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**Why have so many D.C. area nightclubs banned white T-shirts?**

October 11, 2010 - 09:30 AM

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By Sarah Godfrey (Twitter [@sarahgodfrey](#))

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The long list of dress code no-nos, which includes white t-shirts, at Adams Morgan nightclub Heaven and Hell. (Photo: TBD staff)

Back in September, D.C. personality/musician/promoter **Dre All Day** showed up at 14th Street NW's **Policy** nightclub and restaurant for a music video release party. Being the well-known man about town that he is, he immediately hit the red carpet. He posed, holding two giant bottles of vodka, while various photographers snapped away. After he left the carpet, Dre

shook some hands and gave some pounds while making his way to the club's entrance. Once he reached the door, however, Dre was denied entry, due to his attire. He was wearing jeans, a nice chain, and pair of shades. He was also wearing a plain white T-shirt, an item of clothing Policy's dress code prohibits on club nights.

"The way I look at it, I am who I am to this city, and if you don't let me in your club, no problem," Dre says of the incident. "I can always leave and go to **Lotus**, where there's no line and no security, or **Stadium**, which is more upscale than Policy, and everybody knows who Dre All Day is, so there's no problem."

Although Dre was not happy about being caught up in the region's widespread ban on white T-shirts in nightclubs, he actually has no problem with Policy's policy. As an event promoter himself, Dre says he can understand the logic, even if most of the parties he hosts or is affiliated with


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don't have strict dress codes.

"I respect the white tee situation," he says. "When you got a certain type of club or certain type of clientele, they get rid of the white tees because they think it symbolizes a certain crowd," he says. "I have no problem with it. If I was a regular Joe Schmo, I'd just keep it moving, but I'm an uppity negro, so I feel like, 'You got to let me in!'"

The white tee now joins Timberland boots and the vague "athletic wear" on the list of items patrons can't wear if they want to party inside of many D.C. area nightclubs.

The white tee nightclub crackdown started as far back as three years ago in some Maryland clubs, and as recently as 6 months ago in some clubs inside of the city, according to doormen and bouncers I spoke with. Only two reasons are ever cited for the ban: 1) No one wants a club full of patrons in \$2 Hanes undershirts, because it doesn't look nice; 2) white tees, because they are cheap and nondescript, have become the uniform of troublemakers, much like Timberland boots were in the '90s, and clubs would rather those wearing them just stay away.

"Once there was the whole 'no tennis shoe' policy, now you can wear them, then it was Timbs—there's always a certain look they want" Dre says of club owners and operators. "Now, quite a few clubs will say, 'no white tees,' but in my opinion, it's all about who you know. [At Policy] I didn't know none of people at the door. didn't know the security guards. Even people I thought were in control of situation couldn't get me in .

"But if I was [Allen Iverson](#), think they'd turn me down?" Dre wonders.

Actually, at Policy, the answer could be yes. [Tiffany Penn](#), special events manager for the venue, says that Tuesday is the only night with a dress code, as it's the restaurant's club night, and that dress code is strictly enforced. "On Tuesdays, the dress code is more trendy and sophisticated," Penn says. "No white tees. At one point they were acceptable and then, at a certain point, it was like, 'OK, we have an entire club full of white tees.'"

"We still don't allow Timbs or Nike boots either" she says.

Although Policy seems to be pretty strict about any and all white tees, at other nightclubs in the region, it seems that whether patrons in white T-shirts are granted access to clubs or turned away is entirely at the discretion of whoever is working the door.

In 2005, Chris Shott, then a staff writer at *Washington City Paper*, wrote the [definitive article](#) on Timbs and D.C. nightclubs' dress codes. He found boot bans aren't uniformly enforced. The same is true of white tees. While Timberland boots are the most specific item banned (couldn't clubs just say no work boots?), white tees are the most ill-defined. Both items cause significant headaches for area bouncers when would-be patrons dressed in their boots and tees attempt to gain admittance to various clubs.

With Timbs, the argument is usually, "These aren't Timbs!" With white tees, the argument is typically, "It's just a T-shirt," or, "It's not all white!" So bouncers must decide, in the case of white tees, exactly what is acceptable. If tight is OK, but loose isn't, if short is acceptable but long doesn't fly, exactly

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how big a logo has to be to make a white tee appropriate, so that the wearer can get inside the establishment and then proceed to sweat through or spill drinks on it.

On a recent Saturday at [DC Star](#), a club on Queens Chapel Road NE, a group of eight security guards stood in front of the building, waiting for crowds to descend for that night's concert, from go-go band T.O.B. White tees were allowed for that show but are just as often banned at DC Star. On those nights, the bouncers have to decide what flies. Most of it comes down to how well-dressed the patron is. (None of the eight bouncers I talked to wanted to give their names, but they were all happy to unload about the tees.)

"Everybody wants their club to be grown and sexy now," says one security guard. "They think if you come here in jeans, tennis shoes, and a white tee, you're looking for trouble. I mean, white tees are only \$2. Brothers and sisters aren't coming out in their Sunday best to start trouble. I mean you're not gonna fight in stilettos, right?"

"Actually, they'll pull those off in a minute." says another guard.

Yet another security guard says he attempted to get into [Love](#) with a white tee on and, despite his belonging to the tight-knit network of area security guards, the doormen there turned him away. "You gotta have on a polo shirt and dress shoes to get in there," he said, shaking his head.

Down the road at [The Scene](#), a nightclub on Adams Place NE, managers **Will** (who declined to give his last name) and **Tubb Robinson** talk about their club's white tee ban, and how it is enforced—something they say the staff has had many discussions about. They ever dissect some of their employees' white tee-based ensembles to give an idea of what does and does not pass muster.

One man wearing a white tee with a bright, graphic pattern and leather jacket walks by and Will remarks, "See how he has that dressed up?" Another employee, introduced as **Jay**, has on a plain white tee, and has styled it with a green army-style jacket, hat, and nice boots. "He has it dressed up," Will says. "We just want people to look nice and presentable, but it depends on the event."

Dre All Day also says that the white tee can look great but urges that not everyone can jazz it up. "I walk around like a rapper, got my chain, and I can dress it up, but sometimes, a certain class of women discriminate against the white tee," he says.

But is it really about looks, or is the white tee ban just another instance of clubs targeting whatever is the popular urban fashion that kids are wearing, so they can turn away people they just don't like the looks of?

"You can dress up a white tee, but it seems like there's always something when they come in with the white tees," says Robinson. "Like, I can look at you, and your shoes, and tell you're not coming in here to knock. But someone dressed like I'm dressed...it's bad that you gotta do that, but people are coming out to enjoy themselves. If you're dressed up, I'm not saying you're not gonna start something, and if you're in a white tee and boots, I'm not saying you are gonna start something, but this is our venue, we don't wanna lose it, we have to protect it, one way we can protect it is with that

dress code." Robinson and Will both add that they're glad the weather is getting cooler, so they no longer have to turn away people showing up to their establishment in white tees and even wifebeaters.

"We treat this like our house, basically," Robinson continues. "And I wouldn't want some dude coming in my house to pick up my daughter in a white tee, and pants hanging down, smelling like weed smoke"

While the Scene and D.C. Star have had white tee bans for a while, as have many P.G. County clubs, tee bans at some clubs in the area are relatively recent.

**Blessing Showunmi**, an assistant at the 1st Street NW nightclub [Ibiza](#), says she's not sure how long the club has banned white tees but says that the development is recent enough that the club's white tee policy isn't on its website yet.

"We want this to be an upscale environment, so we don't want anyone in basic white tees," Showunmi says. "There has to be a collar on the shirt, or something thrown on top of it," she says. "If you go on our website, you'll see we don't do any athletic wear as well. There are pictures taken in the club, and no one wants to see someone in a Nike jumpsuit.

"Appearance has a lot to do with where you party," she continues. "You don't want to party somewhere where everyone is in gold chains and Nike boots and you have to look over your shoulder when you're going back to your car.

On recent Thursday night in Adams Morgan, bouncers are less chatty about the dress code, and less blunt about how white tees are tied to all sorts of generalizations about race and class. The bouncer at 18th Street NW spot [Grand Central](#) says the club doesn't allow white tees, but he doesn't know how long the ban has been in effect.

Nearby [Tom Tom](#) bans not only white tees but chains as well. Doorman **Yogi Wolridge** estimates that Tom Tom began banning white tees a little less than a year ago. And he says people argue with him about their T-shirts regularly.

"They say, 'It's just a T-shirt, there's nothing to it, what's the big deal?'" Wolridge says. He adds that some believe that cheap white tees have some gang affiliation. "Most of your gangs or thugs wear them." And unlike places where graphic tees are OK, Wolridge says he has to be on the lookout for too plain and too busy, as the club also has a graphic tee ban, too. "If it has a little logo that's fine, but not too much," Wolridge says. "No skulls, stuff like that."

One group he doesn't have to screen, though, is the women who patronize Tom Tom. "C'mon, ladies don't have a dress code!" he says. "As long as they have on some sort of clothes, they can come in."

A couple of doors down at [Club Heaven and Hell](#), the doorman is as stoic as the one at Grand Central, but says that, yes, they do have a white tee ban, but no, it's not a problem for him. Why is he so special to be spared tons of young men arguing to him that their T-shirts should be an exception to the rule? "It's not a big deal, I tell them go to the store right here and buy a black tee for \$5," he says.

The store is 18th Express, two doors down, and the T-shirts area actually \$10. They're not displayed, but walk in and say "black tee" to the counter guy,

and he pulls out a giant stack of them. We have a trouble understanding each other during my visit, but some stuff came out. The store sells a fair number of the items per night, offers them only in size XL, and stocks only black—no white tees in sight.

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Oct 11, 2010 - 11:46:12 AM

Hmmm sounds like a "color" issue to me!

Good point (0)

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### Nightclub Security

Oct 11, 2010 - 08:12:57 PM

White Tees... Timbs... Chains... Athletic Attire... Ball Caps... Sunglasses... Do we continue to limit attire but not hold our guest accountable? Every Security Host or bouncer knows trouble comes in a suit or stilettos; just add the right amount of alcohol... Get the right number of security staff, yes, train them correctly and hold guests accountable and proactively stop problems. Vegas is the king of high end clubs and fights are extremely rare, yes they happen, but rarely. Aggression, Arguing, Disruptive behavior.... get em out, nicely and politely, but get them out.... Be Safe Security Hosts....

Good point (0)

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### TT

Oct 12, 2010 - 01:23:54 PM

Gotta wear the Street Dress Code to get through safely and then the change to the Club Dress Code to get in. Maybe the clubs should offer lockers.

Good point (0)

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