House of Representatives, Feb. 17, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/3fw3apks>.

<sup>88</sup> James MacPherson, “Bill Aims to Extend Time for Abuse Victims to File Claims,” *The Associated Press/U.S. News & World Report*, Feb. 3, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/24pcjnjk>; “Bill Actions for HB 1382,” North Dakota Legislative Branch, <https://tinyurl.com/5a7u4t8s>.

<sup>89</sup> MacPherson, *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> “Pennsylvania agency bungles ballot referendum for child sex victims,” *The Associated Press/NBC News*, Feb. 1, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/4rwyzzk4>.

<sup>91</sup> Hamilton *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.



---

<sup>92</sup> Terry Tang, "Mormon Church Sued for Alleged Role in Boy Scouts Sex Abuse," *The Associated Press*, Dec. 28, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/5e67m7hs>.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades," Gallup, April 18, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/u77zkvpy>.

# Bibliography

## Books

**Honeck, Mischa, *Our Frontier Is the World: The Boy Scouts in the Age of American Ascendancy*, Cornell University Press, 2018.**

An American studies professor at Humboldt University in Berlin explains how the Boy Scouts enabled American global expansion in the 20th century through its activities abroad.

**René Jordan, Benjamin, *Modern Manhood and the Boy Scouts of America: Citizenship, Race, and the Environment, 1910-1930*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2016.**

A historian at Tennessee's Christian Brothers University examines the role of gender, race and religion in the early Boy Scouts of America.

**Wills, Chuck, *Boy Scouts of America: A Centennial History*, DK, 2009.**

A writer offers the official history of the Boy Scouts of America, complete with historic photos and documents.

## Articles

**"Pennsylvania agency bungles ballot referendum for child sex victims," *The Associated Press/NBC News*, Feb. 1, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/y5frr2yn>.**

A state constitutional amendment to make it easier for child sexual assault survivors to file civil lawsuits will not be on the ballot this spring due to a technical snafu, leading Pennsylvania's top election official to resign.

**Brickley, Peg, and Andrew Scurria, “Boy Scouts’ Coed Recruiting Touched Off ‘Ground War’ With Girl Scouts,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 31, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/y92u6hso>.**

America’s two top scouting organizations are warring in civil court and the court of public opinion after the Boy Scouts welcomed girls into all its programs.

**John, Tara, “Girl Scouts sue Boy Scouts over name change,” *CNN*, Nov. 7, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y8qzqne8>.**

The Girl Scouts sued the Boy Scouts of America after the Boy Scouts changed the name of its program for youths age 12 and up to Scouts BSA.

**Randazzo, Sara, and Andrew Scurria, “Boy Scouts’ Liability Insurers Challenging Sex-Abuse ‘Claim-Mining,’ ” *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 25, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/yc9dxnz9>.**

Insurers have tried to limit their exposure in the Boy Scouts bankruptcy case by challenging the validity of thousands of men’s claims of child sexual abuse while scouting.

**Schmidt, Samantha, “Boy Scouts must settle 95,000 abuse claims by next summer — or risk running out of cash,” *The Washington Post*, Nov. 19, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/yacgrht5>.**

The Boy Scouts said it must emerge from bankruptcy by summer or risk running out of cash as its legal fees mount and the pandemic suppresses revenue.

**Tang, Terry, “Mormon Church Sued for Alleged Role in Boy Scouts Sex Abuse,” *The Associated Press*, Dec. 28, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/ya45d2nv>.**

Seven men sued the Mormon Church for allegedly covering up child sexual abuse when it sponsored Boy Scout troops in Arizona.

### Reports and Studies

**“2019 State of Play: Trends and Developments in Youth Sports,” *The Aspen Institute Project Play*, p. 1, <https://tinyurl.com/yb36xf3e>.**

Researchers said young children’s participation in team and individual sports is declining.

**Hamilton, Marci A., *et al.*, “Child Sex Abuse Statutes of Limitation Reform from 2002 to 2020,” *Child USA*, Feb. 3, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/ya7a85yb>.**

---

Advocates for eliminating or extending state deadlines for filing child sexual abuse claims and bringing criminal charges track dozens of reforms since 2002.

**Jones, Jeffrey M., “U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades,” Gallup, April 18, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/y5vj82fy>.**

Membership in churches, synagogues and mosques has declined by 20 percentage points over two decades.

# The Next Step

## Abuse Scandal

**Bekiempis, Victoria, “Boy Scouts will sell Norman Rockwell paintings to fund sexual abuse claim payments,” *The Guardian*, March 2, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/wp3w459d>.**

The Boy Scouts could sell more than 50 Norman Rockwell paintings and hundreds of other artworks to help finance a compensation fund for victims of sexual abuse.

**Brickley, Peg, “Boy Scouts Cease-Fire With Abuse Victims Committee at Risk,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 25, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/yh8mt8ys>.**

The Boy Scouts are asking a bankruptcy judge to extend an injunction that put legal proceedings brought by sex abuse victims on hold, but the committee that represents the victims opposes the extension.

**Kelly, Cara, “Boy Scouts of America plan to exit bankruptcy would pay abuse survivors an average of \$6,000 each; survivors object,” *USA Today*, March 2, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/32swek54>.**

The Boy Scouts proposed paying roughly \$220 million toward a fund to compensate tens of thousands of former members who say they were abused as Scouts, with another \$300 million coming from local councils, but survivors think these amounts are too low.

## Diversity

**Hays, Holly V., “1% of Eagle Scouts are Black. Indianapolis’ inner-city troops are working to change that,” *Indianapolis Star*, Sept. 8, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/p7unj9jj>.**

Diversity is growing within the ranks of Scouts BSA troops in central Indiana, and more Black members are reaching the highest rank of Eagle Scout.

**Wendell, Bryan, “Noah Harris, Harvard’s student body president, is an Eagle Scout,” *Scouting Magazine*, Feb. 26, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/35hvs9fv>.**

The first Black man elected student body president of Harvard University is an Eagle Scout, and he says his experience in the Boy Scouts helped prepare him for leadership roles.

**Williams, David, “An Indiana teen is one of the first Black female Eagle Scouts,” *CNN*, Feb. 11, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/c2tm9n5j>.**

At least 21 young Black women have reached the rank of Eagle Scout.

### Girl Scouts

**Bentley, Lauryn, “Girl Scout and Boy Scout leaders explain differences between new BSA Girl Troop,” *NTV*, Feb. 12, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/3yh7e82w>.**

After the Boy Scouts started an all-girls troop in Kearney, Neb., local representatives from both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts made pitches to families about which organization would be better for their daughters.

**Jacobs, Dylan, “How even Girl Scouts have adapted during the pandemic to continue to sell,” *Waynesboro Record Herald*, March 1, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/3kpsj63d>.**

The Girl Scouts has adapted its cookie business for the pandemic, allowing for contactless delivery and drive-through orders, and one girl included free rolls of toilet paper in orders when supplies ran low in 2020.

**Ludden, Nicole, “Girl Scouts to sell cookies that can be donated to front-line pandemic workers,” *Tucson.com*, March 4, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/3b3p6u6t>.**

Arizona Girl Scout troops are holding an event in which participants can pay to donate boxes of cookies to workers on the front lines of the pandemic at hospitals and vaccination clinics, as well as to fire and ambulance services and funeral homes.

### Statute of Limitations Laws

**Franklin, Gabrielle, “New bill would end statute of limitations for sexual assault in Colorado,” *Fox 21 News*, March 4, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/ajv9nb7y>.**



---

A Colorado bill that would end the statute of limitations on civil claims for sexual assault against a child would also allow parents to seek damages on behalf of their children.

**Krehbiel, Randy, “House committee approves bill eliminating statute of limitations for child sex abuse lawsuits,” *Tulsa World*, Feb. 16, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/2837zb9v>.**

An Oklahoma bill unanimously approved in committee would remove the statute of limitations for child sex abuse lawsuits and allow a five-year window for filing previously time-barred actions.

**Nguyen, Candice, and Michael Bott, “600 Sex Abuse Lawsuits Expected to Hit Northern CA Dioceses in New Window for Accusers,” *NBC Bay Area*, Feb. 18, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/a3vrmdj4>.**

Hundreds of people are coming forward to sue Northern California Catholic dioceses for abuse they allegedly suffered from priests and clergy, enabled by a recent law allowing lawsuits to be brought regarding allegations that had previously been prohibited by a statute of limitations.

## At Issue:

Should a belief in God continue to be mandatory for Boy Scouts?

**Yes**



**MARK RAY**

Author, *Boy Scout Handbook*, 13th ed.; Eagle Scout  
WRITTEN FOR CQ RESEARCHER, MARCH 2021

“There is no religious *side* to the Movement. The *whole* of it is based on religion, that is, on the realisation and service of God.” So wrote Scouting founder Robert Baden-Powell in 1920.

I wouldn’t go quite that far, but I do believe faith in a higher power, however one defines it, remains an essential part of Scouting a century later. In fact, I think the Boy Scouts of America’s nonsectarian Declaration of Religious Principle (which is a prerequisite to membership) has actually made Scouting more inclusive rather than more exclusive.

How? Let me explain.

Although the word *God* appears in the Scout Oath, the BSA doesn’t define what or in whom a Scout must believe. As a result, many faith groups have embraced Scouting as a way to serve their members and

their communities. Today, quite literally, faith groups from A to Z — from the African Methodist Episcopal Church to the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York — offer religious emblems their adherents can wear on their Scout uniforms.

But duty to God doesn't just mean burrowing deeper into your own faith. It also means discovering what your fellow Scouts believe. In defining *reverence*, the *Scouts BSA Handbook* emphasizes that Scouts be faithful in their religious duties *and* respect the beliefs of others.

Scouts take that last part seriously. When religious services are held at the quadrennial National Scout Jamboree, you can see Methodist Scouts attending Shabbat services, Jewish Scouts going to Catholic mass and Scouts of all faiths stopping by the onsite mosque to learn what Muslims really believe. At the 2013 Jamboree, hundreds of Scouts attended an open forum on Sikhism and even learned to tie turbans. As one Sikh Scouter told me later, "Some kids didn't remove their turbans for two days because they thought it was the coolest thing."

The same thing happens on a smaller scale every week. When I was a scoutmaster in the days after 9/11, our troop organized a "tour of faiths." Over two months or so, we visited several houses of worship — many represented in our membership — including a Catholic cathedral, a Jewish synagogue and a Hindu temple. I'll never forget the pride one Hindu Scout showed as he explained the customs of his faith to his fellow troop members.

I fear such sharing would be lost if we decided there really was no religious side to the Scouting movement.

### No



**MARGARET DOWNEY**

Founder and President, Freethought Society

WRITTEN FOR CQ RESEARCHER, MARCH 2021

Over 30 years ago, my son Matthew was ousted from the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). A move by our family to Pennsylvania prompted the need for us to reapply in order to continue his BSA affiliation and to be assigned to a new troop. As we did throughout his previous Scouting experience in New Jersey, we crossed off the word "God" on the application and wrote the word "Good" in its place. We had been accepted and loved in New Jersey, but the Pennsylvania application was immediately rejected because of the adjustment we made. The word "good" was not good enough for BSA.

The rejection prevented my son from joining the troop our neighbors belonged to and drove a wedge between him and other schoolmates who wondered why Matthew wasn't part of Scouting. The religious bigotry was hurtful, mean-spirited and un-Scout-like. BSA certainly was

---

not helpful, friendly or courteous to our family. Why? Simply, because we did not believe in God and wanted to say an oath to Good as we sought to be included in the world's largest youth group.

In an attempt to be inclusive and to stop negative stereotyping, BSA now accepts girls, gays and transgender individuals. BSA, however, contends that a belief in God is paramount. To join BSA, all applicants must agree with its "Declaration of Religious Principles," which states: *"God as the ruling and leading power in the universe and the grateful acknowledgment of His favors and blessings are necessary to the best type of citizenship and are wholesome precepts in the education of the growing members."*

When a group declares a nonreligious person cannot be "the best type" of citizen, it contributes to unfounded prejudice, separatism and harmful negative stereotyping. Rejection of the nontheist community is encouraged and exemplified through the Scouting program.

In 1991, 6 percent of the U.S. population identified as atheist/agnostic. A 2021 Pew Research Center survey lists atheists/agnostics at 9 percent to 11 percent. Religiously unaffiliated citizens are 28 percent to 30 percent. This trend suggests that many more families today may be subjected to BSA bigotry than 30 years ago. In any case, one person experiencing exclusion is one too many.

As the country tries to heal from Christian nationalism, we must show our youth, by example, that there is no room for prejudgment of their fellow citizens who happen to not believe in God.

## Discussion Questions

*Here are some questions to think about regarding the future of the Boy Scouts:*

- Why has membership in the Boy Scouts declined in recent years?
- What steps have the Boy Scouts taken to reverse the membership loss?
- What do critics say are the Boy Scouts' shortcomings in the area of diversity and inclusion, and what has the organization done to address these criticisms?
- Why did the Boy Scouts file for bankruptcy protection? What is its plan for emerging from bankruptcy?

- If you were the parent of a girl who was interested in participating in scouting, would you encourage her to join the Girl Scouts, or the Boy Scouts? Why? What are the pros and cons of each option? ■

# Scoutmaster Builds Troop Through Community Engagement

***“For so many people, Scouting is a local program.”***

*Bryan Martin Firvida, a 47-year-old senior project manager for a software services company, has been a Scouting volunteer since 2012, when his now-16-year-old son Brendan joined. For four years, Martin Firvida was Cubmaster for Pack 98 in Northeast Washington, D.C., and saw membership climb from 20 to more than 120 boys. He is in his fourth year as scoutmaster of Scouts BSA Troop 98, during which time membership has doubled to 32 boys. He spoke with CQ Researcher freelance correspondent Barbara Mantel about what makes a successful Scout troop. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

**CQR: Why has your membership climbed, while membership has been declining nationally?**

Martin Firvida: Several reasons. First of all, I embraced the training and resources that the Boy Scouts of America and our National Capital Area Council made available. And I encourage all our volunteers to complete that training. It has really helped us provide a consistent and solid program that is engaging for the boys.

**CQR: What kind of training?**

Martin Firvida: First, any volunteer has to complete youth protection training.

**CQR: So they have to know policies, such as that volunteers cannot be alone with a child?**

Martin Firvida: Exactly. That training is mandatory. All the other trainings are voluntary but strongly encouraged. So, there is a

---

specific training curriculum for somebody who is going to be a scoutmaster or a den leader or a merit badge counselor. There is supplemental training, like how to deal with kids who aren't your own or communicating across generations.

**CQR: What other factors are behind the success?**

Martin Firvida: We have a strong partnership with our chartered organization, which is St. Anthony of Padua Church, and we've been blessed with a strong team of volunteers.

**CQR: But how do you keep the boys interested and from dropping out?**

Martin Firvida: If you grow up in a big city like D.C., the opportunity to go camping or start a fire or go fishing or shoot a shotgun or a crossbow, those are not normal things that you get to do. But in Scouts, we do them all. We're also giving back to the community. Last year, we had a couple of Eagle Scout service projects. One was a removal of invasive species. The other was building a Zen garden on the grounds of a local high school. And we provide high adventure opportunities, so in the summer of 2019, before the pandemic, we had Scouts go to Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico for a two-week trek. And on the other side of the country, in West Virginia, we had Scouts at the World Scout Jamboree.

**CQR: Who plans all these activities?**

Martin Firvida: We're committed to having what we call a youth-led troop. The actual leader of our troop is our senior patrol leader, who is elected by the Scouts. He is a Scout, and he serves a one-year term. We're providing them guidance and a framework.

**CQR: How have you adapted to the coronavirus pandemic and social distancing restrictions?**

Martin Firvida: We continue to meet weekly but now through Zoom. And we're looking at what things we can do that are different and engaging. So, we'll have guest speakers, and this Saturday morning, we're doing [an online] joint meeting with a unit in Ireland. The boys are going to get to meet Scouts from another country and discover what's different about our programs, what's the same, have Q and A time, play some games.





Bryan Martin Firvida (Courtesy Bryan Martin Firvida)

**CQR: Are you still doing hiking and camping?**

Martin Firvida: Our council suspended summer camp last year. Last fall, we were able to do one camping trip, with one patrol. So we've had to kind of downsize to keep everybody safe. We've also done a day hike.

**CQR: But don't the boys still have to meet all the requirements to earn their merit badges and advance in rank?**

Martin Firvida: Yes, although there have been a few

adjustments. It requires a little bit more creativity on our side. So, in November, we delivered to every Scout knot-tying kits that had two one-foot long dowels and two six-foot lengths of cord. And every one of our Scouts had the equipment that they needed to learn how to tie knots and everybody could follow along [online].

**CQR: You have Scouts not just in Northeast D.C. but in Virginia and Maryland?**

Martin Firvida: Yes, and I delivered some of these kits myself, and getting to see the Scouts in person reminded me of how diverse our troop is. Even though we're chartered by a Catholic church, not everybody is Catholic. We're also a racially diverse unit with Black, white, Latino and Asian Scouts. D.C., unfortunately, was still segregated when Troop 98 and Pack 98 started up about 70 years ago. But the Scouting program was always integrated, as was the parish, and it's a reflection on the values of the community. And I think that's another thing that draws youth and families into our program.

**CQR: Has the BSA's bankruptcy filing and the sexual assault scandal affected your troop?**

Martin Firvida: It hasn't. For so many people, Scouting is a local program. When the boys are out collecting food for the parish pantry or planting 5,000 tulip bulbs in one of the triangle parks along the streets, people see it here in the neighborhood. And that's what they and the Scouts embrace.

---

# Girl Scouts Formed to Promote Self-Reliance

*Founder's vision was "particularly progressive" for its time.*

When British military hero Robert Baden-Powell published *Scouting for Boys* in 1908, it captured the imagination of not just boys. British girls also devoured the field guide and wrote letters to Baden-Powell asking permission to form Scout troops. Some, like Nesta Maude Ashworth, resorted to subterfuge and signed their letters with only a first initial.

"From the moment [*Scouting for Boys*] had fallen into our hands we were determined to be Scouts," recalled Ashworth as an adult. "Instinct, I think, warned us that Scouting was a movement for boys and the only way we could get in was by hiding the fact that we were girls," she said. <sup>1</sup>

Girls formed troops that were single-sex or mixed-gender. But many Scouting leaders felt the presence of girls would make the movement less appealing to boys, while others believed that the activities were not appropriate for females. In 1909, Baden-Powell started planning a separate organization for female Scouts.

Judged by today's standards, Baden-Powell's attitudes toward females were less than progressive.

"Girls must be partners and comrades rather than dolls," Baden-Powell wrote, complaining of idle young women who congregate with working men in bars at the end of the day and live "aimless, profitless lives." He also criticized "hard and sexless" women who go to the other extreme and "take up manly pursuits." A Scouting organization for girls would show them how to "take up useful woman's work with zeal," he said. In 1910, Baden-Powell created Girl Guides. <sup>2</sup>

Yet even a separate girls' Scouting movement was too liberal for some of Baden-Powell's contemporaries. These critics argued that girls who hiked and learned about the outdoors would become too masculine and that joint expeditions between Girl Guides and Boy Scouts would lead to inappropriate behavior. These concerns did not stop both movements from quickly spreading around the globe, including to the United States. <sup>3</sup>



Young Girl Scouts attend the 2012 unveiling of a wax figure of Girl Scouts' founder Juliette Low at the Madame Tussauds museum in Washington, D.C., commemorating the 100th anniversary of the organization. (Getty Images/Kris Connor)

Georgia native Juliette Low, a wealthy widow of an Englishman, spent part of every year in Britain, where in 1911 she met Baden-Powell. Low started a Girl Guides group for poor girls in rural Scotland, where she had a country home, and trained with other Girl Guides leaders at Baden-Powell's London headquarters. <sup>4</sup>

Low returned to the United States determined to create an American version of the organization and founded the American Girl Guides in 1912, before American women had won the right to vote. "She and the other early leaders wanted to give girls an outlet for them to be self-sufficient, to be useful outside of the home as well as inside the home," says Tammy M. Proctor, an historian at Utah State University.

The next year, the name was officially changed to the Girl Scouts. Low wanted to call it Girl Scouts because guiding was associated with British empire-building in India, says Proctor. "Scouting had a much more adventurous connotation in the United States because of the notion of scouts on the [Western] frontier," Proctor says.

Girl Scouts learned handicrafts and homemaking but also went hiking and camping, played sports, learned to shoot rifles and

---

donated their time to helping others, Proctor says. She added that the uniforms and merit badges were a big attraction, just as they were for boys in the Boy Scouts of America, formed two years earlier.

Low financed the nascent organization with her own funds, incorporating it in 1915 and moving its headquarters from Washington, D.C., to New York City in 1916. She also applied for patents for the uniform, insignias and training materials. <sup>5</sup>

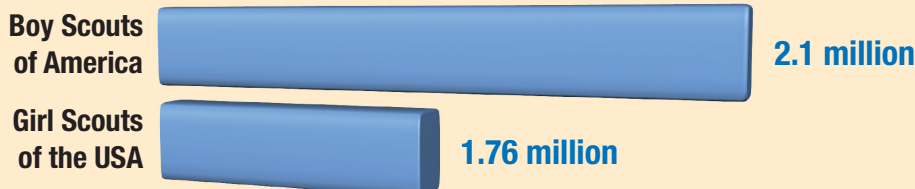
The early Girl Scouts' emphasis on female self-sufficiency was "particularly progressive" for the times, said historian Rebekah Revzin. The organization expected girls to earn the money for dues and advocated professional careers for women. In its 1920 handbook, it gave examples of such careers: translator, stockbroker, decorator, doctor, small-business manager, accountant and architect. <sup>6</sup>

"Although the Girl Scout movement initially focused only on middle-class white girls, it very quickly diversified, beginning in 1915 with immigrant troops in the overcrowded metropolitan areas like New York and Chicago," wrote Revzin. In the 1920s, African American girls began to form troops; "however, the exclusively white regional councils did not officially recognize many of these groups until the late 1930s," Revzin said. Segregated troops were "standard throughout the South until 1960, when the Girl Scout policy officially changed to promote integration." <sup>7</sup>

### Boy Scouts' Membership Is Larger Than Girl Scouts

The Boy Scouts of America reported having 2.1 million youth members in 2019, while the Girl Scouts had a membership of 1.76 million the previous year. Both organizations have experienced a decline in membership in recent years.

#### Youth Scouting Membership



Note: The most recent figures for Boy Scouts of America are from 2019, and the most recent figures for Girl Scouts of the USA come from 2018.

Source: "Boy Scouts of America 2019 Annual Report," Boy Scouts of America, accessed March 2, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/yc8jkdzs>; David Crary, "Girl Scouts promote 'girl power' to reverse membership decline," *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 26, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/6hdc3u6w>

Three years ago, the Girl Scouts of the USA sued the Boy Scouts of America after the Boy Scouts changed the name of one of its core programs, Boy Scouts, to Scouts BSA in recognition of its new policy to welcome girls. Girl Scouts said the name change was a trademark infringement and could create the impression that the Girl Scouts had merged with the boys' organization or ceased to exist.<sup>8</sup>

The two organizations have been in court before over the use of the word Scouts.

In the 1920s, the Boy Scouts of America unsuccessfully sued the Girl Scouts to end its use of the term "Scouts," says Proctor. The BSA "claimed it was an infringement on their brand and worried that boys wouldn't want to join the organization if it somehow were associated with girls," she says.

The two national organizations have not been "very cooperative at any point," says Proctor.

— **Barbara Mantel**

---

<sup>1</sup> Tammy M. Proctor, *Scouting for Girls: A Century of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts* (2009), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Rebekah E. Revzin, "American Girlhood in the Early Twentieth Century: The Ideology of Girl Scout Literature, 1913-1930," *The Library Quarterly*, July 1998, p. 268, p. 270, <https://tinyurl.com/ycut44ar>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>8</sup> David Crary, "Boy Scouts celebrate the first group of female Eagle Scouts," *The Associated Press*, Feb. 20, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/2e8zatvv>.

## Chronology

**1908-1937** The transatlantic scouting movement grows.

### 1908

British military hero Robert Baden-Powell publishes *Scouting for Boys*.



---

## 1910

Newspaper publisher William D. Boyce incorporates the Boy Scouts of America (BSA).

## 1912

Arthur Eldred, 17, becomes the first Eagle Scout. . . . *Boys' Life* becomes the official BSA magazine. . . . Juliette Low founds the Girl Scouts.

## 1913

The Mormon Church makes the Boy Scouts its official youth program.

## 1916

Congress grants a national charter to Boy Scouts of America.

## 1920

Some 8,000 Scouts from 34 countries, including 301 BSA members, attend the first World Scout Jamboree, held in London. . . . The BSA starts keeping records of adult volunteers accused of child sexual abuse.

## 1926

The BSA forms the Inter-Racial Service to promote recruitment of African American boys; most troops remain segregated, and Black troops are often denied full privileges.

## 1930

The BSA launches the Cub Scouts, for boys ages 9 through 11.

## 1935

BSA membership exceeds 1 million.

## 1937

The BSA holds its first national jamboree, in Washington, D.C. . . . Over the next four years, businessman Waite Phillips donates 127,000 acres in New Mexico for a wilderness camp, eventually named Philmont Scout Ranch.

---

**1949-1973** BSA membership booms.

### 1949

The BSA has more than 2.5 million members and 543 local councils.

### 1950

More than 47,000 Scouts and leaders attend the second national jamboree. . . . The U.S. Post Office Department issues the first Boy Scout stamp.

### 1960

More than 53,000 Scouts and leaders attend the fifth national jamboree.

### 1965

The 500,000th Eagle Scout is honored.

### 1973

The BSA peaks at more than 4 million youth members. . . . Some 64,000 youths and leaders attend the eighth national jamboree.

---

**1981-Present** Membership declines; the BSA accepts gays and girls in the midst of a sexual assault scandal.

### 1981

30,000 Scouts and leaders attend the 10th national jamboree.

### 1991

The BSA establishes Learning for Life, a character-building program for schools.

---

## **2000**

The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the BSA is a private organization exempt from state anti-discrimination laws and was within its rights to fire gay Assistant Scoutmaster James Dale in 1990.

## **2010**

An Oregon jury awards a 1980s victim of child sexual abuse by scout leaders a record \$18.5 million.

## **2012**

The Oregon Supreme Court orders the BSA to make public 21 years worth of records listing volunteers banned from Scouting because of sexual abuse allegations. . . . Youth membership declines to 2.7 million.

## **2013**

The BSA ends its ban on gay Scouts; two years later it lifts its ban on openly gay scout leaders.

## **2017**

The BSA announces it will open Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts to girls and will call the Boy Scouts program Scouts BSA.

## **2018**

The Girl Scouts sue BSA over the name change, claiming it is part of a larger attempt to pilfer Girl Scouts members.

## **2019**

The Mormon Church severs ties to Boy Scouts. . . . BSA youth membership is 2.1 million with 254 local councils.

## **2020**

In February, the Boy Scouts of America declares bankruptcy as it faces 275 child sexual assault lawsuits; by November, 95,000 claims of child sexual assault at the hands of adult volunteers have been filed with the bankruptcy court.

### 2021

The Boy Scouts of America proposes a preliminary plan to emerge from bankruptcy and to compensate abuse victims; victims' lawyers say the sum is inadequate (March).

## For More Information

**Baden-Powell Service Association**, 1631 N.E. Broadway St., #108, Portland, OR 97232; 636-544-3239; [bpsa-us.org](http://bpsa-us.org). A back-to-basics, secular scouting organization that welcomes all genders; offers four program levels for youths starting at age 5.

**Boy Scouts of America**, 1325 W. Walnut Hill Lane, Irving, TX 75038; 972-580-2000; [scouting.org](http://scouting.org). One of the nation's largest values-based youth development organizations; offers five programs for girls and boys, starting in kindergarten and going through age 20.

**Child USA**, 3508 Market St., Suite 202, Philadelphia, PA 19104; 215-539-1906; [childusa.org](http://childusa.org). A think tank dedicated to protecting children and preventing abuse.

**Girl Scouts of the USA**, 420 5th Ave., New York, NY 10018; 212-852-8000; [girlscouts.org](http://girlscouts.org). A values-based youth development organization for girls; offers six program levels from kindergarten through 12th grade.

**Trail Life USA**, 10612 Augusta Road, Belton, SC 29627; 321-247-7761; [traillifeusa.com](http://traillifeusa.com). A Christian mentoring program for boys in grades K-12; male-led troops focus on outdoor activities.

**World Federation of Independent Scouts**, Angelstr.15, 65558 Heistenbach, Germany; [wfi.world](http://wfi.world). A federation of 140 affiliated scouting organizations in 64 countries, including the Baden-Powell Service Association.

**World Organization of the Scout Movement**, Geneva Rue Henri-Christiné 5, 1205 Genève, Switzerland; +41-22-705-10-10; [scout.org](http://scout.org). An international association of 171 national scout organizations, including the Boy Scouts of America.

---

## About the Author



**Barbara Mantel** is a freelance writer in New York City. She has been a Kiplinger Fellow and has won several journalism awards, including the National Press Club's Best Consumer Journalism Award and the Front Page Award. She was a correspondent for *NPR* and holds a B.A. in history and economics from the University of Virginia and an M.A. in economics from Northwestern University. Her most recent *CQ Researcher* reports were on "Higher Education in the COVID Era" and "Preventing Wildfires."