



TIKVAH
ONLINE
ACADEMY

The Boy Scouts: A Cradle of American Citizenship

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Sunday, Aug. 22 at 7:00 PM EDT

Course Description:

In a Supreme Court decision in 2000, Chief Justice William Rehnquist affirmed the Boy Scouts' right to "expressive association": the organization could choose its staff to advance its particular mission. The decision rested on the idea that the Boy Scouts play an important role in advancing a message about what it means for young people to be budding citizens. In this seminar, we will explore President Calvin Coolidge's understanding of that message as expressed in his speech "What it Means to be a Boy Scout," three-quarters of a century before Chief Justice Rehnquist reiterated its importance. We will discuss the role of civil society associations in shaping, through teaching and practice, citizens of a free society. Students will consider how obligations and rights combine to make a flourishing nation, how we discern those obligations and their centrality in citizens' lives.

Guiding Questions:

1. Why does President Coolidge consider nature the "great restorer"? What is there in nature that young people cannot find in cities? (Note the biblical allusion in "there is strength in the hills, if only we will lift up our eyes.")
2. What does a "reverence for law" have to do with being a leader?
3. President Coolidge says, "It is hard to see how a great man can be an atheist." Do you agree? What do you think he means by "great" in this context?
4. What do you think President Coolidge is referring to when he mentions "our American institutions"? What do the teachings of the Boy Scouts have to do with them?

“What it Means to Be a Boy Scout”

Calvin Coolidge

25 July 1924

There was no Boy Scout organization in my boyhood, but every boy who has the privilege of growing up on a farm learns instinctively the three fundamentals of scouthood.

The first is a reverence for nature. Boys should never lose their love of the fields and the streams, the mountains and the plains, the open places and the forests. That love will be a priceless possession as your years lengthen out. There is an instructive myth about the giant Antaeus. Whenever in a contest he was thrown down, he drew fresh strength from his mother, the earth, and so was thought invincible. But Hercules lifted him away from the earth and so destroyed him. There is new life in the soil for every man. There is healing in the trees for tired minds and for our overburdened spirits, there is strength in the hills, if only we will lift up our eyes. Remember that nature is your great restorer.

The second is a reverence for law. I remember the town meetings of my boyhood, when the citizens of our little town met to levy taxes on themselves, and to choose from their own number those who should be their officers. There is something in every town meeting, in every election, that approaches very near to the sublime. I am thrilled at the thought of my audience tonight, for I never address boys without thinking, among them may be a boy who will sit in this White House. Somewhere there are boys who will be presidents of our railroads, presidents of colleges, of banks, owners of splendid farms and useful industries, members of Congress, representatives of our people in foreign lands. That is the heritage of the American boy.

It was an act of magnificent courage when our ancestors set up a nation wherein any boy may aspire to anything. That great achievement was not wrought without blood and sacrifice. Make firm your resolution to carry on nobly what has been so nobly begun. Let this nation, under your influence, be a finer nation. Resolve that the sacrifices by which your great opportunities have been purchased will be matched by a sacrifice, on your part, that will give your children even a better chance.

The third is a reverence for God. It is hard to see how a great man can be an atheist. Without the sustaining influence of faith in a divine power we could have little faith in ourselves. We need to feel that behind us is intelligence and love. Doubters do not achieve; skeptics do not contribute; cynics do not create. Faith is the great motive power, and no man realizes his full possibilities unless he has the deep conviction that life is eternally important, and that his work, well done, is a part of an unending plan.

These are not only some of the fundamentals of the teachings of the Boy Scouts, they are the fundamentals of our American institutions. If you will take them with you, if you will be living examples of them abroad, you will make a great contribution toward a better understanding of our country, and receive in return a better understanding of other countries; for you will find in foreign lands, to a very large extent, exactly what you carry there yourselves. I trust that you can show to your foreign associates in the great scout movement that you have a deep reverence for the truth and are determined to live by it; that you wish to protect and cherish your own country and contribute to the well being, right thinking and true living of the whole world.