



## Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts Show Just How Different Scouting Can Be

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chapters and corporate sponsors of the Boy Scouts have withdrawn monetary support to local chapters. And numerous individual troops where the leadership disagrees with the ruling have written their own nondiscrimination policies, stating the troop's noncompliance with the policy held by the national organization.

In addition, the court ruling has raised questions about the policies of similar organizations, including the Girl Scouts. Contrary to popular opinion, the two organizations are not related in the United States. Scouting USA, which sponsors Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, Tiger Cubs, and Explorer Scouts, is not connected with Girl Scouts of the USA, which is a member of WAGGGS, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts.

Girl Scouting is the largest organization in the world for girls and women, with approximately 3.6 million members in the United States and in troops of American girls overseas. Founded in 1912, the Girl Scouts remains as founder Juliette Gordon Low envisioned it, an organization "for all the girls." As early as 1917, the Girl Scouts emphasized inclusion and diversity, making an effort to include

girls with disabilities in local troops. At the same time, African-American girls were also among those to benefit from Girl Scouting's long-standing tradition of pluralism. By the end of the 1920s, Girl Scouting furthered this tradition by actively establishing troops in areas that would encourage Native American girls to participate. The organization received a Congressional Charter in the 1950s; this charter is an honorary title selectively given to patriotic, charitable, and educational organizations.

Girl Scouting continues to be an organization with a mission to empower girls and women — all girls and women — to be their best and to contribute to the betterment of society. It teaches a positive value system, encouraging its members to be, among other things, honest, fair, respectful, courageous and responsible for their actions. It is built on a foundation of equality, service, education and leadership decades old while maintaining a contemporary outlook on society. The values found in the Girl Scout Promise and Law, on which the Girl Scout program is based, provide an essential framework for developing character, making sound decisions and fostering strength of conviction. This

can perhaps be summarized in two slogans recently unveiled by GSUSA as the organization approaches a new millennium — "Girl Scouting is for *every girl, everywhere*," and "Girl Scouts — Where Girls Grow Strong."

These two organizations, while seemingly similar from the outside, espouse traditions and values that are diametrically opposed at some points. One with an emphasis on inclusion, one with a policy of exclusion; one with a history of being ahead of society with respect to actively encouraging minority participation, one whose archaic stance seems unlikely to change in the near future.

In the shadow of this summer's Supreme Court decision, both organizations have faced interrogation as to the nature of the policies each has in effect. The benefits of each organization to the populations they serve have come under close scrutiny, and parents have been forced to consider carefully the decision to enroll their children in organizations that will undoubtedly shape their value systems. Only time will reveal the long-term impact of the decision on the children of this country, whose best interests they claim to serve.