***Brief History of the Karate Uniform and Belt***

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As Karate-ka (one who studies Karate) we wear a uniform called a Dogi (Japanese), Keikogi (Okinawan) or Gi. The Dogi was developed by judo Founder Jigoro Kano around the year 1888 when he was twenty eight to help students with their grappling techniques. In 1907 Kano changed the Dogi by making the sleeves and pants longer and shortening the jacket.

In 1922 Shotokan founder Gichin Funakoshi adopted the Dogi to his organization thus creating the Karate Dogi, which is slightly lighter in weight than the traditional Judo-gi. The uniform was made of unbleached cotton giving it a sort of white hue following the samurai tradition of wearing white in anticipation of death. Not much has changed over the years as far as the Dogi is concerned.

Jigoro Kano came up with the belt system in 1883 when he gave two of his highest students their black belts to separate them from the others. He got the idea from watching an okinawan swimming contest where advanced swimmers wore black sashes and everyone else wore white. Eventually a brown belt was added as a step between the two ranks. In the 1930’s European Judo-ka started adding various colors.

The Obi (belt) is a blessing and equally a burden, this small useless article of clothing we try so hard to obtain is surrounded in so much myth it will make your head spin. Shotokan founder Funakoshi had no rank, goju-ryu founder Chojun Miyagi despised the idea of a ranking system because he felt that rank in karate would create bad politics amongst its students, Bruce Lee refused a ranking system in his Jeet Kun do school. People feel that their belt color is some status symbol.

Your black belt won’t get you a home loan, a job, a mate and it will not protect your sick mother/father in the hospital. Becoming a black belt might make you a better member of society, it should make you the best student at school or one of the hardest workers on your job because striving for greatness is a side effect of training hard in karate. But as karate-ka we should not confuse one with the other. The guy who’s trying to mug you will not care what rank you are, it’s up to you and you alone to protect yourself. Please feel free to look this stuff up in your spare time as I have barely scratched the surface on this subject. The stories go much deeper than this but we don’t have the space to give you all the information, plus my hands hurt from typing, Osu