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## **CIVILIAN AND MILITARY UNIFORMS BEFORE 1850**

**By mandating in 1786 that every French royal post rider wore a uniform, King Louis XVI codified one of the oldest civilian uniforms. Neither soldiers, nor domestic servants with their liveries, these public servants were, to varying degrees, representatives of the royal authority throughout the French territory. For the king, codifying the appearance of these men was a way to manifest the power of one of the most important administrations in the kingdom and to assert his supremacy over mail delivery. His template was the military uniform, with its shapes, colours, and ornaments permeating the civilian uniform for the entire 19th century. Designed to be worn by State representatives, this uniform was altered by subsequent political regimes and used as a banner embodying their authority everywhere. It also helped in organising and hierarchising an increasingly complex public apparatus. For public servants, this entailed a significant investment. Taking up this duty meant acquiring the adequate service uniform made by a tailor or a seamstress, following precise instructions imposed by the State.**

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## **THE SECOND EMPIRE**

**Following the restoration of the imperial regime in 1852, Napoléon III put an end to France's diplomatic isolation and sent his army into colonising conquests. To bolster his projects, he wanted to display the power of his empire for the whole world, and all of his subjects to see. To achieve this, the country started its industrial revolution, a powerful and structured administration was established, that showcased the Empire's policy, and the prestige of the army was emphasised. Following in his uncle's footsteps, Napoléon III standardised the uniforms of all public servants, injecting them with a distinct military quality. The clothes of policemen and postmen were modelled on new imperial army uniforms. Due to this choice, these officers became more easily recognisable through their silhouette, which set them apart from civilians.**

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## **THE THIRD REPUBLIC**

**During the 1870s–1880s, the French Third Republic renewed the wardrobes of major public bodies. This new policy in favour of homogenised clothes coincided with the construction of a national space. The idea was to integrate French people to the Republic and to the Nation. The chosen attire featured many formal, chromatic, and lexical connections with military uniforms. Through these echoes, employers and administrators intended to better control their personnel. Employers, by imposing an outfit, demanded obedience and docility, order and exemplarity. Wearing the uniform, like in the army, meant wearing the colours of the enterprise and endorsing its values. In postal services and railway companies, instilling virile and martial values in workers helped integrating them to the corporate culture, while showing society the reliability and rigour of these institutions. Compliance in terms of size and dress was strictly monitored to keep control over personnel appearances.**

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## **TOWARDS A TRUE CIVILIAN UNIFORM**

**During the first half of the 20th century, civilian uniforms gradually moved away from their military roots. They were able to distance themselves from their model thanks to employees embracing and interiorising professional discipline. Several organisations rationalised their wardrobe by reducing the number of positions and ranks. Professional hierarchy became less apparent due to simplified ornaments and the end of uniforms for executives who returned to civilian clothing. Gradually, logos replaced tricolour cockades and in the 1960s–1970s, new commercial methods pushed public administrations and enterprises to communicate in a different way.**

**They introduced slogans and logotypes that were displayed everywhere, notably on outfits and hats. The civilian cuts used for uniforms drew inspiration from fashion in order to renew their image, which was often deemed old-fashioned, and to better connect with the public.**

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## **A FEMALE UNIFORM, AT LAST!**

**The prolonged lack of female alternatives in uniforms highlights a real unspoken hierarchy in appearances. It is a symptom of how managers refused to acknowledge women as worthy workers, even when they had already fully assumed the function. While not totally unheard of, female uniforms were rare in most organisations and boiled down to a few essential items. This reflected the social inequalities between men and women under both labour law and civil law. During the 1940s–1960s, women won several battles towards the acknowledgment of their rights. Adjusting to these realities, organisations such as RATP (public transport), SNCF (railway operator), PTT (postal services and telecommunications) or the Paris Police Prefecture started providing public-facing employees with pieces of uniforms. However, in many public administrations they remained relegated to the fringes of the dress system until the 1970s. Uniforms had to shed their military quality and acquire a more neutral aspect for them to be worn by both sexes.**

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