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Selling America: The Boy Scouts of America in the Progressive Era, 1910-1921

John Phillips

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**SELLING AMERICA: THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA IN THE
PROGRESSIVE ERA, 1910-1921**

By

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B.S. Mankato State University, 1972

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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(in History)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

August, 2001

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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Nathan Godfried

**An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
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Created in 1910 during the Progressive Era the Boy Scouts of America was a civic reform, middle-class, professional organization intent on building the characters of America's juvenile boys, believing that America's transformation from a rural and small town culture to an urban society had removed some of the traditional character building opportunities from the boy's normal daily routine. The BSA was mass-oriented and commercial in nature, utilizing a sophisticated advertising program through which it sold itself as the nation's premiere patriotic character building organization and communicated a nationalistic political mythology. The BSA's emphasis on advertising, not just as a method of promotion but as an important segment of scout training, as well as the interest the business community took in the BSA, combined to give the organization a commercial makeup. This paper will show that the BSA was a commercial effort created to deal with the problems of twentieth-century urbanization.

DEDICATION

To Laurie and Ailie.

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Introduction

THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA DURING THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

This paper will show that the BSA was a commercial effort created to deal with the problems of twentieth-century urbanization. The commercial effort examined here is not derived from the BSA's business in official equipment and literature but from its use of modern advertising techniques to sell its brand of character building. This paper is interested in the BSA's ideological and cultural rather than its material goods. The BSA's commercialism was also apparent in the interest shown by the contemporary business community in the organization as an excellent vehicle for training boys in commercial skills, specifically efficiency and salesmanship.

The Boy Scouts of America was a character building organization developed during the Progressive Era to counter the ill effects of America's transformation from a rural and small town culture to an urban society.¹ The BSA was not an originator in either character building or perceiving the societal dangers of urbanization. "The YMCA began boys' work in the 1870s, amid evangelical alarm at urban immorality."² Besides the Y, various other youth character building groups emerged in America, some of them predating the Y. Most of these, however, were mainly temperance or abstinence groups, without the wide range of the Y and the later BSA. Among the various hypotheses about the BSA's intent and motivation, a prominent one by Jeffrey P. Hantover suggests that groups such as the BSA feared boys' effeminacy.³ David Macleod, however, feels

¹ David Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 52.

² *Ibid.*, xii.

³ Jeffrey P. Hantover, "The Boy Scouts and the Validation of Masculinity," *Journal of Social Issues* 34, no. 1 (1978): 184-95.

that, while the effeminacy studies have some value, “the history of character-building agencies suggests that it was more directly a reaction to urban life.”⁴

Beyond the YMCA and the other character building forerunners, the BSA had three direct progenitors. Lord Robert Baden-Powell’s English Boy Scouts (1908) provided the name and basic idea for the BSA. But what made the BSA American were its two other immediate ancestors: Ernest Thompson Seton’s Woodcraft Indians (1902) and Daniel Carter Beard’s Sons of Daniel Boone (1905). Seton, born in England and raised in Canada, was a prominent author and illustrator of natural history books. Beard was born in Ohio, educated in civil engineering, and like Seton was also an author and prominent illustrator. Both men had a great love for the outdoors and started their organizations to help boys learn about nature.

To Seton and Beard, farm and small town boys (a description which fit a majority of boys in the nineteenth century) engaged in a lot of outdoor activities. They had close parental guidance and a familiar community that invited social participation. Boys had responsibilities about the home. In such an environment, character-building experiences occurred naturally during everyday life. By contrast, the contemporary twentieth-century boy, especially one living in an urban environment, had little to occupy his time but school. Nurture was “protected and extended. . . . [T]eenagers . . . [were] more narrowly dependent, . . . [protected from] the intrusion of responsibilities demanding sudden maturity.”⁵ Seton and Beard, and subsequently the BSA, saw camping, an activity requiring knowledge of nature and personal responsibility, as supplying those

⁴ Macleod, xv.

⁵ Ibid., 27.

urbanization- reduced character building experiences leading to maturity. Of major importance to the BSA was Seton's and Beard's use of powerful American symbols in their work: Seton dramatized the Native American's wisdom and spirituality, and Beard glorified the frontiersman's pioneering ethos. The BSA would utilize both the Indian and the frontiersman as major iconographic figures.

Seton's and Beard's organizations were relatively small. Both men willingly subsumed their groups into the BSA because that organization offered the chance to spread their ideas nationally. Both took on significant roles in the BSA. Beard became a BSA patriarch, long-lived and totemic, a buckskin clad living symbol of the frontiersman. He served as Associate Editor of *Boys' Life* (1912-1941), member of the National Executive Board (1910-1941), National Scout Commissioner (1910-1941), and as Honorary Vice-President (1916-1941). Seton served as *Boys' Life* Contributing Editor (1912-1914), Chief Scout (1910-1914), and as member of the National Executive Board (1910-1914).⁶ Seton also wrote the first BSA scout *Handbook* (1910), basically an adaptation of Baden-Powell's English scout manual.⁷

Seton did not last as long as Beard in the BSA, as he relatively soon ran afoul of other BSA executives. Chief Scout Executive James West and other national BSA officers focused more on organizational bureaucracy and citizenship training than on camping and the nature experience, the BSA aspects that Seton prized most highly. The BSA used camping as a vehicle for citizenship training rather than as an end in itself. In effect, Seton wanted to revivify boys' souls, while the BSA wanted to organize boys

⁶ William D. Murray, *The History of the Boy Scouts of America* (New York: BSA, 1937), 545-55; R. D. Bezucha, *The Golden Anniversary Book of Scouting* (New York: Golden Press, 1959), 26-27.

⁷ Murray, 392.

efficiently and teach them patriotism. Many of the BSA's "board members were . . . wealthy businessmen . . . preoccupied with promoting social efficiency." The BSA focused on "society rather than the individual." Beard and others were also disturbed by the BSA's direction and expressed themselves on the subject, but they were only willing to go so far and did not let their protests interfere with their BSA careers. Seton, on the other hand, bristled at the BSA's "corporate tone" and continued voluble on the subject. He acknowledged that West was a fine administrator but charged that he lacked outdoor skills and understanding of boys. When the BSA demonstrated that it was not above popular prejudices and sloganeering during the World War I years, Seton had had enough and increased his pestering of the BSA Executive Board. Eventually, in 1915, the BSA decided that because Seton was a Canadian citizen he could no longer serve the BSA. Seton quit.⁸

The change from a rural and small town culture to an urban society which concerned Seton, Beard, the BSA, and other character builders was brought on by a major economic transformation in America. Martin J. Sklar describes the Progressive Era as "the age of the corporate reconstruction of American capitalism," giving dates of 1890 to 1916 as his range for the period, encompassing the transformation of Victorian America into modern urban America.⁹ America's transformation involved a change in the basic American economic system from "small-producer, competitive capitalism" to "corporate capitalism," from a "proprietary-competitive" system to a "corporate-

⁸ David E. Shi, "Ernest Thompson Seton and the Boy Scouts: A Moral Equivalent of War?" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (1985): 379-91, 387 (quote).

⁹ Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1.

administered” one.¹⁰ In other words, small to moderately-sized businesses and industries, founded and run with a democratic entrepreneurial spirit, were displaced and absorbed by monopolies, conglomerates whose intention was to eliminate competition and gain sole possession of local, regional and national markets. Examples of monopolies which came to public attention during these years and the dates of their legal trials include the Sugar Trust (1895), the Trans-Missouri Freight Association (1897), Northern Securities and the Beef Trust (1902), American Tobacco (1908), and Standard Oil (1909).

The change to a corporate capitalist economic system caused disturbances in America’s nineteenth-century based institutions and customs, as “these years witnessed a fundamental shift in American values from those of the small town in the 1880’s to those of a new bureaucratic-minded middle class by 1920.”¹¹ Americans were accustomed to living in the realm of “island communities,” either urban or small town, where local traditions and institutions met most people’s needs.¹² These communities underwent turmoil during the economic shift to corporate capitalism. Many hitherto local issues now became dependent on national arbiters. The United States changed from a “state . . . designed . . . for an agrarian-commercial society” to “an urban-industrial way of life.”¹³ Socially and politically “the United States shifted from the individual toward

¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹¹ David Herbert Donald, foreward to *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, by Robert H. Wiebe (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967). vii.

¹² Wiebe, 12.

¹³ Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 1.

the social, from personal liberty toward social security, from less . . . to more government.”¹⁴

America underwent many changes and struggles during these years. Railroad expansion linked the country nationally, increasing the reliance of small communities on distant and impersonal markets. Heavy immigration populated America with a culturally heterogeneous mix of people, creating a large labor pool to compete with American workers and challenging American mores with new customs and behaviors.¹⁵ During the last quarter of the nineteenth century through the 1920s, America experienced “the greatest strike wave and some of the worst race riots in . . . [its] history.”¹⁶ Ethnic cultural clashes occurred as immigrants settled into urban enclaves or fanned out into smaller communities. Women challenged the status quo, demanding suffrage, increased public visibility and independence, and civic reform. At the same time, women experienced a cultural affirmation of their roles as child-raisers, household managers, and chief consumers. Scientific management in industry, which tended to deskill workers in a mass production environment, removed much of the worker’s ability to control his or her job. People felt threatened that their ways of life were being usurped. There was strong concern for “community self-determination” and much “antimonopoly” and “antialien” sentiment.¹⁷ In foreign affairs America became an economic and military power, with imperialist adventures in Cuba, Mexico, and the Philippines. World War I was

¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵ Wiebe, 48, 52.

¹⁶ Dawley, 1.

¹⁷ Wiebe, 47, 52 (quotes).

dynamically important in solidifying America's involvement in Europe and in making the United States influential in world economic and military affairs.

Sklar sees the growth of trusts as the overriding influence responsible for society's upheavals, for it was this economic activity that stimulated much of the cultural stress.¹⁸ Many contemporaries also observed this. The government responded to corporate capitalism's business disturbances, such as unfair restraints of trade, by initiating legal reforms that sought to curb corporate capitalism's worst excesses and thus make it more palatable to the general public. These reform measures included creation of the Interstate Commerce Commission (1887) and legislation such as the Sherman Anti-trust Act (1890) and the Clayton Act (1914), which imposed restrictions on practices such as railroad rebates to large customers and various unfair restraints of trade. Also created were the Department of Commerce (1903), the Department of Labor (1913), and the Federal Reserve Board and the Federal Trade Commission (1914). These measures rationalized corporate practices, establishing rules that allowed corporations to go ahead with their business without as much public suspicion and with some public control.

Apprehensive over the discontent in America and alert to its potentially disruptive effects, many American corporate leaders cooperated with these regulatory actions, working "to produce a cultural apparatus aimed at defusing and neutralizing potential unrest."¹⁹ It was in the interest of corporations to work with the government to help make corporate capitalism an accepted part of American culture rather than a

¹⁸ Sklar, 2.

¹⁹ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1976), 12.

disruptive intrusion. "Upper- and middle-class leadership could preside over progressive reform as the alternative to reform or revolution from below."²⁰ Governmental reform was not all. The people who ran corporations were not just business functionaries. Rather, corporate capitalists were a social class with a variety of social and domestic as well as business concerns. The corporate capitalist class wanted to shape American society not only to acquiesce to corporate business practice but also to embrace corporate capitalist mores and values. Corporate capitalists involved themselves, to various degrees, in "market and property relations . . . law and jurisprudence . . . party politics . . . foreign-policy making, and . . . scholarly and popular modes of thought."²¹ The corporate capitalist class succeeded in making itself not just one integral part of American culture but "the dominant class" in America.²²

Legal, political, and social reforms were not enough, however, adequately to modify American society to suit corporate capitalism's needs, because reforms did not do much to create a mass-market for mass-produced goods. The corporate capitalist class had also to teach Americans to think like consumers, to teach them to buy. Industry employed advertisers who themselves employed psychologists like Floyd Henry Allport "to develop universal notions of what makes people respond."²³ Allport believed in making people think that they were constantly being subjected to critical judgment. This major Progressive Era advertising message allowed the advertiser to claim that purchasing its product would prevent public humiliation. "[B]eing distinguishable from

²⁰ Ibid., 39.

²¹ Sklar, 3, 15 (quote).

²² Dawley, 150.

²³ Ewen, 33.

the fabricated national norm, a part of advertising's mythologized homogeneity, was a justification for social failure."²⁴ Corporations wanted an American "who could locate his needs and frustrations in terms of the consumption of goods rather than the quality and content of his life (work)."²⁵ It was necessary to "turn the consumer's critical functions away from the product and toward himself."²⁶

Advertising integrated consumerism with Americanism. Frank Presbrey, a major advertising figure of the time as well as an early BSA national leader, believed that advertising brought about "national homogeneity" and "uniformity of ideas."²⁷ Through advertising, corporations could both educate a national community to consume and help America attain cultural order. For advertising enthusiasts, advertisers were synonymous with "integrity" and were seen as preserving traditional American values. "[C]onsumption took on a clearly cultural tone, . . . an ideological veil of nationalism and democratic lingo."²⁸ The BSA, a staunch advocate of Americanism, specialized in the use of "democratic lingo" in its own advertising message.

As a Progressive Era character building organization, the BSA intended to mollify urbanization's negative effects upon the character of America's boys. American urbanization was brought on by the "corporate reconstruction" of the American economy and the larger society, a disruptive process that was modified by numerous reforms, social, economic, political, and legal. America's corporate capitalist class cooperated to a significant extent in these reforms, hoping to reform not only business

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

practices but also to influence the growth of a middle-class, consumer culture. To accomplish this latter end, industry employed psychologically informed advertising whose content was as much about how the product made a consumer's life worthwhile and fulfilled as it was about the product's pragmatic virtues. Many at this time considered advertising to be a conveyer of wisdom, the pith of which was that life was enhanced through the purchase of products. The BSA used advertising extensively and taught advertising to its scouts as a major life skill.

The BSA was a modern Progressive Era agency. Engaged in civic reform, the BSA was middle-class and professional, using scientific methods in its bureaucratic organization. The BSA was highly commercialized and heavily involved in advertising. The following chapter discusses each of these Progressive Era elements in the BSA, showing the organization to have been an up-to-the-minute agency, astutely in touch with progressive American culture.

Chapter One
IN THE COMMUNITY
A Civic Organization

The BSA's social work was of the kind traditionally dominated by women.

Whereas legal and economic reform came under the guidance of largely male-dominated professionals, mostly lawyers and businessmen, women dominated what Nancy Dye calls "civic reform." Civic reforms included such things as "working conditions," "maternal and child welfare," "clean water," "pure food," "sanitation," "playgrounds," "recreation centers," "housing and schools."¹ In this vein, the BSA expressed an interest in reforming "less-chance" (a contemporary BSA usage) urban youth, similar to other social workers who tried to adjust working-class households to a middle-class domestic pattern. The BSA promoted scouting as helping to improve "home relations . . . [especially] among our foreign elements and the poorer classes who first viewed the work with extreme suspicion, and now with real welcome."²

The connection between civic reform and home relations is clear when one considers that it is the home that makes up the basic civic unit. Women's civic reforms were not related solely to municipal or national issues. For instance, "maternal and child welfare" is plainly a domestically oriented area of civic reform, and the same can be said for health, nutrition, constructive leisure, and education. Because laws and regulations are involved in each of these reform areas, it is easy to see them as being of primarily municipal or national concern. However, each was also closely related to how families

¹ Nancy S. Dye, introduction to *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era*, ed. Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 1.

² Charles Edwin Fox, "'Advertising' Scouting," *Scouting* IV, no. 13 (November 1, 1916): 5.

conducted themselves at home. Women's reform efforts were mainly domestically based. One has only to look at the National Consumers' League, which involved itself in many areas of making the home safe.³ Women reformers were at the forefront of "popularizing the view that promoting the welfare of the nation should begin with children."⁴ It was in this domestic milieu that the BSA inserted itself. In this light, one can identify other character building organizations, such as the YMCA, as also being within the larger province of women's social reform work.

The BSA especially tried to assume some of the family's parenting responsibilities. During the Progressive Era, family authority and influence over children waned, as "[b]ureaucratic institutions were taking over much of the work formerly done by the family in reproducing hierarchies of class and gender." Specifically, education began replacing "family inheritance" as a means for children to succeed, and, as fathers more and more became wage earners rather than producers, "most sons . . . did *not* follow in their father's footsteps." Finally, "[the] nuclear family was . . . ceding authority to professional experts."⁵ The BSA set itself up as the professional expert in character building, once mainly the province of the home, church, and school. Franklin K. Mathiews, Chief Scout Librarian, thought that scout executives were "leading scoutmasters to the place where they have the spirit of the father."⁶

³ Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Two Political Cultures in the Progressive Era: The National Consumers' League and the American Association for Labor Legislation," *U. S. History as Women's History*, ed. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 36-62.

⁴ Linda Gordon, "Putting Children First: Women, Maternalism, and Welfare in the Early Twentieth Century," in Kerber, Kessler-Harris, and Sklar, 63.

⁵ Dawley, 308.

⁶ *Official Report of the Third Biennial Conference of Boy Scout Executives* (New York: Boy Scouts of America, 1924), 307.

Corporations and their advertisers had little respect for the American family unit except as a pocket of consumption and a producer of willing corporate cogs. *Boys' Life* carried an ad for the "Father and Son Library," a collection of books on parenting for fathers, which well expressed contemporary reasoning behind the father's lack of parenting skills. The library's publisher claimed to offer the solution to the problem of dad's increasing marginality as a source of helpful wisdom for his son: "Poor Dad came home last night just tired. All day, for eight solid hours, he had faced trouble and disappointment and hard, hard, work."⁷ The father no longer worked at a rewarding job or vocation. His employment did not offer him any skills to pass on to his son. Moreover, the father's job debilitated him, discouraged him, rendered him almost impotent for his domestic responsibilities. Was this a reason to reform the job? No, the corporate answer was to reform the father so that he could tolerate his unhealthy work.

While sociologists lamented the loosening bonds of family life, businessmen . . . saw the phenomenon as an essential part of their own rise to dominance . . . The welcome demise of familial authority was at the core . . . [T]he commodity market and its propaganda [were] to replace the father's authority. Business was to provide the source of a life style.⁸

In the "Father and Son Library," the father could learn what contemporary experts thought his son should know and what they thought should be his mode of relating to his son. The Chief Scout Librarian believed that most parents were ill prepared to make good reading suggestions to their children. "It is just here . . . that the average parent faces the problem" of what to buy for the child.⁹

⁷ *Boys' Life* XI, no. 11 (November, 1921): 36.

⁸ Ewen, 131-2.

⁹ Franklin K. Mathiews, "The Boys Want More Books," *The Publishers' Weekly* XCV, no. 21 (May 24, 1919): 1437.

[I]t is because of this need of the parent that the Boy Scouts have organized their Library Department . . . to give direction to the boy's recreational interests in his leisure time . . . but also to direct them, just so far as we can, during all his spare time.¹⁰

That the BSA wished to involve itself in "all . . . [a boy's] spare time" shows that the organization wanted to enter the home and partially supplant parents with its own brand of child rearing. The Chief Scout Librarian showed no embarrassment at assuming that the BSA could intrude into the home and tell parents what their children should read.

Swift-paced societal changes during this time rendered parents obsolete: "[N]ow-a-days one may never stop, but must always be moving in order to keep up; always growing, always reaching, always broadening out. . . . For movement and continued change are the great characteristics of our age."¹¹ Contemporaries attributed these changes to science and technological innovation. Technology seemed to breed further technology in a spiral of increasing complexity. Many progressives accepted these changes as inevitable. Contemporaries believed that these swift and ceaseless changes disempowered parents. In past times, when change had been relatively slow, a parent could pass on useful wisdom from experience. During the Progressive Era parents could not anticipate what their children's adult lives would be like, and so they did not have anything informed or useful with which to advise them. In addition to suggesting that the state and other institutions and professionals step in for parents, some progressives thought that the young should have a greater role in making their own decisions: "To them [the children] is the task (*sic*) of finding the right and fitting lines of conduct for the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Margery Bedinger, "Censorship of Books by the Library," *Wilson Bulletin* 3, no. 21 (May, 1929): 621.

ever changing conditions of the shifting future.”¹² The BSA was not an exponent of giving the child more autonomy, but it certainly believed that the parents’ role was declining.

World War I exacerbated the family’s declining influence. Many fathers entered the military, and many mothers went to work, not only to help the war effort but also to keep the family’s income on an even footing. This drawing of parents out of the home meant that children had less supervision. The BSA “scout idea” always aimed at supplementing parental child rearing. The ideal scoutmaster was like a father. The BSA felt that it could help fill the vacuum created in those homes where fathers (and mothers) were called off to or occupied by the war:

The scout idea fits into these busy days for fathers . . . since where father cannot give as much attention to his boy as in normal times, or is away from home on service, the Scoutmaster comes in with his steadying influence in a peculiarly happy way.¹³

World War I increased the BSA’s role in the traditional women’s sphere as scout work on the domestic front coincided with other domestic women’s roles. In July, 1917 *Scouting* described women’s importance to the National Food Administration because women led food economy efforts in each home. The scout had a real chance to help the war effort simply by cooperating with his mother in food conservation efforts. The BSA also recommended that scouts cooperate with local women’s clubs in organizing food conservation measures.¹⁴ In August, 1917 *Scouting* further linked the BSA with the

¹² Ibid, 622.

¹³ “All Ought to Be Scouts,” *Scouting* VI, no. 13 (July 1, 1918): 9.

¹⁴ “Ninety Per Cent of American Food Consumption in the Hands of Women,” *Scouting* V, no. 6 (July 15, 1917): 2.

women's sphere, telling its readers that "The President of the United States has asked the women of the country to eliminate waste. 'Every Scout to Save a Soldier' applies here too."¹⁵ We see, then, that despite its exclusively male ranks and whatever fears it may have had about American boys growing up manly, the BSA engaged in the same general type of reform and programmatic work that in the Progressive Era was usually undertaken by women activists and/or homemakers. Rather than work in the political and legal arena for its civic reform agendas, however, the BSA tried to spread its reform ideas through influencing attitudes.

A Middle-Class Organization

Also like most civic reformers, the BSA was biased toward the middle class. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the establishment of "a new middle-class" comprising two groups, professionals and "specialists in business . . . labor, and in agriculture."¹⁶ The middle class included "doctors, lawyers, ministers, skilled craftsmen, small businessmen, bankers, newspaper editors . . . settled farmers . . . white-collar managers, technicians, sales- and service people, factory supervisors, and civil servants."¹⁷

During the Progressive Era civic reformers transmitted middle-class values to the people they were trying to help. Along with hygiene plans and health aid, middle-class reformers tried to bring the poor family, often immigrant and/or working-class, into a middle-class domestic pattern that did not take into account the domestic requirements

¹⁵ *Scouting* V, no. 7 (August 1, 1917): 1.

¹⁶ Wiebe, 112.

¹⁷ Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), xiii.

of a working-class family. Child labor reform, for example, did not acknowledge the real contribution the child's wages made to the family's survival. Another example of such reform is the legislation mandating special working conditions for women, which served to highlight and legalize a separate sphere view of gender roles, a strong middle-class ethos at the time.¹⁸

Like these Progressive Era women reformers, the BSA did middle-class civic reform work. The BSA liked to publicize its mission to the poor classes, but it is arguable how much effort or success it had in this area.¹⁹ One example of scout work among less-chance youth is noted in the June 15, 1916 *Scouting*. A troop in Paterson, New Jersey decided to sign up a few "incorrigible" boys from the "Rescue Mission." "It is hoped that many of them can be saved by changing their environment and giving them an opportunity to associate with boys who are living true to scout ideals."²⁰ Mingling less-chance youth with middle-class scouts was an opportunity for the BSA to work on behavioral adjustment based on peer pressure toward middle-class mores.

The BSA saw industrial plants as one venue for inculcating middle-class values because many boys of scout age worked and many workingmen had scout age boys. Although it tried, the BSA did not have a lot of success in this area. The September 1921 *Scouting* noted that "few industrial plants today are without a Social Service Department . . . [which is] wide open for assistance in bettering the living conditions of the families of their employees and particularly in giving leadership to the boys."²¹ These

¹⁸ See, for instance, Ardis Cameron, "Landscapes of Subterfuge: Working-Class Neighborhoods and Immigrant Women," in Frankel and Dye, 67.

¹⁹ Macleod, 177.

²⁰ *Scouting* IV, no. 4 (June 15, 1916): 8.

²¹ "Troops in Industries," *Scouting* IX, no. 9 (September, 1921): 3.

industrial social service departments were part of an overall industrial human engineering goal of bettering workers' lives by educating them in various healthful and productive lifestyle practices.²² While industrial social service departments often sincerely wanted to improve the individual worker's life, they also ultimately sought to inculcate middle-class values into working-class homes. This can be seen particularly in the desire to "give leadership" to working-class youth who, presumably, were not receiving appropriate middle-class guidance from their parents. The BSA, as always attuned to modern methods, saw these industrial social service agencies as a way of furthering their middle-class mission.

The BSA did not identify itself as middle class, nor did it describe its mission as promulgating middle-class values. In fact, quite the opposite is true. "Like many Progressives, Boy Scout leaders believed that middle-class standards were classless."²³ A basic American myth had always been that the United States had freed itself from the European class structure wherein it was difficult if not impossible for a person to rise above his or her birth-defined social stratum. The BSA was a proselyte of basic American myth. In many ways, the classless myth held true in America, where it was possible for a person to rise to a position of social prominence through his or her labor despite coming from an undistinguished family. However, that an American had the opportunity to climb the social ladder meant that there was such a ladder. Americans were aware of social hierarchy and classified certain values as more or less desirable than others. From the middle of the nineteenth century up through the Progressive Era the

²² David F. Noble, *America by Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1977), 265, 287-8.

²³ Macleod, 178.

developing American middle class claimed to be the embodiment of elemental and paramount American standards. Immigrants and workers did not fit into this group. Anxious middle-class Americans wanted their values to be universally accepted in society because “the threat of widening class divisions [seemed to be] a portent of social unrest.”²⁴ Accordingly, the BSA necessarily recognized class distinctions in the United States and saw its duty as helping to erase those differences. One cannot say that the BSA was classless in outlook.

The BSA was interested in conveying the impression that it did not function within a specific class, however. “[U]niforms did not carry . . . unmistakable class distinctions” in America, for instance. By contrast, in England, where Boy Scouting was born, elite youth wore distinctive school uniforms, thus rendering scout uniforms as possible class indicators.²⁵ To the BSA, uniforms did away with class markers of dress. Further, “[the] Committee on Americanism edited all mention of class conflict out of the Boy Scout Law in 1911, even deleting Baden-Powell’s demand that boys be loyal to their employers, lest that preclude union membership.”²⁶ Additionally, “social equality . . . formulas . . . appeared year after year in reports and speeches.”²⁷ In the final analysis, however, and despite its philosophical proclamations, the BSA had to reflect middle-class values because “[m]ass recruitment . . . demanded a public image which tied boys’ work to basic middle-class American concerns and values.”²⁸ In a very real sense, the

²⁴ Ibid., 177-8.

²⁵ Ibid., 222-3.

²⁶ Ibid., 177.

²⁷ Ibid., 175-6.

²⁸ Ibid., 171.

BSA conducted itself as if the middle class was the only valid class, neglecting to acknowledge that there were other class values worthy of note or emulation.

There were strong ties between the corporate capitalist and the middle class. Corporate capitalism required managers, engineers, technicians, and consumers for its very existence, all of whom fit into the middle class. The middle class adopted many corporate business methods in its professional activities. Additionally, the corporate-capitalist class required middle-class consumers who could purchase the mass-produced goods and, more importantly, *would* purchase them because they thought they needed them. Finally, the corporate-capitalist class needed a middle class that believed in the legitimacy of corporate-capitalism, which was willing to put forth an effort to make America's emergent corporate-capitalist economy work. The cultural reforms initiated during the Progressive Era were designed to make society function efficiently in a corporate capitalist economy. Progressive reformers were predominantly from the middle class and engaged in reform to spread middle-class values. Thus, one way of reforming American culture involved adapting America to corporate capitalism by strengthening America's middle class. This is why business leaders were so excited about the BSA:

Through Boy Scouting, future business and professional men had their first introduction to the formalized service activities of Rotary and Kiwanis . . . [for instance displaying] middle-class paternalism by giving Christmas baskets to the poor. . . . [C]lass symbolism was clear when Boy Scouts took their cleanup campaigns to immigrant neighborhoods.²⁹

²⁹ Macleod, 175.

As part of its middle-class mission, the BSA tried to establish a relationship with the working class. However, organized labor did not take long to position itself against the BSA, seeing the organization as bringing both a threat of militarism and interference in strikes. The BSA did not entirely fail in the labor ranks, however. It had the grudging tolerance of the American Federation of Labor.

An event in 1916 illustrates the BSA's ambiguous relationship with labor. A member of an Evansville, Indiana union affiliated with the AFL publicly condemned the BSA in relation to some scout fund raising in Boston, Massachusetts. Not all of this laborite's colleagues agreed with his anti-BSA opinions and asked Samuel Gompers, AFL president, to explicate the union's BSA position. Gompers deferred to the AFL's original 1912 resolution made soon after the BSA's advent, advising union members not to be hostile toward the BSA but rather to be watchful of it, "so as to prevent its activities or purposes being directed toward any military movement, or militarism in any form." Gompers then "urged" the BSA to be more "sympathetic . . . toward . . . organized labor."³⁰ Gompers was aware of the BSA's potential danger to labor. At the same time, the union head did not wish animosity. Probably Gompers had larger issues to deal with at the time than to worry about the BSA.

Gompers's response to the BSA question was characteristic of his preferred policies: cooperation and moderation. Gompers felt that unionism could best work "within labor's own, self-legitimizing federation." Many other unionists, both inside and outside the AFL, urged a higher degree of activism, including confrontations and strikes,

³⁰ "How Labor Stands on Scouting," *Scouting* IV, no. 9 (July 15, 1916): 3.

than Gompers proposed.³¹ Gompers preferred “business unionism,” sitting down with corporate leaders and working out labor problems in a committee, rather than wrangling on strike lines.³² The problem with business unionism was that it stripped labor of its strongest weapon, the strike, and gave business the upper hand in most negotiations. Business unionism also carried with it the hope, often dashed, that industry felt a need to sit down with labor and work towards equitable agreements.

During World War I, Gompers saw his opportunity to ingratiate the labor movement with industry and government. Fuller employment during the war years “gave millions of workers the confidence to quit jobs and search for better ones and to go on strike on a scale” larger than had been seen before.³³ Labor had gained more power, which Gompers hoped to channel into what he perceived were more rational directions than agitation. “Gompers’s . . . emphasis in the early twentieth century shifted away from violent confrontation with businessmen and toward arbitration under the direction of neutral parties.”³⁴

On October 29, 1916, the Massachusetts State AFL and the Boston Central Labor Union wrote a letter to Gompers supporting the BSA and forgiving the scouters (an adult who worked with the BSA, such as scoutmasters, local scout executives, and other volunteers and scout functionaries) who had criticized the BSA fund raising. The Massachusetts labor leaders attested that they thought the BSA had a pro-labor viewpoint and commended “the sterling character” of their local Boston scouters.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³² Elizabeth McKillen, *Chicago Labor and the Quest for a Democratic Diplomacy: 1914-1924* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 62.

³³ *Ibid.*, 56-96, 332 (quote).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

However, much of the letter replicated the wording of the AFL's 1912 convention position, meaning that the BSA was still considered a possible danger.³⁵ In response to these favorable expressions, scouters encouraged labor leaders to get workers more involved in scouting. Some labor activists, however, had less ambiguity about the BSA. For example, the Secretary and Treasurer of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America wrote in 1917 to Chief Scout Executive James West, saying "the Boy Scouts Movement is one of the grandest movements ever promoted for the advancement of civilization."³⁶ The spirit of national cooperation engendered by the Great War motivated some other unions that had heretofore not done so to extend support to the BSA. For instance, in May, 1917, the United Mine Workers of America temporarily suspended its provision that UMW members or their families could not participate in the BSA, in deference to the patriotic activities of Boy Scouts in food production ("Every Scout to Feed a Soldier"). The UMW executives felt that their union should be "[i]n line . . . with patriotic responses which are being made by individuals and organizations in every section of our great country." The BSA responded to the UMW saying that "there is and can be no antagonism between the ideals of organized labor and those of the Scout movement."³⁷

During the war the BSA-AFL relationship seemed to become more cordial. Frank Morrison, national Secretary of the AFL, spoke at a "public dinner" to honor Baden-Powell in New York City on May 19, 1919. Morrison reminisced about how he

³⁵ "Labor Investigating Committee Endorses Boy Scout Movement," *Scouting* IV, no. 15 (December 1, 1916): 1.

³⁶ "Labor Leader Writes 'God Bless Your Efforts,'" *Scouting* IV, no. 21 (March 1, 1917): 8.

³⁷ "United Mine Workers of America Removes Ban on Boy Scouts of America," *Scouting* V, no. 8 (August 15, 1917): 5.

first met James West when the BSA leader visited his office and tried to elicit “co-operation for the organization of the Boy Scouts.” After a few hours talk, Morrison said, West succeeded in convincing him “that the organization . . . would be of benefit to the youth of this country.” The union leader expansively told the audience that the AFL “will back to the limit, any organization that has for its purpose the education of the youth of our land.” “[L]ove rules the world,” Morrison averred. “[W]hen we think loving thoughts and kindly thoughts, we get on that plane of service.”³⁸ Morrison, of course, represented perhaps the most reactionary branch of the organized labor movement.

Because of its non-partisanship, the BSA had to be careful that its local scouters did not stir up labor controversy. “[T]he misdirected enthusiasms of a very few scoutmasters or executives in the face of industrial trouble,” such as having troops “carrying messages . . . in . . . a telephone strike or . . . guarding fire-alarm boxes when . . . firemen are in dispute with the city . . . or . . . deliver[ing] bakery goods . . . when bakers are on strike,” could compromise the BSA and create a false impression of the organization’s official policies. The BSA wanted labor to be “one of . . . [its] staunch friends.” With supreme confidence, the BSA thought that it would “do more for organized labor than even Labor itself.”³⁹ The difficulty with labor-BSA relations, the BSA felt, was the “slow process” of providing service to both the nation and labor. The BSA perceived that the goals for corporate America and working-class America were not the same. The BSA strategy of “toleration” defined the means by which the middle-

³⁸ “Scouting and Labor,” *Scouting* VII, no. 23 (June 5, 1919): 9.

³⁹ “In Time of Strike—Do Not Rush In!” *Scouting* VII, no. 25 (June 19, 1919): 5.

and working- class boys would mingle, thus affording the opportunity for mutual understanding, which meant the working-class boys adopting middle-class values. By climbing out of their working-class culture as they grew into adults, working-class boys could improve labor's position, because the boys would have been educated to "understand" management's position and be more willing to sit down and cooperate than to make demands and go out on job actions. The BSA considered that the problem for the working class was its ethos, not industrial injustice.

Despite its non-partisan policy in regard to labor actions, the BSA explicitly expressed an opinion on the 1919 New York printers' strike in the October 30, 1919 *Scouting*. Three drawings take up the top third of the lead story's page. (See fig. 1, 26) The one on the left shows a group of irked and inconvenienced uniformed scouts and scouters grumbling about not receiving their *Scouting* and *Boys' Life*. The drawing on the right shows an editor's desk hidden by mountains of paper, the inactivity indicated by a cobweb attached to one of the paper stacks. Having thus graphically complained about the strike, the BSA made its labor position clear in the central picture, which depicted an overall clad worker labeled "A. F. L." confronting a suit-coated man labeled "striking printers." The AFL worker tells the striking printer, "Take my advice and get back on the job." The printer responds, "I'm on vacation."⁴⁰ The BSA could get away with expressing its disapproval of "the vexatious printers' strike" because it was being conducted without AFL sanction. These were strikes by AFL locals in defiance of the union's national officers. Elizabeth McKillen describes how city labor councils, such as

⁴⁰ "The New York Printers' Strike," *Scouting* VII, no. 40 (October 30, 1919): 1.



Figure 1. *Scouting* magazine's editorial view of the New York Printers' Strike.

the Chicago Federation of Labor, resisted Gompers's cooperationist efforts.⁴¹

Gompers's opposition to the New York Printers' Strike allowed the BSA the freedom to disapprove of the labor action. Thus, the BSA endorsed the conservative labor establishment. Perhaps being friends with the AFL was beneficial on more levels than promoting the BSA, as the organization was able to get this *Scouting* issue published "by the help of some good Labor Union friends."⁴²

The end of the war heralded a period of many labor actions. Commenting on this phenomenon in a January, 1920 *Scouting* an editor pointed out that, although there had been 4000 strikes since the end of the war, the BSA was not going "to abuse any group . . . but teach self-reliance, resourcefulness, individual adaptability . . . to build the twelve laws of Scouting into the generation which will solve the industrial problem that appalls us."⁴³ An example of how scout laws might give labor an option to strikes is found in "The Ethics of Work," reprinted in the August 15, 1918 *Scouting* from an Institution for Moral Instruction publication. This brief article contained "The Code of Successful Workers":

1. I will respect all useful work and be courteous to the workers.
2. I will know my work and have ambition to do it well.
3. I will educate myself into strong personality.
4. I will take the initiative and develop executive ability.
5. I will be industrious and willing.
6. I will be faithful.
7. I will be honest and truthful.
8. I will be a gentleman, a lady.⁴⁴

⁴¹ See McKillen.

⁴² "The New York Printers' Strike," *Scouting* VII, no. 40 (October 30, 1919): 1.

⁴³ "Questions Inspired by 4,000 Strikes," *Scouting* VIII, no. 3 (January 29, 1920): 3.

⁴⁴ *Scouting* VI, no. 10 (August 15, 1918): 7.

The piece ends with the axiom: "The world does not owe me a living, but I am proud to make a good living for myself."⁴⁵ This position neither encouraged union activism nor helped the thousands of workers who faced wage cuts, unemployment, and deteriorating work conditions after the war as industry backed away from its war-time cooperation with labor, a testament to the ineffectiveness of Gompers's business unionism. In fact, the BSA was decidedly paternalistic and anti-labor in its view of the ideal worker as an obedient, child-like cog in the machine. The advice said nothing about the worker judiciously sticking up for his or her rights.

Despite its courting of the labor movement, the BSA, with its middle-class bias, did not have working-class sympathies, and it certainly rejected radical political philosophies and movements. The BSA was anti-socialist, as were many socialists anti-BSA. Socialists criticized the BSA for its potential military orientation. Along with many labor activists, socialists feared that the BSA could be "used to suppress rioting or disorder in strikes."⁴⁶ In 1912, socialists heckled Sir Robert Baden-Powell as the founder of Scouting spoke in Portland, Oregon, protesting the above issues.⁴⁷ The BSA was also anti-Bolshevik and promoted itself as a solution to the red menace in the United States. "Neglected Boyhood Breeds Bolshevism," James West told an audience of businesspeople in 1919. West advised his audience that the schools and churches could not adequately develop America's youth. He pointed out "that less than ten per cent of your boys between the ages of sixteen and nineteen have any outside influence whatsoever other than their home." Once again, the BSA devalued parents as character

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Boys' Life*, II, no. 2 (April, 1912): 24.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

builders for their own children. West asked: "Where do the leaders for these bolsheviki and socialistic movements come? . . . They come from the boys who are neglected, who do not have opportunity, who are left to become a part of that great mass of our population who are idlers . . . drifters, who accept a position merely because it gives them a wage."⁴⁸

It is ironic that the organization's idea of proper vocational direction was for a boy to look for a job that offered more than a wage.⁴⁹ Here one sees clearly the BSA's middle-class bias. By encouraging boys to work for "more than a wage" the BSA denigrated the status of wage-earners, the very working-class union members that it tried to recruit in industrial settings and with whom it tried to create a cooperative relationship. Rather than advocating for an ennoblement of work in general, the BSA sought to encourage an abandonment of wage labor by those who wished to succeed in life. "What promise for livelihood and family success is there in the jobs now held by my working boys?" the BSA asked.⁵⁰

This BSA point of view requires some explication, because it seems to contradict the whole process of deskilling that characterized scientific management of industry and business. Industry needed these masses of specialized production workers for its scientifically managed mass-production factories. One would think that the BSA would have expected and encouraged boys to enter a wide range of vocations, blue and white collar, industrial workers as well as salaried employees. However, the BSA did not perceive blue-collar workers as representing successful citizens. It did not see a

⁴⁸ *Scouting* VII, no. 15 (April 10, 1919): 7.

⁴⁹ *Scouting* VII, no. 15 (April 10, 1919): 7.

⁵⁰ "Questions Inspired by 4,000 Strikes," *Scouting* VIII, no. 3 (January 29, 1920): 3.

working-class life as something for which scouts should strive. If the BSA felt that there was no future in a working-class job, then it seems logical that the BSA would have joined with unions in trying to ameliorate the working conditions and low pay that made working for a wage such a dead end job. Ignoring the causes of the workers' plight, the BSA wrote off a large segment of America's population as losers, offering to America's youth only the option to escape from a working-class life, not the option of improving it. This attitude looked like Social Darwinism and expressed the corporate-capitalist class, middle class willingness to relegate a whole segment of America's population into a necessary but unrewarding and unrespected proletarian underclass, made up of people who either could not or would not climb out of the working-class sub-stratum.

Civic education was one of the ways the BSA hoped to teach middle-class values, believing that knowledge of the American governmental system would convince any reasonable person of the folly of pursuing competing political systems. For example, during the Constitutional Campaign and Celebration of the Constitution's 132nd birthday, the BSA participated with "the National Security League . . . the Sons of the American Revolution, the American Defense Society, The American Rights League, the Sons of the Revolution, the National Association for Constitutional Government and the National Society Daughters (*sic*) of the American Revolution" in planning a national campaign to advocate for education about the American constitution, especially for youth.⁵¹ This coalition believed that if people had a good knowledge of the American

⁵¹ Robert M. McElroy, "Fighting Bolshevism with Real Weapons," *Scouting* VII, no. 32 (August 7, 1919): 5-6.

Constitution, they would understand America's superior system of government and be less inclined to follow other political theories such as socialism and Bolshevism.

In its community work, the BSA intended to supplement the child-rearing process by providing guidance beyond that of the parents. The BSA's guidance was fundamentally intended to teach boys how to be helpful middle-class citizens. The BSA tried to forge ties with labor organizations in order to spread the BSA middle-class message among working-class boys. One of the basic BSA messages to working-class boys was that being a member of the working class was not an appropriate goal for someone who wanted to be a success.

A Professional and Scientific Organization

In addition to having a civic reform focus and a middle-class bias, the BSA was highly professional. In his 1937 official BSA history, William D. Murray called the "emergence of a New Profession--The Scout Executive" one of the BSA's "significant developments of the first decade."⁵² Professionalization was a large part of middle class formation during the Progressive Era. Medicine, law, and education were among many vocations which underwent professionalization at the time.⁵³ Generally professionalization involved establishment of an umbrella organization specific to the particular field, such as the "reorganized" American Bar Association (1878). These groups tried to standardize the training and ethics of their members.⁵⁴

⁵² Murray, 138.

⁵³ The middle class was formed long before the Progressive Era, according to most historians, and professionalization of medicine and law, at least, happened in the nineteenth century. However, during the Progressive Era there was a heightened, self-conscious large-scale societal shift toward middle-class hegemony and professionalization of many vocations. The story is more complex than summarized above.

⁵⁴ Wiebe, 111-132.

Not everyone at the time approved of the move toward professionalization, arguing that it removed some of the possibility to exploit intangible qualities such as “the element of personality.” How could “tests or credentials” recognize the person with innate talent or “special genius”? Opponents of professionalization claimed that it replaced “private responsibility” with “a governmental conscience.” Proponents of professionalism responded that these objections reflected “instinctive fear and irritation at certain social necessities growing out of an ever-increasing complexity of life and social organization.” Proponents also argued that “local or individual interest” could no longer handle the sophisticated requirements of things such as education, medicine, or food and water supply. Additionally, those who favored professionalization pointed out that the sole alternative to professionalization was “to avoid a society of increasing complexity,” which for them seemed impossible.⁵⁵

The impossibility of resisting the corporate capitalist restructuring of society (the cause of the “complexity” referred to above) was a common Progressive Era theme. America’s changes were perceived by many as inevitable. “[P]rogressives argued that their society was in the grip of forces they could not control as individuals but might influence through ‘social control’ or ‘social reform.’”⁵⁶ Professionalization was one of those social reforms.

The BSA had no doubt about the need to deal with the era’s complexity and was enthusiastic about professionalizing its paid executives and training its volunteers, particularly scoutmasters. Scouters had opportunities for education and received ample

⁵⁵ Asa Wyncoop, “Why the State Should Provide Standards to be Observed by Local Public Libraries,” *The Wilson Bulletin* (October-November, 1925): 456-7.

⁵⁶ Dawley, 99.

educational and informational materials through a lively and extensive BSA publishing effort.⁵⁷ Educational institutions helped the BSA with professionalization by offering post-secondary courses in scouting. Colleges that offered such scouting curriculums included the State University of Iowa, Columbia University, Johns Hopkins University, Pennsylvania State College, University of Wisconsin, University of Tennessee, and Ohio State Normal College. Most of the courses for scoutmasters reflected a practical orientation and involved just a few days of instruction in the fundamentals of BSA organization and woodcraft knowledge.⁵⁸

The BSA was interested in doing more than educating its scouters. National headquarters in New York created an extensive bureaucracy to establish and coordinate a specific chain of responsibility for BSA operations, running from the national level down to the individual scout. During the Progressive Era both public and private institutions, including corporate businesses, established bureaucratic organizations to ensure “continuity and regularity.”⁵⁹ A look at the 1919 BSA organizational flow chart illustrates how the BSA constructed its bureaucratic system. (See Table, p. 34)⁶⁰

The chart shows the BSA’s sophisticated delegation of responsibility, carefully replicating responsibilities in a descending organizational pattern from national to district (regional) to local control. The United States Congress sits at the top, for the BSA was a federally incorporated organization. With such an august body at its topmost point of

⁵⁷ Harold Levy, *Building a Popular Movement: A Case Study of the Public Relations of the Boy Scouts of America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1944).

⁵⁸ “Universities Offer Strong Courses in Scouting,” *Scouting* VI, no. 11 (June 1, 1918): 4-5.

⁵⁹ Wiebe, 153.

⁶⁰ Adapted from *Scouting* VII, no. 19 (May 8, 1919): 21.

Table--BSA Organization, 1919

<u>United States Congress</u>	
<u>National Council</u>	
Executive Board	
Chief Scout Executive, National Scout Commissioner	
Departments: Field, Education, Library, Camping, Publication, Supply	
<u>District Headquarters</u>	
<u>Local Council</u>	
Executive Committee	
General Direction and Inspection: Scout Executive, Scout Commissioner	
Assistant Executives, Field Executives Deputy Commissioners Assistant Deputy Commissioners	
Administrative Commissions: Finance, Publicity, Camp, Troop Organization	
Leader Training Committee Scout Instruction Committee: Health, Woodcraft, Trades/Handicraft, Civics, Sports	
Examinations and Awards: Court of Honor	
	<u>District Committee</u>
<u>Sponsoring Institution or Organization</u>	
<u>Troop Committee</u>	
<u>Scout Leader</u>	
<u>Troop</u>	

Table 1. Boy Scouts of America 1919 organizational chart.

authority, the BSA's policy had ultimately to pass the muster of United States lawmakers.

It is important to keep in mind that some of the most important BSA personnel were not paid, despite the BSA's serious professionalization. Scoutmasters, Assistant Scoutmasters, and Troop Committees, for instance, were made up exclusively of volunteers. The BSA's use of volunteers was another manifestation of its middle-class bias:

[I]t is a sociological commonplace that white-collar workers are more likely than blue-collar ones to be joiners . . . [s]ince they generally worked somewhat shorter hours, were less physically exhausted, and were less pressed financially. . . . BSA officials sought out middle-class recruits. . . . [E]xecutives spoke mostly to service clubs, church bodies, and college groups; for slum troops they often brought in outsiders rather than hunt up local men.⁶¹

One of professionalism's chief characteristics during the Progressive Era was its use of science. In general, during the Progressive Era Americans had great faith in, perhaps a love affair with, science. Glamorous technological achievements such as wireless telegraphy and flight fired the public's imagination and its enthusiasm for science. Many occupational fields adopted scientific quantitative empirical methods. "Science' [was] the basic word that every school of thought claimed and worshipped."⁶² Contemporary Americans had a great faith that science and technology were wedded to "social progress."⁶³ Industry used science heavily in technological development, production techniques, and labor management.⁶⁴ Many professions, such as medicine

⁶¹ Macleod, 207.

⁶² Wiebe, 147.

⁶³ Susan J. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting: 1899-1922* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 7.

⁶⁴ See Noble.

and education, looked for ways to improve their fields using science.⁶⁵ Science was the way to rationalize an approach to goals.

Statistics was one scientific approach used by the BSA. During the Progressive Era many professionals used statistics to better grasp who was doing what, where and how. Quantified data held out the hope for a clearer understanding of life. The 1890 United States census, for example, with its numerous and detailed questions, was “a technological watershed.”⁶⁶ Statistics were the means by which Progressive Era institutions “scientifically analyzed” their operations and objectives.⁶⁷ The data the BSA collected included public, scouter, and scout opinion; scoutmasters’ religions and occupations; types of troop-sponsoring agencies; and numbers of scouts. The detail of the BSA’s database was impressive. An examination of any BSA annual report reveals pages of charts and tables. The national BSA administration paid close attention to the numbers and opinions when planning policy and procedure. In 1916, for example, the BSA announced changes to *Boys’ Life* based upon a survey of “scout officials” all over the country.⁶⁸ In 1919 the BSA sent out a national “questionnaire” (*sic*) asking for causes of “troops failing to re-register.”⁶⁹ The BSA kept abreast of developments in scientific methods, reporting, for example, in the January 15, 1917 *Scouting* on a new YMCA charting system for boys: “To a man who seeks to help some boy

⁶⁵ Wiebe, 113-23.

⁶⁶ Schlereth, 27-8.

⁶⁷ Wiebe, 147-50.

⁶⁸ *Scouting* IV, no. 1 (May 1, 1916): 30.

⁶⁹ *Scouting* VII, no. 11 (March 13, 1919): 1.

individually . . . there is no finer method of approach than through the charting plan.”

The Y’s charting was intended for religious instruction, but it was offered to scouters as one more scientific method that might be used.⁷⁰

The BSA also employed behavioral science. Granville Stanley Hall was one of the most influential psychologists at the time and important for the BSA because of his studies on adolescence. Hall’s “monumental” 1904 book *Adolescence* was “the first . . . to describe adolescence as a distinct stage in the life cycle.” Hall’s particular analogy for child development was that it “recapitulates” humankind’s evolutionary development of civilization.⁷¹ Hall saw adolescence as imitating the savage period of civilization’s evolution. According to this theory, savages were group (or gang) oriented. Adolescent boys, therefore, in the BSA’s psychological view, should be approached not as individuals but as members of the group of boys. Scouting created an adult-controlled gang wherein boys could be boys, but within a healthy, adult-directed environment.⁷² The BSA troop and patrol system was an attempt to put modern psychology into action. The troop was the basic local scout unit, under the leadership of a volunteer scoutmaster and one or possibly more assistant scoutmasters. Larger communities might have two or even several troops, depending on the population. Ideally, each troop divided itself into three patrols of eight boys each. A patrol leader (the dominant savage) headed the patrol. Patrol leaders were always scouts, usually those with advanced experience and/or rank. The patrol was the BSA’s version of the gang.

⁷⁰ *Scouting* IV, no. 18 (January 15, 1917): 5.

⁷¹ David Hothersall, *History of Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1995), 357-65.

⁷² Macleod, 104.

The organization also recognized psychology's importance in communication media. For instance, in 1917 the BSA helped produce a movie entitled "Knights of the Square Table," which combined "human interest" with "boy psychology." The movie told the story of how the local scout troop uplifted a gang of poor boys through peer pressure and example. The movie portrayed the adolescent boy as peer-oriented, group-influenced, malleable as part of the pack.⁷³

The BSA's civic reform was aimed not at laws and regulations but at the less quantifiable domestic issue of character development usually associated with parenting. During the Progressive Era parents were to some degree marginalized as sources of useful information for their children by the swiftly changing times. The BSA offered itself as a means by which a boy could receive useful, modern information which would not only inform him but better help build his character toward the end of becoming a good citizen. As were other civic reform agencies, the BSA held a middle-class bias, which it tried to inculcate through its reform work. A large part of the BSA's middle-class reform effort was its efforts in Americanization. The working class was a tempting recruiting market because the BSA hoped to inspire working-class boys to aspire to more than a working-class life. The BSA pursued its goals with modern methods, running a professional organization along scientific lines. The next chapter shows how the BSA communicated its message to a nationwide audience using modern advertising methods.

⁷³ *Scouting* V, no. 6 (July 15, 1917): 11.

Chapter Two

IN THE MARKETPLACE

A Mass-oriented Organization

Being part of the pack was a Progressive Era incentive. During this time “daily life was lived more and more in the mass.” “[M]ass production, mass transit, mass education, and mass culture” reflected America’s growing urban population and growth of national over local interests.¹ Public recreations such as amusement parks, movies, and dance halls commercialized entertainment, making it mass-oriented and helping to homogenize leisure tastes.² Commercialization became a way of doing business for the BSA. The BSA’s focus was on mass communication as a means to facilitate the formation of a national (mass) community of boys. The way to communicate to the mass in the Progressive Era was through advertising, which the BSA pursued assiduously, not only using advertising for its own promotion but also making it an important part of scout training.

While the BSA had a mass national orientation from its beginnings, World War One gave it an environment in which its push for a national community of boys could be more strenuously pursued. “[W]ith the declaration of war came the opportunity for National good turns, for as before the boy was related in his citizenship work to his own community, here was the opportunity to relate himself to the nation as a whole.”³ As Scout Commissioner Pirie MacDonald said to a group at the Columbia University Teachers’ College in 1918:

¹ Dawley, 65.

² Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

³ *Scouting* VI, no. 7 (April 1, 1918): 13.

[W]e are putting a hole into individualism; we are warring on selfishness. . . . We are trying to make the people interlock. . . . [T]his is the first step of real nationalism; teaching the boy fair play, cutting down the edge of his extreme individualism, teaching him how he can do some real thing for somebody else. . . . [T]he real work in Scouting has to be done carefully and slowly . . . [so] that you are able to really get your hands down deep into the soul of that youngster.⁴

A good image of how the BSA viewed itself as a mass producer of citizens is found in a 1919 Frank Rigney drawing of a large smoking industrial plant labeled “Factory of Good Citizenship and 100 Per Cent Americanism.”⁵ (See fig. 2, p. 41) Mass communication was the way to create a community of youthful national units. Important developments in mass communication occurred around the time the BSA was founded. Infant radio suggested a national audience for entertainments, information, and product identification.⁶ Movies brought a common cultural image to people across the country.⁷ Even so, during the Progressive Era the print medium remained the chief mode of mass communication. While it kept abreast of the wireless communications field and did a little radio broadcasting, the BSA put its communication efforts chiefly into mass-distributed informational literature. The 1911 *Handbook for Boys* is one example of this type of BSA literature, put together by the BSA’s Editorial Board “[i]n order that the work of the boy scouts throughout America may be uniform and intelligent.”⁸ Aside from the *Handbook*, the BSA’s primary mass communication tool for scouts and scouters was *Boys’ Life*, purchased by the BSA in 1912. *Scouting* magazine was an additional mass communication vehicle, designed

⁴ “Scouting and Recreational Leadership,” *Scouting* VI, no. 15 (August 1, 1918): 9.

⁵ *Scouting* VII, no. 40 (October 30, 1919): 7.

⁶ See Douglas.

⁷ See Larry May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁸ 1911 *Handbook*, v.



Figure 2. Factory of Good Citizenship. As Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall" would do many decades later, the illustration's text compared boys to bricks that were continually needed to keep the edifice under repair.⁹ The difference between the two analogies is that the BSA viewed human bricks positively, whereas Pink Floyd, with the benefit of hindsight, criticized this type of relegation of the individual into a faceless national unit.

⁹ Roger Waters, "Another Brick in the Wall," *The Wall*, Capital CDP 7243 8 31243 2 9.

specifically for scouts. The BSA stayed with print through the years, even as other forms of mass communication became more sophisticated and challenged print for dominance. In his 1944 study of BSA public relations, Harold Levy observed that “[o]f the numerous public information media available to a social agency in the national field . . . [the BSA] places greatest reliance upon the printed word in its own publications.”¹⁰

Although the BSA relied most heavily on print for its mass communications, it gave considerable attention to cinema as a way to reach a nationwide audience, illustrating the BSA’s concern to cover the nation with its message and demonstrating its willingness to exploit modern methods. The BSA worried, however, about the movies’ potential of portraying the organization inaccurately. The BSA’s early popularity made scouting a logical cinematic theme, just as a plethora of juvenile novels with scout protagonists flooded the market during the first twenty years of the BSA’s existence. The BSA felt that there was a good chance that what Americans saw of scouting on the big screen was what they would believe about the organization. In 1916 local scout executives notified national headquarters of “a so-called ‘Boy Scout’ motion picture film” which depicted militaristic scouting activities. The BSA took the issue to the film’s distributor “and succeeded in having the film recalled.” The BSA urged local scouts to continue reporting appearances of this movie.¹¹ The BSA worked hard to suppress such misleading films:

[O]ne of the largest motion picture corporations, at a great expense, undertook to construct a motion picture involving the use of a regular troop of boy scouts . . . [Which] conveyed the impression that it was a representation of the Boy Scout Movement. . . . [A]n appeal was made to the motion picture corporation to

¹⁰ Levy, 94.

¹¹ “Misleading Film Recalled,” *Scouting* IV, no. 9 (July 15, 1916): 3.

eliminate the objectionable features of the film and change the title . . . based upon the provisions of our Federal charter as well as an appeal to the fairness of the motion picture corporation to protect the best interests of scouting.¹²

One can see the BSA's confidence here, especially with its federal incorporation to bolster its claims to protection against misrepresentation.

The BSA was not able to stifle all unofficial or misleading scout films. In 1921 the organization still faced the problem of cinematic exploitation. James West suggested that he was "not sure that we should undertake any effort on the national scale as yet, but the way is open in every community for scouts to give encouragement to the display of only such pictures as are free from objectionable features."¹³ West posited a possible "national" BSA effort to curb these films but did not specify the means that might be employed. He urged scouts and scouters to boycott unapproved films, to talk to theatre owners, and to alert friends, family, and the community as to which films were appropriate to attend. The BSA willingly organized a nationwide effort to quash objectionable movies while at the same time it did not have the same enthusiasm for organized labor actions intended to rectify objectionable work conditions and wages.

In 1917, responsibility for screening movies for which advertisements had been submitted to *Boys' Life* fell to the BSA's Library Department.¹⁴ Movies advertised in *Boys' Life* included "Children of Democracy" and "Boy Scouts to the Rescue."¹⁵ This latter film went to the heart of the BSA's middle-class bias and its acquiescence in the

¹² "Knights of the Square Table," *Scouting* V, no. 6 (July 15, 1917): 11.

¹³ *Twelfth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 67th Cong., 2nd. sess., May 1, 1922, House Doc. 296, 25-6.

¹⁴ *Eighth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 65th Cong., 2nd sess., March 25, 1918, House Doc. 1012, 68.

¹⁵ *Boys' Life* VIII, no. 1 (January, 1918): 35.

common racism of the time.¹⁶ The film was about “a trouble-making Gypsy . . . who is thwarted and finally caught by a big band of Scouts.”¹⁷ Other movies approved for *Boys’ Life* advertising space were a film on Theodore Roosevelt, “Our Teddy,” which was “a great incentive to every red-blooded, ambitious American boy,”¹⁸ and “The Littlest Scout,” a movie to “convert the pacifist,” with a plot including a “German spy” and bombing of an “enemy U-boat.”¹⁹ Although boys’ effeminacy was not the major motivation for the BSA’s advent, the topic of manliness remained important during the early twentieth century, as the advertisement for “Huckleberry Finn showed”: “The boy who wouldn’t rather see this picture than eat ought to wear curls.”²⁰

In February, 1919 appeared the first of what would be *Boys’ Life*’s longest running series of movie advertisements, Paramount/Artcraft advertisements focusing on the theme of educating the family in the movie habit. “What do we see tonight?” asked this first advertisement as the family sat around the completed evening meal while the up-to-date and beaming son displayed the newspaper movie advertisements.²¹ These *Boys’ Life* advertisements, each a full page, all featured domestic illustrations and a sidebar listing the films currently available from Paramount/Artcraft.

These Paramount/Artcraft advertisements illustrate corporate advertising’s goal of undermining the father’s parental influence. Almost invariably, a father pictured in the advertisement was portrayed as unaware of what was going on in the larger world,

¹⁶ The BSA did not control the content of the advertisements appearing in its publication, but it did scrutinize them all to ensure that their message was harmonious with the BSA’s overall values. The importance of the movie advertisements is not so much that the BSA ran them as in what the advertisements reveal about the culture the BSA was helping to create.

¹⁷ *Boys’ Life* VIII, no. 3 (March, 1918): 45

¹⁸ *Boys’ Life* IX, no. 3 (March, 1919): 42.

¹⁹ *Boys’ Life* IX, no. 4 (April, 1919): 1.

²⁰ *Boys’ Life* X, no. 2 (February, 1920): 28.

²¹ *Boys’ Life* IX, no. 2 (February, 1919): 31.

as being behind the times and as requiring instruction from his children. Additionally, these movie advertisements worked hard to inculcate a faith in “brand names,” to elevate product identification and knowledge of consumer products into an important life skill. For example, a 1919 Paramount/Artcraft advertisement entitled “Putting the skids under Dad” asked:

What does Dad know about motion pictures? What *can* he know?--at business all day and buried behind the evening paper at night! Every fellow can tell you that it usually takes the son of the family to keep the folks straight on motion pictures. He is on to the fact that the best guide to quality in motion pictures, as in skates, guns and bicycles, is the *brand name*. . .²²

“Is Your Dad a Regular Fellow?” asked another Paramount-Artcraft advertisement.²³

Sometimes mom needed educating too. “How to sell” her was “the point.” “Get Dad into the conspiracy.”²⁴ “Out of the Kitchen into the World,” featured a wry and resigned dad helping his wife by drying the dishes, while junior puts them into the cupboard.²⁵ “It’s father’s turn home tonight,” shows a content father in his smoking jacket with a book and baby in his lap as mother and kids happily leave the house for a night at the cinema.²⁶ In these advertisements focusing on mother’s emancipation, one sees how Progressive Era advertisers tried to shape the public’s conception of the woman’s separate sphere by playing up the exceptionality of the father participating in domestic activities.²⁷

²² *Boys’ Life* IX, no. 3 (March, 1919): 2.

²³ *Boys’ Life* IX, no. 12 (December, 1919): 39.

²⁴ *Boys’ Life* IX, no. 4 (April, 1919): 37.

²⁵ *Boys’ Life* IX, no. 5 (May, 1919): 33.

²⁶ *Boys’ Life* IX, no. 7 (July, 1919): 1.

²⁷ There was also a growing gender role flexibility within domestic life at the time, which the advertisement may also be illustrating. One must consider also that the studios were trying to sell movie tickets to the whole family and thus would want to enable and encourage every member of the family to go to the movies.

These movie advertisements depicted another significant aspect of the Progressive Era: The general discontent with urban, corporate capitalist work situations and corporate capitalism's awareness of this unease. Instead of trying to correct the work situation, corporations had advertisers suggest palliatives to help people put up with the unhealthy quality of the growing consumer culture. "The End of a Perfect Day" illustrated this clearly when it told the reader: "In your ordinary daily round of activity you feel as though you were in something like a cage." The advertisement suggested that there was an easy option for relieving an unpleasant and disheartening daily life. It did not call for inspecting the cause of the cultural distemper. "The adventurous heart of mankind everywhere presses against the bars of monotony" the advertisement lamented. "Can any Corporation anywhere set before itself a grander and more sublimely *serviceable* ideal than this repeated liberation of humanity's heart?"²⁸ Liberation came through entertainment not through a rewarding vocation.

The BSA did more with cinema than defend itself against misleading scout films and carry advertisements for the movies in *Boys' Life*. The organization also supported films that accurately depicted the BSA. One of the first scout films approved by the BSA was "The Adventures of a Boy Scout," a 1915 movie about Tom Slade, a slum boy who was salvaged through the efforts of a scoutmaster and his troop. Tom Slade was a popular movie character who went on to become the title character in over twenty BSA-approved juvenile novels. The movie cost more than \$20,000 and remained popular at least three years after its premiere. The BSA found the film useful "as a

²⁸ *Boys' Life* IX, no. 9 (September, 1919): 1.

means of raising money for troops and councils and increasing interest in scouting.

National Headquarters will furnish rates and dates to any scout official.”²⁹

In 1917 the Library Department acted as “literary advisor to one of the oldest and most important motion-picture companies,” the Edison Studios of New York City, in the production of a movie entitled “Knights of the Square Table.” The movie was made “under the supervision of our Chief Scout Librarian with the aid of Mr. James Wilder, now chief sea Scout. The picture is based upon Mr. Wilder’s own ideas and was acted under his personal supervision.”³⁰ “Knights” illustrated the BSA’s desire to supplant the father in at least some aspects of parenting and the BSA’s middle-class bias. The main less-chance protagonist’s father is slain by the police. The scoutmaster who wins this boy over to a good way of life through scouting “is the very detective who killed . . . [his] father.”³¹ By proposing that a boy would switch his loyalties from his miscreant father to the authority figure by whom the father was subdued, the BSA was placing emphasis on societal cooperation over family bonds.

A half-page advertisement for the movie appeared in the August, 1917 *Boys’ Life*, perhaps the first motion picture advertisement to appear in the magazine. Kleine-Edison-Selig-Essanay Service handled distribution, asking that scouters and other persons interested in the BSA to correspond if they wanted the film shown “in their local theatres, either as part of a regular program or for a special Scout program.” In Moline, Illinois scouts “invited the city” to a showing of “Knights” at a local theatre. The film was free, funded by a local council member. Three thousand people showed

²⁹ “The Adventures of a Boy Scout,” *Scouting* VI, no. 7 (April 1, 1918): 11.

³⁰ *Eighth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 65th Cong., 2nd sess., March 25, 1918, House Doc. 1012, 36.

³¹ *Boys’ Life* VII, no. 8 (August, 1917): 40.

up, and the benefit for the scouts was a haul of “two troop committee men, three scoutmasters and fifty-five boys.”³² A Louisiana scout troop combined public scout demonstrations of first aid and signaling with the showing of two non-scout movies. Movies could be used in other ways than to depict the scouts. Any family-oriented film would do to attract a crowd.³³

Some other scout-related films that met with BSA approval in 1917 were “The Littlest Scout,” two English movies directed by Baden-Powell, and “The Boy Who Cried Wolf,” by Richard Harding Davis, a popular author of the time.³⁴ In 1918 the BSA produced the “Boys’ Life Screen Review,” “[a] combination news reel and educational screen magazine.” The film was “issued” by Boys’ Life Productions, New York, “Producers of Motion Pictures Authorized by the Boy Scouts of America.” Scouters and scouts were encouraged to approach local theatre managers and inform the national office of any who were interested in showing the film.³⁵

In 1919 the Chief Scout Librarian observed “so great has become the demand for Boy Scout films, it is hoped that in the near future more adequate provision may be made for meeting this need.”³⁶ By 1920 the Library Department spent a significant amount of its time conferring with film producers and producing and distributing scout films.³⁷ The Chief Scout Librarian devoted a significant portion of his workload “to the supervision of the production and distribution of Scout motion pictures and other

³² “Knights of the Square Table,” *Scouting* V, no. 12 (October, 1915): 13.

³³ “Movies and Scouting,” *Scouting* IV, no. 9 (September 1, 1916): 8.

³⁴ *Eighth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 65th Cong., 2nd sess., March 25, 1918, House Doc. 1012, 36.

³⁵ *Boys’ Life* VIII, no. 12 (December, 1918): 65.

³⁶ *Tenth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., House Doc. 708, April 1, 1920, 113.

³⁷ *Eleventh Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, New York?, March 7, 1921, 66. (Incomplete bibliographic information printed on document.)

films.”³⁸ In 1921 he reported promotion of movies of jamborees and news shorts for “news weeklies.”³⁹

Some businesses experimented with scouting films as a way of coupling their names with the movement. In 1919 two new scout films came out: “Days of Real Sport,” a single reel featuring “a number of Scout activities . . . produced and distributed by the Ford Weekly;” and “America’s Heritage,” a double-reel documentary of “a motor truck hiking trip taken by certain picked Scouts of the Akron, Ohio, Council.”⁴⁰ The expense of the trip was borne by the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co., and the picture . . . was made and will be distributed at the expense of the Goodyear Co.”⁴¹ It is ironic that the BSA, which was so chary of seeing its name associated with commercial products, would be so sanguine about these two major United States corporations utilizing the organization for their own commercial exposure. There is a difference, however, between the scout name appearing on chewing gum or .22 rifles and being used by two powerful industries. Both Ford and Goodyear were paradigmatic examples of American enterprise, and the BSA could be nothing but proud of their approval, to say nothing of the various sponsorships which the two companies might afford.

The BSA’s mission depended on reaching a national audience, and the organization effectively utilized mass communication, particularly the print medium, to accomplish this. Although it specialized in print, the BSA remained alert to

³⁸ *Tenth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., House Doc. 708, April 1, 1920, 110.

³⁹ *Twelfth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 67th Cong., 2nd. sess., Doc. 296, May 1, 1922, 75.

⁴⁰ *The Ford Weekly* was a publication put out by Ford Motor Company for its employees.

⁴¹ *Tenth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., House Doc. 708, April 1, 1920, 113.

developments in mass communication and enthusiastically embraced both its own and others' cinema as a means to show the organization's image to a national audience.

A Commercial Organization

As was illustrated by its movie ventures with Ford and Goodyear, the BSA gravitated toward the "business way" of doing things, especially in an orientation toward advertising and selling. The Progressive Era as a whole marked an "eradication of indigenous cultural expression and the elevation of the consumer marketplace to the realm of an encompassing 'Truth.'"⁴² Corporate advertisers, with their goal of selling to as large a market as possible, wanted to override as many indigenous tastes as they could with their promotion of a product to a national market. Adherents of commercialism assumed a mantle of wisdom, claiming to know "the right way" about life in general, and specifically about how Americans ought to live.

The BSA considered itself a business, though its primary product (outside of its supply department which sold official equipment and publications) was not material. The BSA reiterated that it was in the business of selling the idea of Scouting, which it considered to be the right character building method for the American boy. The BSA was commercialized even though it did not seek great monetary profit. The real profit the BSA sought was accounted in members and, hopefully, a national community of like-minded, patriotic boys. As with the advertiser who wished to create a nationally homogenous taste for its product, the BSA wished to create a national belief that it could mold the proper "cultural expression" of American boyhood.

⁴² Ewen, 67.

The BSA conducted its operations in a commercial manner. Like any advertiser, the BSA was jealous of its brand. The BSA was diligent and aggressive in rectifying perceived infringements upon its name or identity as the true scouting organization in America. Early annual reports contain many notices of pending and resolved lawsuits involving some form of BSA name infringement. In addition to its problems with use of the BSA name in the movies, the BSA was bothered in two other ways by trademark infringements. One other problem was companies harassing the BSA by using its name on commercial products, such things as Boy Scout Chewing Gum, Boy Scout Cigarettes, and Boy Scout Pop-Guns. Like any commercial enterprise, the BSA objected to commercial exploitation of its brand name.⁴³

Another problem was competing scout organizations using the words “Boy Scout” or “Scout” within their organization’s names. Over the years, the BSA worked to subsume some of these groups and suppress others, just as any aggressive corporate business did in its drive to dominate its market. In his 1937 official BSA history, William D. Murray recalled the old days of monopolizing the field:

[T]he new Movement succeeded in uniting and absorbing a number of organizations working with boys--the Woodcraft Indians and The Sons of Daniel Boone . . . the most important . . . National Scouts of America, the Peace Scouts of California, the 3000 Polish National Alliance Scouts of Chicago . . . Rhode Island Boy Scouts.⁴⁴

The BSA embraced the legitimacy brought by the 1916 Federal Incorporation Act, anticipating “the protection it will afford to the official insignia and good will of the

⁴³ “Federal Incorporation,” *Scouting* IV, no. 4 (June 15, 1916): 1.

⁴⁴ Murray, 140.

organization . . . the same power to enforce respect for its insignia and name as is enjoyed by the American Red Cross Society.”⁴⁵ With its new power, the BSA filed suit against the United States Boy Scouts, a Hearst sponsored group which emphasized military style drill and had sometimes deviously blurred the distinction between itself and the BSA during fund-raising and recruitment.

The BSA did not want to appear mercenary about its brand protectiveness, however, for in the mind of the organization “image,” not monetary profit, was the main stake. The public’s correct understanding of its message was vitally important to the BSA. The BSA did not mind competing with other character building agencies, as is evidenced by its close relationship with the YMCA. The BSA saw its brand of character building, however, as being the only legitimate one in the “scouting” category. Therefore, for the BSA, the monopoly battle was as much if not more about ideas than it was about numbers. In other words, the BSA wanted the public to know that it saw its conflict with the USBS as being over the ideas of the organization being misrepresented, not primarily about a possible loss of money or recruits through competition. The BSA did not wish its legal battle with the USBS to be seen as “a row between rival organizations.” The BSA simply could not tolerate any public confusion about its identity.⁴⁶ In 1919 the BSA gained a favorable decision against the USBS in the New York State Supreme Court, which ruled that the USBS could no longer use the “Boy Scout” name in its promotional and other activities.⁴⁷

Just as the BSA monopolized the scouting field as a business strategy, so the BSA employed an aggressive sales pitch. “Throughout the 1910s, Boy Scouting

⁴⁵ *Scouting* IV, no. 4 (June 15, 1916): 4.

⁴⁶ *Scouting* V, no. 8 (August 15, 1917): 6.

⁴⁷ *Scouting* VII, no. 12 (March 20, 1919): 4.

remained in a promotional phase, stronger at the top than at the bottom, with the national office floating high upon a wave of publicity.”⁴⁸ In fact, Macleod suggests that “the story of boys’ work publicity is mainly the story of the Boy Scouts; for the BSA used extensive self-advertisement to transform itself almost instantly from an innovation into an established institution.”⁴⁹ Advertising itself as a service agency and encouraging its scouts to perform public service projects, the BSA put itself in the public eye in innumerable communities around the nation. “[O]fficials valued service projects primarily for their effect on the boys and on public opinion.”⁵⁰

The BSA believed that advertising was its key tool. A *Scouting* article noted that eventually a troop developed to the point where it needed the financial and active support “of the community at large.” Such a troop often became frustrated in its attempts to elicit support from “the big men of the town, who . . . [were] supposed to stand for everything progress [*sic*],” because the scouters lacked sufficient sales skills. The scouter had to “fully and enthusiastically . . . [assure] himself that his community . . . needs Scouting, and needs it badly.” The scouter had to approach community leaders confidentially, with evidence at hand of the community’s need for scouting.⁵¹ The BSA made its commitment to advertising explicit in another *Scouting* article: “Scouting is Salesmanship.” “The same five principles that apply in salesmanship apply in Scouting”: favorable attention, interest, desire, decision, and action.⁵²

⁴⁸ Macleod, 155.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁵¹ *Scouting* IV, no. 13 (November 1, 1916): 5.

⁵² *Scouting* VI, no. 24 (October 24, 1918): 10.

Advertisers zealously promoted advertising as a great cultural tool and the BSA helped them spread the message in the July, 1916 *Boys' Life* advertisement for the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World. The University of Pennsylvania had recently granted a degree in Advertising, thus legitimizing advertising as an academic field and acknowledging it as a professional activity. The Associated Advertisers planned to celebrate this event in St. Louis the following year, and the announcement was an early notice for those who might be interested, including, obviously, America's scouts and scouters. The advertisement clearly reflected contemporary thinking about advertisers:

Today . . . Advertising has come into its own. It is recognized as something greater than any Art or Science cause it colors the whole fabric of life more intimately. It is a world-wide power for good in spreading the gifts and benefits of civilization among all the peoples of the earth.⁵³

The advertisement went on : "Advertising . . . disseminates knowledge; binds far countries together . . . rais[es] the standard of living . . . [and makes] what were once only the luxuries of the rich the necessities of the poor."⁵⁴ One of advertising's primary goals was to make people believe that they required many consumer goods. For this reason people needed at least a suitable wage to give them purchasing power and a belief that they needed to buy the goods. There is unintended irony in the advertisers' pride in their power to burden poor people by making it necessary for them to purchase luxuries. Advertisers wanted to create a mass culture dependent on buying as a survival mechanism. They embraced "a broad scaled strategy aimed at selling the way of life

⁵³ *Boys' Life* VI, no. 4 (July, 1916): 40.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

determined by a profit-seeking mass-productive machinery.”⁵⁵ St. Louis scouts assisted at the 1917 Associated Advertising convention, ushering and helping with crowd control “during the night parade.” John Ring, Associate Director of the Convention Board, wrote the local scout executive thanking him. Ring was so impressed with the scouts’ work that he thought the AACW might “be able to make a liberal contribution to the Boy Scout fund in St. Louis.”⁵⁶

Advertising was not just a tool for the BSA. The BSA wanted to teach advertising to the scouts, in the form of salesmanship, as a valuable character building skill. The organization accomplished salesmanship training by encouraging scouts to do impressive public stunts—e.g., scout skill demonstrations or special community services such as trash pickup or ushering at a public event. The idea was to be seen scouting, to portray oneself as a scout, to sell scouting to the community. Despite Macleod’s accurate assessment that the BSA was strongly motivated to perform public service for its promotional value, the BSA also sincerely believed that doing things for others was a major character building exercise. For the BSA, to “do a good turn daily” was not merely a slogan.

The BSA identified itself with advertising and viewed itself as a product.

Scouting wrote:

Today we sell ideas.

The Boy Scout Movement is as near concrete as an idea can be. It is the insurance policy of to-morrow. Its earning power lies in its wholesome, productive future.

Boy Scout Week in June will be selling time. Mr. McAdoo will direct sales. The market is the nation.

Now, scoutmaster, is the time to push your advertising!⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ewen, 54.

⁵⁶ *Scouting* V, no. 5 (July 1, 1917): 2.

⁵⁷ *Scouting* VII, no. 18 (May, 1919): 4.

The BSA considered “salesmanship” as the primary ingredient of a good scout leader, “not military training, not having boys of one’s own, not outdoor hobbies.” For the scouters, the “biggest happiness is in selling ideals. . . . [G]et the boy’s view. . . . [B]elieve in the product. . . . [A]rrange by suggestion to *let the boys buy*.”⁵⁸ The boys were to buy the idea of scouting. Scout officials apparently doubted that people might naturally favor scouting ideals without the hype or that the ideals might strike a sympathetic chord in the American populace because they represented a vanishing American character building process.

As World War I gave the BSA an opportunity to increase its influence over child-rearing in the home, so the war also gave the BSA an increased opportunity, through its Liberty Bond campaigns, to train scouts in some real commercial salesmanship:

The Liberty Loan Campaign from the educational point of view gives an excellent opportunity for training in salesmanship. Never before in the history of the world were boys given such a large opportunity to sell and to serve for the sake of our Country.⁵⁹

In conjunction with the Liberty Loan campaigns, the BSA gave scouters tips on how their scouts might improve their sales technique. For example, the October 1, 1917 issue of *Scouting* carried an article intended to help scouters “who are called upon to instruct their boys as to the methods and psychology of practical salesmanship.”⁶⁰ The BSA tried to teach the scouts aggressive sales tactics. One of these was to uphold the consumer to public scrutiny, a major psychological technique employed by advertising

⁵⁸ *Scouting* VIII, no. 1 (January 1, 1920): 3.

⁵⁹ *Scouting* VI, no. 7 (April 1, 1918): 13.

⁶⁰ *Scouting* V, no. 11 (October 1, 1917): 4-5.

at this time.⁶¹ In the case of the Liberty Loan Campaign, the BSA urged scouts to aim public scrutiny at the individual who had not “done his bit” by buying Liberty Bonds. The BSA intended that scouts embarrass community members who had not subscribed to Liberty Bonds. *Scouting* wrote:

A stunt’s the thing wherein to trap the conscience. . . . Develop . . . this latent ingenuity in the boys. . . . [G]et them thinking of selling ideas. It’s good for them and it’s good for you, and, needless to say, good for the U. S. A., too. . . . [A]ll Scouting will know of the resourcefulness of your troop.⁶²

Edward F. Bigelow, the Scout Naturalist, pointed out that “[s]elling Liberty Bonds requires exactly the same qualifications as studying nature. Humans are interesting animals worthy of careful study and skillfully considerate treatment.”⁶³

The business community recognized the commercial benefit in scouting, seeing it as a way to train future businessmen. The Rotary Club staunchly supported the scouting movement, feeling that its relationship with the BSA was one “that almost puts . . . [the BSA] in the position of being Junior Rotarians or [the Rotarians] in the position of Senior Scouts.”⁶⁴ In 1919 *Scouting* carried a front page story stating that there is “the assurance” of Rotary Club “financial” and “leadership” support for the organization.⁶⁵ In these ways, advertising and business influenced scouting activities. The BSA could hardly be expected to take a critical view of the business or advertising community that provided economic and personnel support.

Businesspeople saw the BSA as a means of teaching efficiency, a very highly prized quality in business at the time. The Boston Chamber of Commerce devised an

⁶¹ Ewen, 34.

⁶² *Scouting* VI, no. 6 (March 15, 1918): 9.

⁶³ *Scouting* VI, no. 7 (April 1, 1918): 5.

⁶⁴ *Scouting* V, no. 7 (August 1, 1917): 7.

⁶⁵ *Scouting* VII, no. 9 (February 27, 1919): 1.

“Efficiency Badge” for scouts who had advanced in the ranks and earned various combinations of merit badges. The Chamber of Commerce required that the scout “must show further knowledge of the leading industries, transportation lines and commerce of Boston and New England.” Boys who earned the Efficiency Badge had the potential to be hired by members of the Chamber of Commerce “desiring to employ efficient and intelligent boys.”⁶⁶

Not all scouters appreciated the extent to which some businesses and even some non-commercial community organizations looked to the scouts for service. For instance, T. H. Spence, a Milwaukee, Wisconsin scout executive, wrote to the national office complaining about the number of commercial events local scouts were asked to help staff:

to sell tickets and distribute handbills for plays, bazaars and fairs, to usher, sell programs and take tickets at benefit plays, to have its drum corps furnish music at entertainments, and recently we were asked to take a booth and sell soft drinks at a charity horse show.⁶⁷

James West, Chief Scout Executive, responded to Spence that while the BSA was not a commercial enterprise it did have as one purpose serving the community. He advised the local scouters to use discretion when lending scouts but to look for worthwhile events, commercial or not.⁶⁸ Through such frequent helpful participation in public events the BSA gained recognition in and identification with the community.

Large corporations also had a favorable interest in the BSA. The June 19, 1919 *Scouting* featured a half-page advertisement--previously run as a *New York Sun* editorial--showing scouts canoeing and swimming, with a text reading in part:

⁶⁶ *Scouting* IV, no. 7 (August 1, 1916): 7.

⁶⁷ *Scouting* IV, no. 21 (March 1, 1917): 7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

It is significant that such men as Charles M. Schwab, Rodman Wanamaker and Collector Edwards . . . should be among the earliest and most enthusiastic friends to help the Boy Scouts of America in their endeavor to raise a fund of \$1,000,000 and to gain 1,000,000 adult associate members. They know the value of character in business and industry and character building is what Scout training means.⁶⁹

Corporate capitalists thus saw the BSA's program as an important method for indoctrinating boys into a pro-business attitude.

Despite the BSA's commercial orientation, the organization did not engage in shady or deliberately cynical promotional work. On the contrary, the BSA espoused the highest business ideals and repeatedly reminded scouts and scouters of the organization's moral stance. For instance, the organization believed in honest advertising and pledged to stand behind all products it advertised in *Boys' Life*. The BSA also screened advertisements for:

propositions which, while they won't do the reader any particular harm, won't do him any particular good. . . . 'A Scout is Thrifty,' and the official magazine of the movement cannot consistently offer its readers temptations to waste their money on things which won't do them any good[.]⁷⁰

The BSA claimed that its work was "helpfulness outside of the field of commercialism."⁷¹ The BSA frequently encouraged boys to a higher than material appreciation: "Money is not the only reward for education. It is not even the principal reward."⁷²

The BSA wanted to organize a national community of patriotic boys. To address this mass audience, the organization effectively utilized mass communication.

⁶⁹ *Scouting* VII, no. 25 (June 19, 1919): 8.

⁷⁰ *Boys' Life* V, no. 2 (April, 1915): 2.

⁷¹ *Scouting* VII, no. 12 (March 20, 1919): 4.

⁷² *Boys' Life* 6, no. 5 (September, 1916): 1.

Although print was the BSA's first and strongest communication medium, it used cinema from its earliest years. The BSA was an alert organization and canny about getting its point across. The BSA's skill at communication and promotion derived in large part from the organization's belief in modern advertising techniques. The BSA ran itself like a business selling its brand of character building. The organization's commercial methods were aimed at getting across an idea, however, not in earning a profit. The BSA thought that business was good, however, and it promoted itself as a mold of efficient, business-ready young men. Corporations recognized the BSA's benefits and supported the organization's work. The BSA produced effective propaganda for American corporations because it communicated such enthusiastic support for business as the American way.

The BSA was an effective organization. Professional, scientific, mass-oriented and commercial, the organization tried to interact with other community institutions with which it felt a common cause. In this community liaison work the BSA was sometimes successful in bringing about cooperation among community institutions. In so establishing itself with the community in which it was selling character formation, the BSA made gains in making itself a traditional part of the mainstream culture, as an important voice in the affairs of juvenile boys. An examination of Children's Book Week provides an illustration of how the BSA put all its Progressive Era characteristics together and created an American institution.

Chapter Three

CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK:

A CASE STUDY OF THE BSA AS A PROGRESSIVE ERA ORGANIZATION

The BSA was greatly concerned about what books boys chose for recreational reading. Many BSA leaders felt that books were almost as influential as people.¹ Some scouters went further. Chief Scout Librarian Franklin K. Mathiews thought that "[t]he boy is influenced by the personality, but the . . . personality that influences the boy most is not flesh and blood. It is the man or a boy in a book."² The BSA could even point to the most important reading time in a boy's day: "the silent night time of . . . [his] own companionship . . . [when] character is built up or torn down." Whatever other activities a boy might indulge in during those solitary nocturnal hours, the BSA was convinced that reading was one the most common and the most psychologically influential.³ The BSA coveted the time a boy spent alone in independent and reflective thought. Occupying a boy's leisure time, after all, was what scouting was all about. Parents would seem the logical candidates to oversee what their boys were reading, but parents had a dubious resume during the Progressive Era. It thus became the province of professionals like those in the BSA to direct boys' reading.

To accomplish its reading goals, the BSA created a Library Department in 1912 and hired Franklin K. Mathiews as Chief Scout Librarian. Born in 1872 in Middletown, New York, Mathiews's schooling included Peddie Institute college-preparatory, a degree

¹ Murray, 405.

² *Official Report of the Third Biennial Conference of Boy Scout Executives* (New York: Boy Scouts of America, 1924), 304.

³ *Official Report of the fifth National Training Conference of Scout Executives* (New York: Boy Scouts of America, 1928), 489.

from Brown University, and further study at Crozier Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary, and Harvard University Divinity School. Work as a pastor saw Mathiews at Emmanuel Baptist Church, Ridgewood, New Jersey, Central Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee, and, finally, Baptist Church, Scotch Plains, New Jersey, in which community Mathiews became a scoutmaster. Inspired by his scouting experiences, Mathiews came to believe in the BSA movement as a major force for good in America. He felt that his true calling came from the BSA and, at age forty in September, 1912 Mathiews joined the BSA national staff.⁴ The Library Department's mandate was to encourage boys to read books with at least some educational value and to give scouters a program for directing boys to good books, thus "mak[ing] complete our influence by guiding boys . . . in all their hours of leisure."⁵

The BSA reading program played out against the backdrop of what Peter Soderbergh calls "The Great Book War."⁶ Actually, there were two book wars during the Progressive Era. The larger of these conflicts involved advocates of quality children's books, including the BSA, trying to prevent youthful readers from consuming poor quality literature, primarily series fiction, for example *Tom Swift*, *The Bobbsey Twins*, Horatio Alger's novels, and *The Motor Boys*. The good book crowd, largely "clergymen, educators, municipal librarians, and parents," believed that poor quality

⁴ *Official Report of Fourth Biennial Conference of Boy Scout Executives* (New York: Boy Scouts of America, 1926), 382.

⁵ "Library Department," *Scouting* IV, no. 13 (November 1, 1916): 7.

⁶ See Peter A. Soderbergh, "The Great Book War: Edward Stratemeyer and the Boy Scouts of America, 1910-1930," *New Jersey History* 91, no. 4 (1973): 235-48. Although participants in the Great Book War sometimes used militaristic language, it is unclear at this time whether or not the good book conflict was called "The Great Book War" at the time.

juvenile literature threatened children and society with harm.⁷ Mathiews energized these good book advocates, who faced difficult challenges because, “as Mathiews found out, the boys preferred reading . . . syndicated books to the sanitized adventure stories offered by the” good book advocates.⁸ The smaller book war, the war within the war, consisted of the BSA attempting to curtail boys’ reading of poor quality fiction (once again primarily series novels) with Boy Scout protagonists. These wars occurred simultaneously and the BSA participated in both. This case study primarily concentrates on the larger book war.

In the early twentieth century, “young people . . . read omnivorously, insatiably and proficiently.”⁹ Mathiews used charts to demonstrate that “reading claimed the largest percentage of [a youth’s] time.”¹⁰ Mathiews asserted that great numbers of juveniles were reading “anywhere from one to three or four books a week.” He reported that one child read ninety-eight books over a summer, and he announced that books were the favorite premiums selected by boys selling “Curtis publications.” He cited another report that showed reading as the top hobby for boys.¹¹ This voracious reading was fed by “an enormous flood” of “cheap books,” both paperback and hardcover. Technological developments in the use of “groundwood paper” enabled mass production

⁷ Ibid., 237.

⁸ Nancy Tillman Romalov, “Children’s Series Books and the Rhetoric of Guidance: A Historical Overview,” in *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, ed. Carolyn Steward Dyer and Nancy Tillman Romalov (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 117.

⁹ John T. Dizer, *Tom Swift, the Bobbsey Twins, and Other Heroes of American Juvenile Literature* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 354.

¹⁰ Franklin K. Mathiews, “Blowing Out the Boy’s Brains,” *Outlook* 108 (November 18, 1914): 652.

¹¹ Ibid., “Books as Merchandise and Something More,” *The Publishers’ Weekly* LXXXVII, no. 20 (May 15, 1915): 1487.

of books not possible before.¹² All of this was no doubt good news for publishers, but Mathiews and the rest of the good book crowd saw a dangerous component to this youthful literary enthusiasm. Many juveniles were choosing to read the wrong books, sensational cheap novels of little literary merit and content that damaged the juvenile readers' imaginations. The Winnetka Graded Book List, a much cited study done in 1927, concluded that "reading habits of fifth, sixth, and seventh graders were dominated by . . . [t]hose books which were 'unanimously rated trashy' by librarians."¹³

Edward Stratemeyer was the major purveyor of "wrong books" during the Progressive Era. Stratemeyer (1862-1930) was a prolific writer of juvenile novels, authoring according to one reckoning 150 titles under his real name alone. Using the pseudonym "Arthur Winfield," Stratemeyer wrote the famous *Rover Boys* series. He was so well respected in the series book community that "he was chosen to complete 'Oliver Optic's' unfinished manuscript . . . and eleven Alger stories."¹⁴ Both Optic and Alger were major names in American juvenile literature during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it was a testament to Stratemeyer's skill that he was chosen for these creations. Stratemeyer also edited juvenile magazines.¹⁵

Stratemeyer was even more prolific in creating title characters and plot outlines than he was at writing entire books. In 1903 Stratemeyer started a "fiction factory," hiring "experienced writers" to write books of twenty-five chapters for \$125 apiece based upon his plot outlines. St. George Rathbone, Leslie McFarlane, Mildred Wirt, and

¹² John William Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States* (New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1981), 2: 481.

¹³ Romalov, 118.

¹⁴ Soderbergh, 235.

¹⁵ Dizer, 355.

Howard Garis (author of several Motor Boys, Tom Swifts, and Bobbsey Twins) were some of Stratemeyer's major authors. Some have called Stratemeyer "the Henry Ford of the juvenile industry." His major series titles (with their dates of inception) included *The Bobbsey Twins* (1904), *The Motor Boys* (1906), *Tom Swift* (1910) *The Motor Girls* (1910), *Baseball Joe* (1912), *Ruth Fielding* (1913), and *Bunny Brown* (1916).¹⁶

Stratemeyer, an astute businessman as well as a creative fount, "negotiated . . . and retained exclusive rights" to his books. In his publishing arrangements with Grosset & Dunlap, Stratemeyer "owned the plates to his books," and he dealt with multiple publishers, so he never became dependent upon one publishing house and could have several ventures going on simultaneously.¹⁷ In 1910, the same year that the BSA began and six years before the organization gained federal incorporation, Stratemeyer incorporated as the Stratemeyer Syndicate. Peter Soderbergh estimates that between 1904 and 1930 Stratemeyer put out around 700 books. Stratemeyer deserved the description as "the dominant figure in the juvenile book field in America" and "the most influential writer/producer of children's books in this country until his death in 1930."¹⁸

Stratemeyer, the quintessential Progressive Era corporate book producer, further distinguished himself by being "a highly moral man, modest and retiring." Stratemeyer "[g]enerally . . . ignored the periodic torrents of abuse directed at his beloved books. His readership was his weathervane and his jury. 'Any writer who has the young for an audience can snap his fingers at all other critics,' he said repeatedly."¹⁹

¹⁶ Soderbergh, 236 (quote); Dizer, 355. Series which began after this paper's purview but which may be familiar to many readers include *Bomba* (1926), *The Hardy Boys* (1927), and *Nancy Drew* (1930).

¹⁷ Dizer, 360.

¹⁸ Soderbergh, 236, 235 (first quote); Dizer 355 (second quote).

¹⁹ Dizer, 355 (first quote); Soderbergh, 237 (second quote).

The critics in the good book crowd accused Stratemeyer and others series fiction authors of bad writing, immorality, and sensationalism. “[P]ublic libraries . . . created . . . a dichotomy between . . . popular (i.e., low, subliterate, escapist, trashy) and elite (i.e., edifying, uplifting, artful) literature.”²⁰ The good book lobby deemed sensationalism especially dangerous because it fed youthful imaginations with fantasies of super achievement that could never be realized. Chief Scout Executive James West felt that “[b]oys who spend hours reading what is often called ‘trash’—books that are carelessly written and inaccurate, books with characters that are not true to life—rarely develop into leaders.”²¹ The good book crowd did not claim that bad books turned readers into crooks. They were concerned that reading “trash” hindered the youthful reader from becoming a productive citizen. Mathews theorized that the imaginative faculty was the one by which “a boy develops initiative and resourcefulness.” The wrong books, “by over-stimulation, debauch and vitiate . . . [the imagination], as brain and body are debauched and destroyed by strong drink.”²² Like Mathews, librarians “worried that reading about omnipotent children was dangerous because it could lead to feelings of discontent, causing children to dream, perchance to act upon the dreams, or worse, to behave disrespectfully toward adults.”²³

Criticism of juvenile reading matter was not new to the Progressive Era. During the latter two-thirds of the nineteenth century many juvenile books and magazines

²⁰ Romalov, 113.

²¹ James E. West, *Making the Most of Yourself: The Boy Scout Trail to the Greatest of All Adventures* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1941), 65.

²² Franklin K. Mathews, “The Influence of the Boy Scout Movement in Directing the Reading of Boys,” *The Publishers’ Weekly* LXXXV, no. 22 (May 30, 1914): 1765.

²³ Romalov, 116.

offended upholders of decent culture. Anthony Comstock of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice was a leading figure in the battle against dangerous juvenile literature. In 1883 Comstock published *Traps for the Young*, a fulmination against the dangers of sensational juvenile literature. “[S]everal generations of educators and librarians” took Comstock seriously. Comstock raged mainly against dime novels, the nineteenth-century predecessors of the series books that became targets of the Progressive Era good book crowd. Dime novels had a bad reputation among the educated not only for their lack of literary quality but also (and primarily) for their unrestrained sensationalism; this prejudice carried forward into the twentieth century, tarring many of the hard-bound inexpensive juvenile series books with dime novel notoriety.²⁴

Inability to control children choosing these unwonted books especially troubled the good book crowd. As pointed out earlier, Mathews and the BSA (and the rest of the good book advocates) feared those times in a boy’s life when he was alone with his reflections and his self-chosen reading material. It frustrated the good book group that the child often chose to read the wrong type of literature. There was no mystery to good book advocates why children read so many of the inferior series novels: They were exactly what children wanted. A 1921 study concluded that series books “speak to interests of boys and girls.” Not only did series books provide what children wanted to read, but they also reflected intelligent publishers who thought about what would attract the juvenile reader. A study by Johns Hopkins University in 1922, found that in juvenile

²⁴ Dizer, 353 (quote), 352.

books “external appearance was a significant factor in book selection . . . attractive covers and illustrations, short chapters, large print, wide margins, and much dialogue.”²⁵

While the good book crowd was more than happy to join Mathiews in criticizing dangerous juvenile literature, it was less creative than Mathiews and less in tune with the times in coming up with a solution to the problem of getting children to read the right books. Librarians and teachers had always been in the vanguard of trying to uplift the community’s literary tastes, but their efforts rarely went beyond the library and the classroom. Librarians and teachers conducted their book war by trying to teach children about good books and persuading them to read such, but it was obvious that more children were reading the dangerous books than was good for society. Mathiews came up with the idea to fight the book war in the marketplace and thus bring the battle into Progressive Era modernity. Mathiews saw that the way to get juveniles to stop reading the cheap series novels was to offer them good books at competitive prices, to increase good book advertising, to weld the good book factions into one army, and to encourage the writing, publishing, and retailing of “appropriate” series novels in competition with the trash. Mathiews understood why popular books sold and he encouraged publishers and authors to produce books which had all the elements common to trashy literature but with “reasonably” sensational plots rather than the highly fanciful unrealistic plots of the cheap books. Mathiews went about this task in several ways, but the most impressive, successful, and progressive action he took was in the creation of national children’s book weeks.

²⁵ Romalov, 118.

Only a couple of years into his tenure as Chief Scout Librarian, Mathiews tried out his idea of a book week for children. He made a survey of scouts' recreational reading and was "dismayed." "[I]t appeared that no one was doing anything about better distribution of books to boys."²⁶ During the 1914 Boy Scout Week (a week of nationally orchestrated BSA activities intended to promote scouting in communities across the United States), Mathiews experimented with a regional book week effort in the American South, visiting several communities where he spoke to civic groups and BSA executives and dropped in on booksellers. Mathiews was persuasive. In some communities "ministers . . . preach[ed] upon the worth of good books for boys, and through the week . . . newspapers . . . published special articles." Cinemas showed "lantern slides calling attention to" good books available at popular prices.²⁷ This regional effort proved sufficiently successful (measured in community enthusiasm and booksellers' reports of increased sales) that Mathiews determined to nationalize his book week idea.

That first national book week effort, called "Safety First Book Week," came the following year, in 1915.²⁸ As part of his strategy to make the book week national and to begin his efforts at commercializing the book war, Mathiews contacted the American Booksellers' Association's program committee chairman, Louis Keating, and arranged an invitation to speak before the ABA's 1915 annual convention. Mathiews talked on "Books as Merchandise or Something More," arguing that publishers ought to decrease

²⁶ Tebbel, 266.

²⁷ Franklin K. Mathiews, "The Influence of the Boy Scout Movement in Directing the Reading of Boys," *The Publishers' Weekly* LXXXV, no. 22 (May 30, 1914): 1766-7.

²⁸ *Eighth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 65th Cong., 2nd sess., March 25, 1918, House Doc. 1012, 69.

distribution of objectionable books.²⁹ Mathiews called his planned effort a “Juvenile Book Week” and suggested “that the last week of November or the first week of December be set aside” for the event. As this period coincided with the Christmas buying season, booksellers could “urge the public to ‘shop early.’” Mathiews revealed BSA plans to engage the cooperation of librarians, clergy, newspapers, “women’s clubs, parent-teacher associations, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, etc.” in making the book week work for each community. Mathiews directly asked the ABA to support the book week and become involved in its success. He reminded the booksellers of their higher duty to ensure that the books they sold were of healthy content and not the dangerous trash that was the target of the good book crowd.³⁰

The ABA convention endorsed Mathiews’s idea and soon thereafter the American Library Association followed suit. *Publisher’s Weekly* acknowledged that librarians had “been doing valiant and devoted work” trying to fight against cheap juvenile fiction, which was “poison” to juvenile mental health. Alerted to the seriousness of the good book crowd’s war against trashy literature and its promotion of good books, the booksellers recognized that they needed to join in to ensure that their market was not undercut and that they did not miss some movement toward a particular type of juvenile publishing that could prove profitable. Booksellers had not undertaken any type of cooperative effort in this direction before and they were very interested to see how it came out. *Publisher’s Weekly* reemphasized Mathiews’s strategy of holding the book week “just as the holiday buying of children’s books was beginning.” *Publisher’s*

²⁹ Tebbel, 266.

³⁰ Franklin K. Mathiews, “Books as Merchandise and Something More,” *The Publishers’ Weekly* LXXXVII, no. 20 (May 15, 1915): 1490-1.

Weekly added its own opinion that the book week was “to have but one object--the encouragement of the buying of better children’s books, the discouragement of the sale of bad ones.”³¹

The 1915 Safety First Book Week was even more successful than the 1914 regional effort and in 1916 Mathiews and his allies scheduled another national book week (“Good Book Week” this time around) for December 4 through 9. *Scouting* magazine suggested what scouters could do in their communities, including encouraging librarians to make special exhibits of good books, handing out book lists, conducting promotional activities, contacting women’s clubs, enlisting churches, and working with booksellers. Educators could encourage students to ask their parents for certain books for Christmas. Women’s clubs could include Christmas book buying on their meeting agendas. Major segments of the community were to unite in the good book effort.³²

The first *Boys’ Life* notice of any book week was its moderately sized advertisement for Good Book Week in the December, 1916 issue, which urged parents to “Buy The Best Books For Your Children” and prompted the reader to “[a]sk your librarian or bookseller or send 4 . . . [cents] in stamps for list BOOKS BOYS LIKE BEST, prepared by the Library Commission of the Boy Scouts of America.”³³ It is significant that it took *Boys’ Life*, the official scout magazine, two years to advertise Mathiews’s book weeks, especially as Mathiews worked as an editor on the magazine. Over the years, *Boys’ Life* would give only moderate attention to book weeks, a seeming anomaly given the importance accorded to the reading program and the book weeks.

³¹ “‘Books Boys Like Best,’” *The Publishers’ Weekly* LXXXVIII, no. 17 (October 23, 1915): 1281.

³² “Buy the Best Books for Your Children,” *Scouting* IV, no. 14 (November 15, 1916): 2.

³³ *Boys’ Life* VI, no. 9 (December, 1916): 44.

However, although the boys might be reading, it was the parents who probably purchased most books and it was the good book crowd that did the recommending.

Mathiews and the good book crowd continued Good Book Week in 1917, but World War I caused a hiatus in 1918.³⁴ In 1919 Mathiews helped develop Children's Book Week (November 9-15), a tradition that has continued to the present day and was the true fruition of Mathiews's efforts. In May, 1919 Mathiews again addressed the ABA national convention and spoke of booklists, cooperation between booksellers and the community, and promotional tips to help booksellers sell scouting related books during Boy Scout Week. During this address Mathiews identified the commercial problem, as he saw it, facing good juvenile fiction. Cheap books were tough competition for higher quality books, because "it is almost impossible to make a good book . . . at a popular price." Mathiews referred to a Boy Scout juvenile series novel written and published with BSA encouragement that did sell at a competitive cost. He also referred to "Every Boy's Library," a series of BSA selected reprints, edited and published by the BSA in cooperation with a large publishing firm, which also competed with the cheap fiction. However (even with the advanced mass production technology of the day) it was difficult to get good books into the stores at popular prices because of "the present high cost of manufacture and the difficulty of interesting writers of stability and reputation to write books to sell at a low price."³⁵ Despite this somewhat discouraging

³⁴ *Eighth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 65th Cong., 2nd sess., March 25, 1918, House Doc. 1012, 69.

³⁵ Franklin K. Mathiews, "The Boys Want More Books," *The Publishers' Weekly* XCV, no. 21 (May 24, 1919): 1437.

situation, Mathiews was about to get additional and major support for his book week efforts.

Based on the precedents set by the successful Safety First and Good Book Weeks, the ABA proposed giving solid and unreserved backing to a new “Children’s Book Week,” supported by a coalition of the good juvenile book crowd. Any reservations that the publishers may have had about the first few book week efforts vanished in the face of Mathiews’s successes. “[A] joint committee of the American Booksellers’ Association and associated publishers” joined to direct the 1919 book week.³⁶ Frederick Melcher chaired the committee and Mathiews served as vice-chairman. Melcher was heavily involved in children’s book publishing, selling, and editing, establishing the Newbery Medal for children’s books in 1921 and the Caldecott Medal for picture books in 1937. “The ABA’s executive committee did the organizing” and expanded “the original concept to girls . . . and . . . little children of both sexes.”³⁷

Making up the Children’s Book Week committee, in addition to Melcher and Mathiews, were F. Brett Stokes, Treasurer (Appleton Publishing), Maxwell Aley (Harper’s), Anne Carroll Moore (New York Public Library), M. A. Corrigan (Baker & Taylor), Harry E. Maule (Doubleday), Cedric Crowell (Crowell), T. L. Reed (Grosset & Dunlap), E. W. Mumford (Penn), Frank Bruce (Houghton Mifflin), Mrs. Louise Pleasanton (Brentano’s Children’s Dept.), and Bessie Graham (Philadelphia School of Bookselling).³⁸ It makes sense that booksellers dominated the committee, because

³⁶ *Tenth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., House Doc. 708, April 1, 1920, 112.

³⁷ Tebbel, 267.

³⁸ *Ibid.*,

Mathiews had known all along that the battle for good books had to be fought in the marketplace. Although the book week committee would succeed in marshalling a national coalition of the various good book advocates, there were very few librarians and educators involved at the highest level.

Why did the committee not name Mathiews as chairman? There would have been some logic to that choice because Mathiews conceived of the book week idea. But the booksellers took over Children's Book Week, supplanting the BSA which, prior to 1919 had provided the hub of cooperation and motivation. Once the book week idea proved profitable, the commercial interests co-opted it, making it their own advertising tool and going beyond the scout and male market. Mathiews's role should not be diminished because he did not gain the chairmanship of the book week committee. He was always a vital and central figure in Children's Book Week. He went on a twenty-three city speaking tour at the publishers' "invitation and . . . expense," meeting with "[local BSA] executives, librarians and booksellers, . . . women's clubs, parent teacher associations . . . and . . . cooperat[ing] with the local book stores."³⁹

Mathiews tried to incorporate as many interested parties as he could in this grand 1919 Children's Book Week. In addition to libraries, publishers, bookstores, and the BSA, Mathiews enlisted churches, YMCAs, newspapers, and magazines. Mathiews's book week synergy impressed *Publisher's Weekly*, which wrote that "[n]o co-operative undertaking in the book field has shown greater promise of splendid accomplishment."⁴⁰ In October, 1919 *Publisher's Weekly* wrote: "The Co-operative Effort Is An Assured

³⁹ *Tenth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., House Doc. 708, April 1, 1920, 110, 112.

⁴⁰ "Children's Book Week," *The Publishers' Weekly* XCVI, no. 5 (August 2, 1919): 341.

Success.”⁴¹ *Publisher’s Weekly* was extremely impressed by the cooperation involved in Children’s Book Week. Most of its articles on the 1919 and subsequent Children’s Book Weeks used “cooperation” in their titles and/or emphasized the cooperative effort in their text.

Publisher’s Weekly was not shy about assigning credit for Children’s Book Week, heralding the ABA’s dominance but acknowledging at the same time Mathiews’s role: “While the booksellers are taking the initiative, it has from the beginning the support of the Boy Scouts of America, Mr. Mathiews, the Chief Boy Scout librarian, being one of those largely responsible for the movement.” *Publisher’s Weekly* acknowledged librarians as veterans in the fight for good reading and noted the ALA’s official support for Children’s Book Week.⁴²

The booksellers conceived of Children’s Book Week as a way to encourage book buying for home libraries. *Publisher’s Weekly* wrote that “the American parent is prepared to recognize the justice . . . of the idea that the average American child needs more books.” It is indicative of the booksellers’ commercial intent that the descriptive word for books was “more” rather than “better.” Although the purpose of Children’s Book Week was to promote quality reading, the promotional material contained very little about how to determine book quality. *Publisher’s Weekly* urged “bookstores of the country” to make “every effort to see that their supply of books measures up with the occasion and that their sales force is adequate and competent to meet the public’s expectations.” Apparently the booksellers had no difficulty persuading other institutions

⁴¹ “Children’s Book Week,” *The Publishers’ Weekly* XCVI, no. 14 (October 25, 1919): 1056.

⁴² “Children’s Book Week,” *The Publishers’ Weekly* XCVI, no. 5 (August 2, 1919): 341.

to get in line with Children's Book Week's commercial emphasis. Librarians had "already shown . . . their interest in having the public own books as well as to borrow . . . [T]here has been much fine co-operative work done between them and the bookstores."⁴³ The librarians' cooperation with the booksellers in promoting books for sale demonstrates Progressive Era commercialization of public institutions. The libraries, while not trying to sell books themselves, accepted that to spread their good book message they had to adopt modern advertising techniques. More than that, they closely collaborated with private, for-profit businesses. They thus blurred the lines between teaching critical thinking, which was the librarians' business, and behavior modification through psychological advertising, which was the booksellers' business.

The 1919 Children's Book Week was well and variously promoted. Noted illustrator Jessie Wilcox Smith designed the poster, for example. Because of the poster's quality and production expense, its distributor asked recipients to treat it "with care" and keep it "for repeated display" in future years. Scribners produced "an attractive sticker . . . sent in quantity to workers." The ABA helped finance Children's Book Week with \$400 of its own, and the association made "appeals" to "publishers of children's books . . . [for] various amounts according to the length of their list," resulting in \$2, 300 in paid book advertisements for the Children's Book Week book list distributed nationally to libraries, schools, and bookstores.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "Children's Book Week," *The Publishers' Weekly* XCVI, no. 14 (October 25, 1919): 1056 (first quote); "Children's Book Week," *The Publishers' Weekly* XCVI, no. 10 (September 6, 1919): 596 (second quote); "Children's Book Week," *The Publishers' Weekly* XCVI, no. 18 (November 22, 1919): 1275 (third quote).

The 1919 Children's Book Week was so successful that interested parties enthusiastically looked forward to the 1920 event. Mathiews conducted a seventeen city speaking tour, traveling from Spokane, Washington to Chattanooga, Tennessee between October 17 and November 11.⁴⁵ Librarians energetically worked for Children's Book Week. *The Wilson Bulletin* listed some of the ways librarians could get involved, including "talks in the library . . . at woman's club meetings . . . story hours . . . talks in the bookstores . . . newspaper articles . . . [and] Christmas exhibits."⁴⁶ Annabel Porter, of the Tacoma Public Library, reported her cooperative efforts with the local Scout executive and "the Girls' Reserves and Camp Fire Girls." She testified to the need for public and private institutions to join forces in the book war, saying, "the problem of indiscriminate book buying will ultimately be solved by the children's librarian coming into the book store. Parents will choose good books for children because only good books will be displayed."⁴⁷ Mathiews suggested that librarians help create displays in bookstores, "to be exhibited with a card bearing the following legend: 'Some of the Books Recommended for Christmas Purchase for the Children by the Public Library.'"⁴⁸

Children's Book Week thrived again in 1921. The Children's Book Week committee continued to provide many materials for institutions to use, including "posters, window display fliers, clippings, cards, drawings, list[s] of children's book films, and other material. The special feature this year is the Thomas Bailey Aldrich

⁴⁵ "Good Books to the Fore," *Scouting* VIII, no. 15 (October 14, 1920): 12.

⁴⁶ *The Wilson Bulletin* 1, no. 21 (September, 1920): 521.

⁴⁷ Annabel Porter, "Continuing the Results of Children's Book Week," *The Publishers' Weekly* XCVII, no. 7 (February 14, 1920): 493.

⁴⁸ *Eleventh Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, New York?, March 7, 1921, 65. (incomplete bibliographic information printed on document)

bookcase.”⁴⁹ Cinemas showed movie versions of children’s stories. Mathiews reported a stepped up effort to address families: “Hundreds of meetings were held, when addresses by competent persons gave helpful advice to parents regarding the better and best books to buy for their children.”⁵⁰ Children’s Book week had “become an annual institution among booksellers, librarians, boy scouts, women’s clubs and in many schools and churches, all working together in the interest of children’s reading and more books in the home.” Major institutions participating in the event included the BSA, the ABA, the ALA, and the General Federation of Women’s Clubs.⁵¹ The 1921 committee again had Melcher as Chair, Mathiews as vice-Chair, and Miss Marion Humble as Executive Secretary.

In 1967, in recognition of Mathiews’s work in the juvenile book field, especially his book week accomplishments, *Boys’ Life* and G.P. Putnam’s Sons established the Annual Franklin K. Mathiews Award for juvenile literature, offering \$10,000, serialization in *Boys’ Life*, and hardcover publication by Putnam’s to the winning manuscript. Non-winning submissions might also gain consideration for publishing or serialization. Significantly, promotional literature did not emphasize Mathiews’s work with publishers. According to a press release, Mathiews initiated “‘Children’s Book Week’ in 1915 . . . [i]n cooperation with the American Library Association and Parent-Teachers Association . . . ‘to call the attention of parents and others to the importance of

⁴⁹ *The Wilson Bulletin* 1, no. 24 (November, 1921): 609.

⁵⁰ *Twelfth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 67th Cong., 2nd. sess., Doc. 296, May 1, 1922, 74.

⁵¹ *The Wilson Bulletin* 1, no. 24 (November, 1921): 609.

worthwhile reading for young people.”⁵² Deliberately or not, the BSA chose to emphasize the non-commercial side of book week, despite its overwhelmingly commercial origins and development. It should be noted that Mathiews’s book week efforts were commercial in means and not necessarily in ends. Although the BSA did have some juvenile book publishing efforts of its own from which it derived some profit, Mathiews’s commercialism was mainly a tool with which the good book crowd could more effectively *market* its juvenile reading selections.

Children’s Book Week revealed several characteristics of Progressive Era civic reform activity. Surveys and other studies scientifically established a need for a good book effort. A host of middle-class institutions joined together to inculcate a shared vision of American culture into the nation’s youth. The effort was highly professional through bureaucratic organization and the participation of professionals such as teachers, librarians, and scouts. Children’s Book Week aimed at a mass, national audience and employed mass-communication media including print and cinema. Further, Children’s Book Week was more intent on selling than with educating. Modern advertising techniques helped spread the book week message and booksellers emerged as the dominant force behind the book week efforts. Perhaps most impressively, the BSA, through the work of Chief Scout Librarian Franklin K. Mathiews, proved effective in joining multiple public and private institutions into common cause, thus expanding the range of its influence and proving itself a competent and leading player in civic affairs.

⁵² William K. Powers, “The Franklin K. Mathiews Award,” (Boy Scouts of America and G. P. Putnam’s sons, joint press release, November 1, 1967, photocopy).

It is difficult to ascertain the effectiveness of Children's Book Week. It succeeded in energizing the good book community and in increasing book sales. Nevertheless, a Grosset & Dunlap Publishers' Children's Book Week advertisement in the September 27, 1919 *Publishers' Weekly* featured not only BSA approved Boy Scout novels and a book by Ernest Thompson Seton, but also "The Marjorie Series," "The Outdoor Girls Series," "The Bobbsey Twins Books," and "The Bunny Brown Series," all of them Stratemeyer products.⁵³ Grossett & Dunlap not only participated enthusiastically in Children's Book Week but also enjoyed simultaneous publishing contracts with the BSA and the Stratemeyer Syndicate. Yet, in its promotion for the BSA's most important good book effort, the publisher showed little regard for the critical judgement which it was supposed to exert in order to promote good books.

Grosset & Dunlap's disregard for the principles upon which Children's Book Week were founded, namely that cheap series books like "The Outdoor Girls" or "The Bobbsey Twins" were unhealthy for children, demonstrates a hypocritical business attitude. Grosset & Dunlap's cashing in on Children's Book Week must have been obvious to Mathiews. It is not known if Mathiews protested. It is obvious that he went along with the publisher's advertising. What the advertisement shows is that, however much Children's Book Week was about good reading for Franklin Mathiews, for some publishers it was primarily a time for increased sales of any books. In the end the BSA's commercial methods allowed its values to be undermined, because it placed so much faith in the marketplace as the ideal transmitter of ideas. The marketplace is always about profit. Profit outweighed the BSA's values in many publishers' estimations.

⁵³ *The Publishers' Weekly* XCVI, no. 13 (September 27, 1919): 831.

Chapter Four

AMERICANISM

The BSA was a Progressive Era organization with expressed high moral values at its core. The BSA's reform work lay in character building leading to middle-class citizenship. Professional national and local BSA scout executives utilized up-to-date scientific methods in their work and created a sophisticated bureaucratic structure. As the BSA's goal was to create a national community of boys, the organization was mass-oriented, intent on communicating to a nationwide audience. In pursuit of this mass-communication goal, the BSA adopted modern commercial sales techniques and was an enthusiastic advocate of modern advertising. As an advertiser, the BSA hoped to spread the message that it could teach boys to be patriotic, capable citizens. The BSA's definition of a patriotic, capable citizen became the informational and philosophical content of the BSA's advertising message. It was fairly easy for the BSA to teach scouts the rituals and requirements of citizenship. The 1911 *Handbook's* "Patriotism and Citizenship" chapter was thirty-three pages long and contained both American history and elementary civics.¹ The philosophy of citizenship, the qualitative side of living appropriately within the United States, was perhaps more difficult to transmit than the rituals and facts. In any case, it was harder to ascertain if a scout had a selfless love for America than it was to determine if he could fold the flag properly. The BSA did have philosophical information about citizenship to transmit, however, which it communicated with relative degrees of subtlety. Examining some of the BSA's advertising messages

¹ *The Official Handbook for Boys* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1911), 323-56.

intended to shape boys' way of thinking about the United States offers insight into the organization's philosophical message.

Political Mythology

The BSA mandated that its image "must at all times be held . . . inviolate from commercial, racial, religious, political, militaristic, partisan or other factional partiality." By the same token, scouts could perform "disinterested" duties at partisan events.² In 1921, a scoutmaster wondered if it would be permissible for his troop to march "in a parade in recognition of the Irish Republic." The scoutmaster's local executive reminded him that the BSA was non-partisan and that if the scouts marched "we would leave in the minds of many the impression that we were giving official recognition to the activities."³ Embracing non-partisanship did not preclude the BSA from taking political positions. The organization expressed its opinions on many national topics through its advertising messages to the scouts. A good place to look for the BSA's citizenship philosophy is in its political mythology, a summary of which is found in the May, 1917 *Boys' Life's* front page article "Our Country Is At War." Referring to the opportunity for service to America during wartime, the author, refreshing the scouts on their national heritage, sketched a history of the United States that provided a succinct example of the BSA's message to its scouts:

There was the Revolutionary War, after which a Republic was established here which since has come to be an ideal for oppressed men the world over. There was the Civil War, and millions who had been slaves were made free. We sent our men to Cuba, to fight and to die that a people cruelly treated by a foreign master might be independent. We took upon us the danger and the responsibility of driving an oppressor from the Philippines, in the far Pacific,

² *Scouting* IV, no. 7 (August 1, 1916): 6.

³ *Scouting* IX, no. 8 (August, 1921): 3.

and remain there only to help the little brown men learn (what their old rules would not let them learn) to govern themselves as free men.

Our armed forces, with those of other nations, punished offenders in China and exacted from them a penalty of millions of dollars for their crimes, and then our Government returned all that money to China to be used to pay for the education of Chinese boys in American schools and colleges.

That is why “your flag and my flag” is a symbol loved throughout the world.⁴

The reference to “brown men” in the Philippines directly relates to ascriptive citizenship laws in the United States during the Progressive Era, which were underpinned by the belief that, as Rogers Smith writes, “racial destiny . . . seemed the most scientific and politically necessary tradition of all.”⁵ It must be said that the BSA followed an official policy of being open to all races and advocated nothing but the most cordial relationships among people around the globe. Even so, the BSA clearly adhered to the racism common to the time. The BSA political mythology was also nationalistic and unreflective in its thoughts on American imperialism, neglecting to note, for example, that Cubans did much of the fighting and dying in that conflict and refraining from explaining that the United States suppressed the Filipino movement for independence. The editor tried to draw the reader into the myth, saying: “We are writing a *new* page of history, and in it *you* will have a part. We shall have new heroes. You can be one.”⁶

⁴ *Boys' Life* VII, no. 1 (May, 1917): 1.

⁵ Rogers M. Smith, *Civic ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 424. Following is an adaptation of Smith's outline of America's four-tier Citizenship hierarchy during the Progressive Era:

1. “excluded status . . . owing to . . . ethnic or ideological traits” (Filipinos);
2. “colonial subjectship . . . for territorial inhabitants . . . racially ineligible for citizenship” (Guam);
3. “second-class citizenship . . . required by improvident grants of formal citizenship to races not capable of exercising it, and as the proper status for women” (blacks, Indians, Puerto Ricans, women); and
4. “full citizenship, including voting rights” (Hawaiians)

⁶ *Boys' Life*, VII, no. 1 (May, 1917): 1.

This summation of American history obviously lacked substance and patently glossed over and fabricated its message. It certainly was not a unique outlook, as many contemporary Americans believed in America's destiny to lead the world into democratic peace and prosperity. This very idea of America's holding the truth of the world in the form of its democratic corporate capitalist system was one of Woodrow Wilson's central political beliefs.⁷ The BSA was right in line with its times and with the federal administration. The BSA wanted American boys to believe the story because the organization desired to build a national community of obedient, uncritical, patriotic citizens who had faith in America's rightness. The BSA adhered to the position of whatever administration inhabited Washington. Beginning with William Howard Taft, the sitting American president held the office of BSA Honorary President. With such a titular sponsor, the BSA did not advocate independent critical thought when it came to America's government.

The BSA's did not communicate its political mythology solely through this *Boys' Life* summation. The 1911 *Handbook* contained a substantial chapter on American history and civics that went into much more detail.⁸ The *Handbook's* history and civics information is not so easily criticized as is the *Boys' Life* political mythology. Much of the chapter is factual and fair, albeit patriotic. The *Handbook* chapter's intent is basically the same as the *Boys' Life* summation, but it is not so jingoistic. A major avenue for passing on the nation's political mythology came through the BSA's Americanization activities. Americanism (or "nationalism" as it was often termed) was an ideology

⁷ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), 15.

⁸ 1911 *Handbook*, 323-56.

intended to weld Americans into patriotic unity. Nationally, Americanization particularly expressed itself when white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants expressed concern for assimilating immigrants and their children and in public school educational curricula. "The spirit of nationalism . . . celebrated the rise of the American nation-state every step of the way from the War of Independence through the triumph of the Union to the burst of imperialism in the 1890s."⁹ The BSA was proudly nationalistic and claimed Americanization as one of its highest priorities. The BSA Associate Member certificate, for instance, described the BSA's program as "character building, citizenship training, and Americanization."¹⁰ One major scout Americanization activity was to "distribute letters and cards [with information about educational opportunities, aids to citizenship, and patriotic adjurations] among aliens in the interest of . . . [governmental] educational work." In addition, scout troops comprising hundreds of boys in New York's East Side "were the greatest single agency in operation rightly to interpret the war to their foreign-born neighbors."¹¹ *Boys' Life* was proud to report on a 1920 Bureau of Naturalization study which devoted "nearly three pages to the work of the" BSA. It praised Boy Scouts' Americanization work:

They have approached the stranger not with the sense of prejudice inspired by their strangeness of tongue and with the too ready appellation of "wop," "guinea," "kike" and the like. . . . [T]hey have met these coming Americans as guests, who, though strange, are nevertheless entitled to the courtesies usual to guests.¹²

⁹ Dawley, 114.

¹⁰ *Boys' Life* IX, no. 5 (May, 1919): 29.

¹¹ *Tenth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., House Doc. 708, April 1, 1920, 29.

¹² *Boys' Life* XI, no. 4 (April, 1921): 26.

The report used the adjective “strange” twice, illustrating the government’s condescension toward foreign customs. Immigrant customs were quaint but had to be subdued through Americanization as quickly as possible. The report also described immigrants as “guests.” Thinking of someone as a guest meant that one expected the individual to leave some time, that he or she was not permanent. Obviously, the Bureau of Naturalization knew that most immigrants were here to stay, so the use of guest was probably more of a courtesy than it was a slight. However, Americanizers felt that it was the immigrants’ responsibility to get on with the task of becoming Americans and living up to the welcome they were receiving.

An idea of the BSA’s views on Americanization can be found in an article featured in the June 19, 1919 issue of *Scouting*:

AMERICANIZATION is agreeable to almost everyone . . . Americanization is the interpretation of American ideals, traditions, standards and institutions to foreign peoples. . . . [T]he second generation (the boy in our troop) is not only more responsive, but often the best avenue of Americanizing influence designed to reach his elders.¹³

The article listed how membership in a scout troop forwarded the Americanization process by encouraging “[a] common language,” instilling a “desire for cooperation,” helping to form “[r]esistance to antagonistic propaganda” by expunging “misunderstanding, unrest, and disloyalty,” doing away with “colonies and immigrant sections, which keep America apart,” and by maintaining “American standards of living, including foods, their preparation, and the care of the children.”¹⁴ The article contained practical suggestions as to how a troop could make an immigrant boy feel welcome.

¹³ *Scouting* VII, no. 23 (June 19, 1919): 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Incorporating immigrant youth into a scout troop thus discouraged native languages, helped shift loyalties from the home to the institutional group, prevented freedom of speech by discouraging study of optional political thought, and homogenized cultural variation through the adoption of traditional “American” ways of living. This passage expresses no interest in or respect for immigrant culture, and it does not offer suggestions toward enabling immigrants to earn a decent wage, which in itself might have gone a long way toward assimilating these seekers of the American Dream.

In looking for ways to instill Americanism into America’s boys, the BSA and others studied how this had been done in other countries. Because of the need to Americanize a national community of boys, it was necessary to create a centralized, bureaucratic institution. Ironically, the BSA admired the German system of organizing youth for patriotic ends, even though Americans excoriated Germany for its disciplined people blindly following the dictates of a militaristic government. An article in the August 1, 1917 *Scouting* praised German boys who “are trained to fight for their country through production . . . with a thoroughness not yet dreamed of in America.”¹⁵ National political leaders also recognized the effectiveness of the German system of youth training, and some even saw the BSA as a vehicle by which American youth could compete with their German counterparts in single-minded nationalism. For example, Charles Nagel, former Secretary of Commerce and Labor under Taft, felt that

the Boy Scout movement is the most intensely American manifestation in our country. . . . [A]s high praise may probably be given to the same movement in both England and Germany. . . . In Germany the Boy Scouts probably received

¹⁵ “A Fair Fight,” *Scouting* V, no. 7 (August 1, 1917): 1.

less notice because their activity was only another expression of the common attitude of the individual to the State.¹⁶

As an Americanizing agency, the BSA taught boys a simplistic and sometimes biased American history and the specifics of citizenship responsibilities. The BSA, along with others in America, looked with some admiration at the ability of Germany to organize its populace into an obedient mass. To the BSA's way of thinking, the way to preserve traditional American values was to make a story about them and require all Americans to believe that one story. The very idea contradicted essential American traditions, including perhaps the most important, freedom of speech.

Pacifism and War

Along with the BSA's Americanism came a commitment to peace, a message advertised strongly through the organization's early years. "War brings a relaxation of moral fiber," the organization said as late as 1918, and "offer[ed] the essential antidote for . . . [the] poisons of war."¹⁷ The 1911 *Handbook* claimed that peace "has been . . . and always must be, our programme (*sic*) --the chart and compass of all our ways."¹⁸ The annual report for 1913 contained a "Non-Military" section that explained the BSA's official position on its relationship with the military:

[T]he Scout Movement is not military in thought, form or spirit, although it does instill in boys the military virtues such as honor, loyalty, obedience and patriotism. The uniform, the patrol, the troop, and the drill are not for military tactics; they are for the unity, the harmony and the rhythm of spirit that boys learn in Scouting. It is in the wearing of the uniform and doing of things together

¹⁶ "Former Cabinet Member Sees Social Cooperation in Scouting," *Scouting* IV, no. 14 (November 15, 1916): 5.

¹⁷ *Eighth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America*, 65th Cong., 2nd sess., March 25, 1918, House Doc. 1012, 5-6.

¹⁸ 1911 *Handbook*, 339.

as Scouts that they absorb the force and truth of the Scout law which states: "A Scout is a friend of all, and a brother to every other Scout."¹⁹

Another view of the BSA's idea of peace is represented in the "Scoutcraft" chapter in the 1911 *Handbook* which described "peace scouts." Peace scouts were those such as Daniel Boone, Lewis and Clark, or Kit Carson who used their scouting skills in non-war situations.²⁰ This is not to say that Boone, Lewis and Clark, and Carson did not contribute to violence in the areas they explored or that they did not participate in violence themselves in the pursuit of their goals. But they were not at the time of their best exploits involved in war making. These peace scouts used their skills to help develop America, as the BSA hoped its boy scouts would do. The BSA viewed war as an impediment to the American dream, and so it wished to avoid promoting military training, however much its skills might transfer later on in a boy's life to a military activity.

Up to the beginning of World War I the BSA maintained its peace principles. In this philosophy it was not alone. Other progressive groups also embraced pacifism, for instance the American Union Against Militarism, the Women's Peace Party, the American Socialist party, and many labor unions:²¹

[A]s the issue of the European war worked its way into the American body politic, the great majority of advanced progressives and socialists were Cassandras who warned that war would be the undoing for all the causes they held dear . . . [T]heir call for peace and justice commanded the moral and political high ground.²²

¹⁹ "Fourth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America," *Scouting* 1, no. 23 (New York: Boy Scouts of America, April 15, 1914): 5.

²⁰ 1911 *Handbook*, 4.

²¹ Dawley, 174.

²² *Ibid.*, 175.

Once World War I began and the United States began its journey through neutrality to belligerency from 1914 to 1917, these progressives found their peace positions less and less tenable, although there was much anti-war sentiment in the United States during this period. "There is no doubt that a majority of the population opposed U. S. entry into the war at least through the November 1916 elections."²³

When war broke out in 1914, the BSA made what may have been a noble and sincere effort at countering militarism in its "strongly antiwar" November, 1914 *Boys' Life*, which featured several articles about the war, including T. M. Bray's poem "When Some Fellow's Daddy Kills Some Fellow's Dad." Other articles were: "A Challenge! Do You Want to Fight?" by David Starr Jordan; "What War Is--Just One Battle" by Cyrus Townsend Brady; and "What I Saw Scouts Doing in Europe" by Alfred H. Loeb. Further, there was a piece of fiction by Irving Crump called "In the Line of Fire" about "[a] Belgian boy's experiences between two opposing armies."²⁴ Theodore Roosevelt and General Leonard Wood seriously criticized the BSA's "first impulse . . . of horror" at the war.²⁵

The following month in *Boys' Life*, the only mention of the war was Frank L. Coes's monthly stamp collecting feature, entitled "Tramp, Tramp--Stamp, Stamp." The table of contents described the article: "While soldiers march and slay, new issues of stamps and overprints tell absorbing stories."²⁶ After its initial war protest in the November, 1914 *Boys' Life*, there was never again anything unique about the BSA's war

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Boys' Life* IV, no. 9 (November, 1914)

²⁵ Macleod, 179.

²⁶ *Boys' Life* IV, no. 10 (December, 1914): 20.

opinion, and the organization followed the Wilson administration's policies with unquestioning loyalty and an equal amount of vigor well before there was certainty of American military involvement. There was a long period of social debate before America got into the war itself. "With every new diplomatic crisis, social reformers turned more of their attention to the issue of peace."²⁷ The BSA, however, had already abandoned its peace position in 1914 and, for the next two years, embraced interventionist rhetoric. The July, 1916 *Boys' Life* carried a patriotic article that ended: "IF NEED BE, I WILL DIE FOR MY COUNTRY."²⁸ The irony was that at the time the war was not about America, and American soil was never threatened. The biggest danger to Americans was traveling in ships that traded on a neutral status to violate Germany's claims as a belligerent to control the sea-lanes supplying its enemies. Most progressives eventually supported America's war aims, although they hoped that Wilson would make the war a positive experience for the United States. Leading progressives reasoned that "[t]he war presented an opportunity pregnant with 'social possibilities.'"²⁹ The BSA advocated this view itself and felt that one of the war's social possibilities was that it would usher in "the boy age" because a significant proportion of the country's men would be removed from "their places in society, leaving a great gap between youth and age." As a result, boys would move into this space earlier than they normally would and contribute significantly to molding an immediate future, "the most wonderful period of the world's history for boys."³⁰

²⁷ Dawley, 174.

²⁸ Dr. Frank Crane, "My Country," *Boys' Life* VI, no. 4 (July, 1916): 10.

²⁹ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1980), 50.

³⁰ "The Boy Age," *Boys' Life* VIII, no. 1 (January, 1918): 1.

The BSA did not seem to anguish over altering its peace position to one of total support for the government's military policies. While the organization supported the Wilson administration, it also wooed Theodore Roosevelt, an interventionist who had criticized the agency's 1914 *Boys' Life* peace issue. On Preparedness Day in May, 1916 two scout troops put on a drill exhibition at Roosevelt's Oyster Bay home. In keeping with the BSA's (and perhaps Roosevelt's) desire for maximum publicity, movie cameras were rolling, still photographers were present, and the print media described all the action. "They are real American citizens. I'm proud of every one of them," Roosevelt said.³¹

In 1917 James West summarized the BSA's war policies, emphasizing that local scout troops must be kept alive during the crisis. The war was "for democracy," West said. The United States was united as a nation in support for the war. Scouts and scouters must help America. West faced the issue of war dissent squarely: "There must be no slackers, or pet theorists. All that we do must be for the support of our country."³² West did not seem thoughtful about the war. He said that the war had no complex reasons and that America's involvement was a moral good. World War I, however, arose out of complex political and economic issues. America's involvement could not be reduced to only moral reasons given how the U. S. economy benefited from supplying the belligerents with food, supplies, armaments, and capital. America's entry into the war had as much to do with Wilson wanting to make the world safe for the spread of American corporate capitalism as it did with saving the civilian victims of the

³¹ "Roosevelt Calls Boy Scout Exhibition 'Fine!-Inspiring!'," *Scouting* IV, no. 2 (May 15, 1916): 1.

³² James West, "Scouts and the War," *Scouting* V, no. 1 (May 1, 1917): 2.

war. West falsely implied that no Americans dissented against the war. West had to have known there was war protest if he had any awareness of contemporary events. West did not intend to imbue the scout community with the idea that personal morality and individual critical thinking were relevant to being a good American citizen. The good American citizen, in West's vision, was someone who followed the prevailing administration's policies without scrutiny.

Not all members of the BSA national headquarters staff agreed with West's pro-war stance. The September, 15, 1917 *Scouting* ran a short piece entitled "Slacker or Patriot?" The article took a stern look at BSA national and executive members, describing some (not by name) who seemed to avoid sufficient involvement in the war effort. The BSA considered slackers not only those who tried to avoid military service but also those who, if not in the military, avoided home front activities. The BSA felt that public scorn was not sufficient consequence for such slackers and they were "blacklisted at Headquarters pending further development of their attitude."³³

The BSA became as aggressively patriotic as the most red-blooded American. The organization advised Americans to overcome anti-German prejudice, reminding the scouting community in particular that many Germans had made America their home and that if they showed "by their character and loyalty" that they are "respectable" then they ought not to be mistrusted or stereotyped.³⁴ However, the organization did not stay aloof from popular German-bashing. In a 1918 *Scouting* article, "Shall We Have Hun Scoutmasters?" the editors speculated that during the pre-war years, Germans attempted

³³ *Scouting* V, no. 10 (September 15, 1917): 6.

³⁴ "Our Country is at War," *Boys' Life* (May, 1917): 56.

to become scoutmasters for seditious reasons. The German knew that “[n]o man exercises a greater influence over an American boy than his scoutmaster.”³⁵ This statement indicates the BSA’s high estimation of itself as the appropriate parenting supplement.

To help scouts and scouters identify Germans or German sympathizers in their midst, the article listed revealing signs, including:

1. Is any troop sluggish in selling Liberty Bonds and War Savings Stamps?
2. Who is teaching the boys?
3. *What* is he teaching?
4. Who endorsed his application?
5. Did the applicant tell the truth?

In language anticipating *Animal Farm*, the article gives a sort of wartime creed for scouts and scouters: “The Boy Scouts of America are Americans. They obey the orders of our Government. . . . If there is a Hun in our ranks, give him the boot. Send his name and address to National Headquarters with evidence of his disloyalty The safest course is not to permit German leadership in the work of the Boy Scouts of America.”³⁶

Despite its unabashed support for Wilson’s war activities and its bellicose rhetoric, the BSA remained firmly against militarizing itself. Once the country started developing war fever, some people suggested that boys and girls receive pre-military training. It seemed to proponents of this idea that the public school system could most handily undertake the training. Largely against this idea, the education community offered a compromise that it felt did not interfere with the educational process. The Philadelphia School Board, for example, voted against providing military training in its

³⁵ *Scouting* VI, no. 15 (August 1, 1918): 8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

school system, but agreed to lengthen its physical education time.³⁷

To some, the BSA was a logical choice to provide pre-military training, even though the organization might not be currently set up to provide such instruction.

“[T]he State or the Nation . . . [should] supplement the . . . training of the boy scouts with military drill for a few weeks in summer camps.” General Leonard Wood conducted one such camp, attended mainly by private school students.³⁸

The BSA did have a role to play in military preparedness by emphasizing general physical education. In 1916 West noted that schools now stress “[s]pecialized athletics . . . baseball, football, track and field events” over general physical education. West said that those students who were not on the specialized teams were relegated to the role of audience. Quoting statistics about the large numbers of military recruits who were rejected for physical problems, West agreed with other educators that schools should increase their general physical education efforts. West proposed that the BSA could “supplement” the schools’ general physical education program, a task the organization was eminently suited to do because it was already skilled at general physical fitness as opposed to specialized sports education.³⁹ West’s view of the difference between military training and the BSA program was that military training was “merely military tactics and maneuvers, ” the war-like practice that makes soldiers. This the BSA had never utilized and had no intention of ever doing. The BSA did teach:

discipline, obedience, loyalty, courtesy, endurance, resourcefulness, initiative, alertness, moral courage, good health, knowledge of how to care for oneself . . .

³⁷ *Scouting* IV, no. 2 (May 15, 1916): 6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ James West, “Military Training and the Boy Scouts of America,” *Scouting* IV, no. 9 (July 15, 1916): 1.

as part of citizenship training . . . to properly prepare . . . for later responsibilities as home makers, wage earners and citizens.⁴⁰

While West and others acknowledged that scout training was valuable preparation for future soldiers, the BSA did not intend to directly train soldiers.

People outside the BSA, however, never completely gave up on attaching a military potential to the scouts. Charles Nagel, Secretary of Commerce and Labor under Taft, for instance, allowed that the BSA was “primarily not military” but added the caveat that “[S]ervice must be rendered when and where the country calls.”⁴¹ The BSA never conceded this issue and vigorously defended its position. The national office warned in November, 1918 against the possibility that scouters returning from the war might be inclined to impress a military stamp upon their troops.⁴² The BSA officially hoped that returning veterans would go into scouting and encouraged them to do so but insisted on steering them clear of militarism.⁴³

Despite the BSA’s support of America’s war effort, and in keeping with the BSA’s non-military identity and its non-partisanship, West did not want Boy Scouts to publicly convey war enthusiasm. The BSA encouraged scouts, as always, to give non-partisan service during appropriate community events. West’s position on scout participation in “Preparedness Parades,” for instance, was that he wanted the scouts present but not as paraders, “not merely ornamental.” Scouts could aid with crowd

⁴⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁴¹ Charles Nagel, “Former Cabinet Member Sees Social Cooperation in Scouting,” *Scouting* IV, no. 14 (November 15, 1916): 5.

⁴² “Scout Leader Warns Against Militarism,” *Scouting* VI, no. 29 (November 28, 1918): 7.

⁴³ James West, “Registrations, Leadership and Militarism,” *Scouting* VI, no. 30 (December 5, 1918): 5.

control, distribute leaflets, deliver messages, and assist with first aid “in an inconspicuous manner.”⁴⁴

One periodically finds somber BSA statements about the war, reflective of the BSA’s original peace stance and indicating that there were “taints” of that sentiment still alive. For instance, the organization never stopped speaking deplorably of war, even as it continued with its war effort and flag-waving. In August, 1917 *Scouting* ran a chart called “Special Values of the Boy Scout Program in Time of War,” by Norman E. Richardson of Boston University. The chart showed how the BSA provided a solution for each of several social ills caused by war. For instance, as war “[d]ecreases parental supervision of boys,” scouting “[e]nriches the boys’ social inheritance,” or as war “[a]wakens brutal and vicious impulses,” scouting “[t]eaches chivalry, courtesy, and kindness.”⁴⁵ BSA President Colin Livingstone’s Christmas message in the December, 1917 *Boys’ Life* also contained evidence of the BSA’s ambiguity about war:

Picture to yourselves . . . the destroyed and shattered firesides--the fatherless, homeless, boys and girls of bleeding Europe--the sick, the wounded, the helpless and the aged--the soldier brothers and fathers in shell torn camps and trenches--once all as happy and fortunate as you--now the actors in the most ghastly tragedy of all time!⁴⁶

When it became clear in 1917 that America would be involved militarily in World War I, the BSA was quick to promote its organization’s potential for help in the bellicose times. Among the list of services a scout might be able to perform, in addition to flying the flag at home, were first aid, helping out at the hospital, sending semaphore

⁴⁴ “An Expression of Policy Concerning Participation in ‘Preparedness Parades,’” *Scouting* IV, no. 3 (June 1, 1916): 13.

⁴⁵ *Scouting* V, no. 7 (August 1, 1917): 7.

⁴⁶ “Our War Christmas,” *Boys’ Life* VII, no. 10 (December, 1917): 1.

or wireless messages, helping law enforcement and disaster crews, carrying messages and providing for “the temporarily homeless.”⁴⁷

Finally, on April 17, 1917, the United States declared war. *Scouting* headed its April 15, 1917 issue “The Boy Scout’s Place In a Nation at War.” The article consisted of a rehash of all the previous advice to scouts and scouters as to how they could help.⁴⁸ Immediately the BSA launched a food production drive: “Every Scout to Feed a Soldier.”⁴⁹ The Liberty Bond Campaigns developed into even bigger scout war efforts. Toward the end of 1917 Woodrow Wilson asked the BSA to organize its scouts to be “dispatch bearers in carrying to the homes in their communities the pamphlets on the war prepared by the Committee on Public Information.”⁵⁰ The BSA’s cooperation with the CPI tied the organization into the U. S. government’s propaganda campaign.

The war affected the leadership ranks of the BSA. National Guard mobilization took its toll on scoutmasters.⁵¹ Once Congress declared war, the BSA advised scoutmasters who might be called to military service on how to “[p]rotect the troop” by helping the local council make a smooth transition.⁵² Scouters were told to be alert for potential replacement scoutmasters, especially those who failed to muster up to army standards.⁵³ The BSA did not suffer from War Taxation, as it was exempt through the category for “corporations or associations . . . for religious, charitable, scientific or

⁴⁷ “If War Should Come,” *Boys’ Life* VI, no. 11 (March 1917): 37.

⁴⁸ *Scouting* IV, no. 23 (April, 1915): 1.

⁴⁹ *Scouting* IV, no. 24 (April 25, 1917): 1.

⁵⁰ “Every Scout to Boost America,” *Scouting* V, no. 16 (December 15, 1917): 1.

⁵¹ “Effect of Mobilization on Boy Scout Movement,” *Scouting* IV, no. 9 (July 15, 1916): 16.

⁵² “The Boy Scout’s Place in a Nation at War,” *Scouting* IV, no. 23 (April 15, 1917): 1.

⁵³ James West, “Scouts and the War,” *Scouting* V, no. 1 (May 1, 1917): 2.

educational purposes.” The government classified the BSA as an “educational” organization.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ “No War Tax Levied on Scouting Funds,” *Scouting* VI, no. 7 (April 1, 1918): 11,

Conclusion

THE BSA AS A CORPORATE ORGANIZATION

This paper has examined the BSA as a commercial Progressive Era character building agency designed to counter the ill effects of urbanization, which itself was a symptom of the corporate capitalist restructuring of America's economy and culture. The BSA's program was one of many Progressive Era reform efforts that sought to allay some of the discontent brought on by corporate capitalism. The BSA was a modern civic reform organization, middle-class and professional. The agency utilized scientific management and aimed its message at a mass audience with the intention of creating a national community of boys. The BSA was officially non-partisan yet embraced conservative politics. In this vein, the BSA favored Americanization and communicated a propagandistic political mythology to its scouts and scouters. Conceived with a pacifist orientation, the BSA, after a brief expression of anti-war protest, quickly switched to a position of support for the Wilson Administration. As a way to take its middle-class message into the working-class, the BSA developed an ambiguous relationship with the A.F. L. wherein the labor organization sometimes spoke highly of the BSA but never gave up its official position that labor should be wary of the BSA for its potential to promote militarism and work against strikes. The BSA was effective at its work, forging a large and complex national organization and demonstrating its skill at uniting public and private institutions into coalitions working for a common cause, as was demonstrated by Children's Book Week.

The BSA was in large measure one part of a larger national corporate advertising campaign designed to adjust and train Americans to live in the new, corporate-capitalist,

twentieth-century, urbanized United States. BSA leaders admired corporations and their ways of doing business. In the June 15, 1916 *Scouting* Milton A. McCrae, BSA Vice President, McCrae pointed out that America “has proven through several dissimilar institutions the wonderful and effective power of organization.” He named Standard Oil as a corporate paradigm “primarily . . . because of its scientific organization” but neglected to mention Standard Oil’s predatory way of doing business. McCrae declared “Tammany, the most powerful political organization we have . . . because of its splendid organization,” ignoring this political machine’s corruption. By 1916 progressive reformers had publicly exposed both Standard Oil and Tammany as vicious and venal. Despite the BSA’s high profile role as an agency of morality, a leading BSA executive seemed to eliminate morality from his definition of organizational efficiency. McCrae redeemed himself somewhat when he also cited the YMCA and the Roman Catholic Church as two other good examples of organizational structure.¹ The BSA was willing to ignore questionable business practices in its support for American business institutions. In its use of commercial techniques for managing the organization, the BSA ended up selling a character building product that had commerce as its essential moral value.

¹ “Power of Organization,” *Scouting* IV, no. 4 (June 15, 1916): 4.

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