

ABSTRACT

CHRISTINA M. BLYDE. "Be Prepared": The Endurance of Robert-Baden Powell's Militaristic Ideology in Boy Scout of America Films. (Under the direction of Professor Marsha Gordon Orgeron).

The Boy Scouts of America is a government-recognized organization which has directly influenced the lives of millions of Americans throughout its century-long tenure. Despite the fact that the Boy Scouts of America Museum in Irving, Texas has catalogued almost 700 films and film strips produced by the institution, there is virtually no scholarship available on these films. The conspicuous lack of knowledge about these texts is in part a result of the organization's hesitancy to lend out their materials to scholars, researchers, or writers. In an attempt to implement a new discourse about the Boy Scout of America's filmic history, this paper will offer a close reading of two Boy Scout films. *The Big Picture* (c. 1974) is a documentary produced by the United States Army and is available under public domain while *Meeting near Mafeking* (1982) is one of the BSA's many fictional recruitment films.

Sir Robert Baden-Powell's militaristic ideology, which fueled the creation of the Boy Scout movement, has been thoroughly discussed in the works of scholars such as John Springhall and Michael Rosenthal. This paper contends that these films illustrate the endurance of this ideology as well as the BSA's military practices through their representation of Boy Scouts at war, in preparation for war, and their direct parallel to the United States Army, regardless of the filmmakers' attempts to create distance between the organizations through the use of dialogue and narration. Further evidence to support the institution's self-contradictions with regard to its relationship to the Armed Forces is provided in articles published in two Boy Scout of America publications, *Boys' Life* and *Scouting*.

The recent increase of scholars' engagement with non-theatrical and educational films has provided a significant new element of cultural studies. While this paper directly addresses the greatly under-researched organization of the Boy Scouts of America, this research also contributes to a variety of other discourses, including those concerning masculinity, American identity, and social communities.