

**The Bill Blackwood
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Recognition of Police Uniforms

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ABSTRACT

An officer's morale is affected by color, and it also affects how the officer is perceived by the public. It has been found that each officer's attitude about themselves and the agency in which they work for has improved because, in society, the traditional police uniform is in dark in color and it is related to most agencies. The public perception changes with the color and style of different uniforms and the way an officer wears it. The public has also been shown to feel safer with a darker colored uniform than a lighter colored uniform (Schwenke-Martin, S. (2000, July 6).

Since the beginning of law enforcement in United States, most police agencies dressed their officers in a dark to black colored uniform. There are nine agencies within the Harris County law enforcement agencies. This report will illustrate that the most common uniform colors are solid black or dark blue uniform. The solid dark colored uniform is overwhelming used by four of the agencies.

The topic of the citizens' recognizing the police uniform assist with the public and has a psychologically impact it has on both the public and the criminal element (Johnson, 2005). It makes it possible for the officer to conceal himself while walking around the dark streets or hiding next to a building and watching the criminals. When the officer is well dressed in a paramilitary uniform which is pressed and clean give a impression of a professorial officer with good morale, efficient, and the citizens a since of being protected. Most officers and agencies like the darker uniform because of it conceal stains and are easier to acquire (Schwenke-Martin, 2000).

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INTRODUCTION

The history of law enforcement goes back over a 150 years. Cities used to use citizen watchmen, often in plain clothes and identified by a badge, before the formation of a public police force. London formed the first modern police force in 1829. The British military wore white and red. So the London Police Force chose dark blue for their uniform color. In 1853, New York Police Department was the first United States police department to institute a dress code. They also chose blue as their color choice. The initial uniform was a navy blue wool coat with tails, high-collars and shiny buttons and topped off with a cane top hat. Over the years, the United States police uniforms style was modified. The wool coat had the tails removed which left the coat a tunic-style. The cane top hat was replaced with a custodian helmet that consists of a chinstrap and was peaked at the top. The United States police uniform slowly evolved by the 1950's to blue shirt and blue pants. The custodian helmet was replaced by a flat cap with a front visor (Bennett, n.d.).

Over the years, United States police uniforms have traditionally stayed a paramilitary-style uniform in a dark color, usually dark blue or black. One reason police agencies may decide to choose a dark color is for tactical reasons. An officer is better able to conceal their location wearing a darker color, especially at night, should that officer need to stay hidden from the criminals. Another reason may be that it is easier to hide stains with dark colors and that the stains are also easier to clean than lighter colors (Johnson, 2005).

Harris County, Texas has a total of nine different police agencies under its umbrella. There is a sheriff's department and eight different constable's offices spread

out across the county. There is confusion with having too many different uniform colors and styles, which in turn, makes it very difficult for the citizens of Harris County, Texas to easily identify a police officer. This is a safety concern to the public because the identity of the police is very important and not to get confused to a security guard or an impersonator in a crises situation. By the county having to purchase different styles and colored uniforms, it ends up costing the county tax payers more money.

During the years, each time a sheriff or constable is newly elected, they change the uniform to fit what they want the image to look like. Not only do they change uniforms, they also change badges and the color of the patrol vehicles. This is a practice that should not happen because with the budget restrains in today's society with the state, county and local agencies does not need to increases cost in any category. The sheriff's offices usually often wear a two-tone uniform combination of both lighter khaki on top and darker brown on the bottom or the reverse. The shirts are a button-down uniform shirt, either short sleeve or long sleeve and often have shoulder patches reading "SHERIFF" across the top in some manner (Babb, n.d.).

Harris County constable's offices have the following colors in paramilitary style uniforms: tan shirt and dark green pants, black shirt and black pants, green shirt and tan pants and white shirt with brown pants. This report will consist of reviewing various articles, journals and magazines and web sites of each office (Harris County Sheriff's Department, Harris County Constables Precinct One, Harris County Constables Precinct Two, Harris County Constables Precinct Three, Harris County Constables Precinct Four, Harris County Constables Precinct Five, Harris County Constables Precinct Seven and Harris County Constables Precinct Eight (a-h)).

This report will show why the color of the uniform is one of the most important decisions that the chief or elected law enforcement official will make for the citizens of the community. The majority of police uniforms in the United State today are produced in darker colors such as black, blue, brown, green, and grey. Just as with the style of the police uniform, the color of the police uniform has a meaning. Psychological tests have found that people associate color with specific moods. For example, red is generally associated with excitement and stimulation, thus explaining why it is often a color in flashing emergency vehicle lights. These tests have also found that the color blue is associated with feelings of security and comfort, and black is most often associated with power and strength (Johnson, 2005).

Studies of both high school and college students in the United States, have found that students perceived light colors such as white and yellow as weak, but also good and active. The same students perceived dark colors such as black and brown as strong and passive, but also as bad. These results were not based on cultural influences because they did not vary with the race of the student (Johnson, 2005).

The first thing a citizen should see when they call the police, is someone that makes them feel safe. The citizen should be able to identify the officer when he/she arrives on the scene by wearing a paramilitary uniform in a color they can recognize as a police officer who is going to assist them in their need. All police departments should have a standardized uniform for city and county officers. This would help the public know who is a peace officer and who is not.

There is a common problem with most agenices that have special squads within their agenices all having different color schemes. Most agencies have bike units,

motorcycle units, traffic units, water units, school units, special weapon and tactics (SWAT) units, and bomb units. What each unit has done in the past, was specialize the uniform to enhance the special group feeling about working in the elite unit. The general public would have no idea who the officers works for, the only thing anyone knew was that he/she was different from the regular patroln officers. The best way to stop this is to make everyone have the same color and change only what is needed, the type of material its made from and the patches on the shoulders that would state the specialized unit's name. This would also reduce the uniform budget as it would be standarized.

POSITION

Every day, people select clothing to wear that make us feel confident, feel good or define our status or profession. This report will assist in establishing the importance of uniform color, styles, and the impact that uniforms have on an officer's morale. The subject of public recognition of officers by their uniform will also be addressed (Schwenke-Martin, 2000).

Most citizens will modify/change their actions and reactions to situations based on seeing a uniformed police officer. When coming to an intersection, a driver will most likely submit to the uniformed police officer's hand directions. If a criminal sees a uniformed police officer, they will usually refrain from unlawful behavior. Most children are taught at a young age, that police officers are to be trusted and respected and that they are there to help in times of need. In emergency situations, people young and old, seek out a uniformed police officer for help (Johnson, 2005).

Never underestimate the impact a police uniform can make both physically and psychologically on citizens. The police uniform can bring out positive emotions for example respect and pride. On the other hand, police uniforms can bring out negative emotions like anger and fear. It depends on citizen's background and history. Additionally, the police officer's equipment and even the condition of the uniform can make an impact. Prison inmates that murdered police officers admitted that the police officer's appearance had an influence on them. The inmates indicated that if they thought the police officer was "unprofessional" in his actions or appearance, they felt that they had the capability of resisting the police officer successfully. Even a wrinkled or dirty uniform may send a message to the inmate that the police officer may be complacent. The dark colored uniform was thought to be the best uniform for a police officer but during the 1970's, the mood changed in society and studies showed that the citizens wanted less aggression from their police officers (Johnson, 2005).

A police officer should always try to make a good first impression. Visually a police officer's uniform expresses the essence of the police officer. A uniformed police officer that is smartly dressed gives a good impression of alertness, good morale and is an asset to their community (Schwenke-Martin, 2000).

In areas where there are fewer tall building and more trees, the most common colors are green and dark brown and not black and blue. Most citizens psychologically associate dark colors with strength. Most citizens also associate dark colors with aggression and even sometimes evil. After the riots in the 1960's and the police corruption in the 1970's, New York Police Department changed their uniforms from dark blue to a lighter blue that was thought of to be friendlier. After September 2001, when

United States citizens wanted to feel safe from terrorism, the police uniform returned to the dark blue (Bennett, n.a.).

The nine agencies, one elected official sheriff and eight constables, are all under the order of Harris County Commissioners and are found to wear the following uniforms: two wearing black shirt/ black pants, one wearing dark blue shirt /dark blue pants, two wearing light blue shirt/dark blue pants, one wearing dark green shirt/tan pants, one wearing tan shirt/green pants, one tan shirt/dark blue pants and white shirt/brown pants. There is one major problem with having so many different police uniform colors throughout the county because it is almost impossible for the citizens of Harris County, Texas to know who is a police officer. There is also another problem because all the agencies have different style of markings on their patrol vehicles. This would put Harris County on the map in Texas by setting a standard though out the State of Texas by becoming the first County in Texas to standardized all police agencies funded by the County.

A study was conducted to identify citizen's impressions of the most negative and most positive police uniform color combinations by Richard R. Johnson of the University of Cincinnati. Richard R. Johnson conducted the study of approximately 120,000 people in a Midwest community shopping mall. Study participants were shown photos of a police uniforms. The eight by ten color photos had the same background. The only thing different was that the uniforms were different colors (Petrocelli, 2006).

The first uniform consisted of navy blue pants and a light blue shirt which is worn by police agencies in cities like Houston, Philadelphia, Kansas City and Chicago. The second uniform consisted of black pants and a white shirt which is worn by police

agencies in cities like Columbus and Cincinnati. The third uniform consisted of black pants and a black shirt, the United States most common police uniform, which is worn by police agencies in cities like New York, Atlanta, Miami and Indianapolis. The fourth uniform consisted of khaki pants and a khaki shirt which is worn by police agencies in cities like Wichita and Las Vegas (Petrocelli, 2006).

The uniforms were graded by the participants in seven areas of nice/mean, friendly/unfriendly, honest/corrupt, passive/aggressive, warm/cold, gentle/forceful and good/bad by the study participants on a scale of one to five. The first uniform, consisting of navy blue pants and light blue shirt, was perceived the most favorable, as being the least cold, least forceful, least aggressive and least mean in the seven categories. The third uniform, consisting of black pants and black shirt, was perceived the least favorable, as being the coldest, most forceful, most aggressive and most corrupt and the most unfriendly (Petrocelli, 2006).

Citizens want to feel safer after tragic events, like after the 09/11 terrorist attacks for example. United States citizens were fearful of future danger so the paramilitary style uniforms started coming back. But the paramilitary style uniform's appearance is a threatening one. The United States should revive the "Officer-Friendly" uniform from the 1950's, when citizens felt safe (Doran, 2009).

After 50 years, the Portland Police Department is replacing their "Portland Blue" shirts and darker blue trousers with one dark navy blue single-tone uniform commonly known as Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) blue. The LAPD blue uniforms have a dye that has become the color that is the standard color for law enforcement. The cargo style pants have more pockets and are much lighter (Bernstein, 2010).

The LAPD blue uniforms are distinctive and set police departments apart from one another. By changing to LAPD blue, the Portland Police Department will save up to \$250,000.00 next year, slowly changing uniforms precinct by precinct. For greater accountability, Portland Police Department will appoint a quartermaster. The quartermaster will be in charge of inventorying the police uniforms. The new uniforms will be of polyester, either pure or a blend, lycra and rayon, and will be wash and wear (Bernstein, 2010).

Most police officers are concerned about how their uniforms will perform in wet conditions and the cost of dry cleaning. When the current uniforms get wet, they stay that way. The new uniforms that are being considered are easier to keep dry because the drops stay on the surface of the uniform. The new dark navy blue is well-stocked and easier to keep in inventory as needed by the department (Bernstein, 2010)

COUNTER POSITION

The perception of most departments and local government agencies is that they would prefer to maintain their individuality and set themselves apart from the other agencies around them. This way the citizens who live in the area know their local police department and they are able to be easily identified by the local citizens.

If the departments within Harris County, Texas would consolidate uniform colors, it would reduce the cost of uniforms being ordered because of the discount received by the mere quantity of uniforms purchased using the same color and style. Each elected law enforcement official within Harris County will pick the same design and color and have the human resource personnel contact Lonestar Uniform Company who provides all Harris County Law Enforcement agencies with uniforms. The cost is reduced from

an average of \$135.30 dollars a set to \$92.30 a set when the county purchases all the same style and color from one supplier (example: Lonestar Uniforms Company) with a savings of \$43.00 per set. The departments could maintain their identity by the distinct patch with a design that displays the department's name and shield which is located on both sleeves just below the shoulders and the departmental badge. This would also give the officers' ability to give the impression of being united with the rest of the county with a professional image towards the citizen. The pride that an officer feels while wearing the police uniform can be linked to the officer's morale. Most law enforcement agencies have to cut their budgets, and a \$43.00 savings per set is substantial when one considers that there are 6,200 Harris County law enforcement officers, which is approximately \$266,600 dollars. The savings of \$266,600 could be used to purchase seven new fully equipped marked patrol vehicles at \$35,400 each or could be used to purchase one additional police uniform at \$92.30.00 each for each officer or add approximately 6 additional new deputies at a cost of \$67,000.00 per deputy (See Appendix A).

The challenge for police agencies that have darker colors is the public's negative perception. Police agencies that want to have a friendly public image may find it more difficult when the police officer is perceived in a negative manner based partly on the darker colored uniform. It has also shown that the dark colored uniform gives off an anger or lack of sympathy for the public (Johnson, 2005).

RECOMMENDATION

For the safety and perception of all law enforcement officers and the citizens of Harris County, Texas, it would benefit the county to consolidate the funding for

uniforms. This would reduce the cost to every agency and would also make the uniforms readily available. This would give the officers ability to be unified and have great deal of pride and a sense of high standards and morals wearing a professional looking uniform which is easy to keep clean. The police uniform shows the power of authority along with safety and consequences for people's actions. The uniform is the most important part of public perception because everyone is judged by what you look like on first impression. The officers must wear the uniform with a great deal of pride and dignity and respect to the office in which it represents. This is why when the agencies wear a darker in color uniform; it shows that they are serious about their responsibility to the public and that they care about public safety and will enforce the laws.

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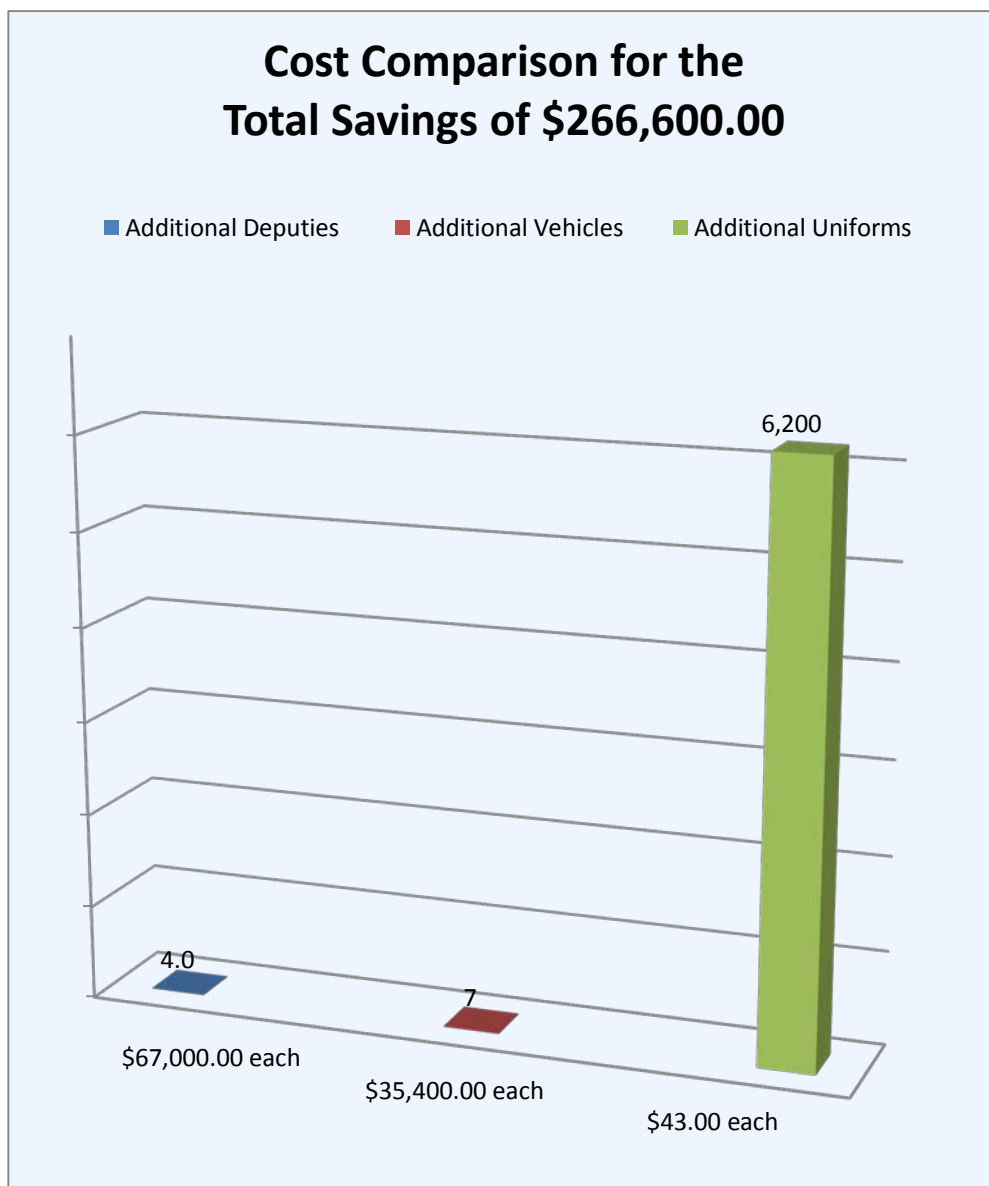
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Appendix A



Sources: Uniforms- Lonestar Uniform Company

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