

LEVELED BOOK • M

The Story of Jeans

Written by Elizabeth Austin

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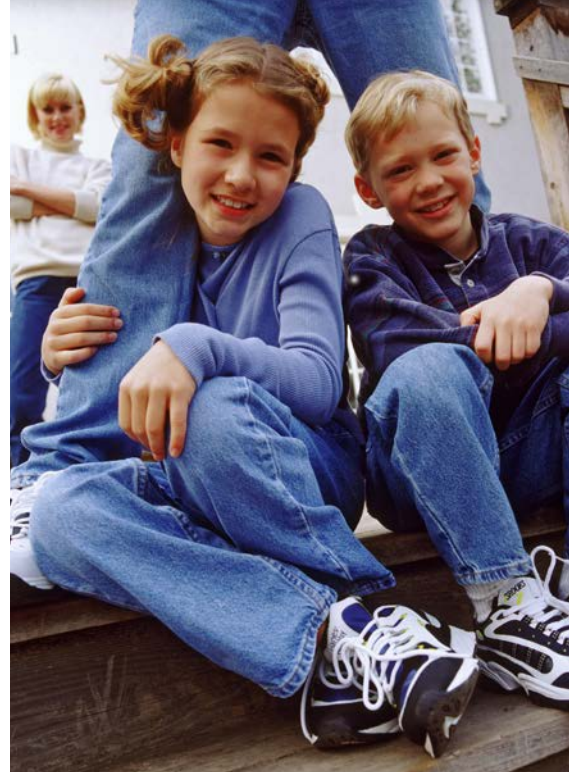
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Introduction

Take a look in your closet or clothes drawer. Do you see a pair of jeans? You probably do. The average American owns about seven pairs. You may be wearing a pair right now. Or you might have a jean jacket, shirt, or a pair of denim shoes. Jeans are so common, you may wonder who invented them and how the fashion took off.



People of all ages wear jeans.

History

Jeans were invented by a German man named Levi Strauss. He went to the U.S. in 1847 and followed the Gold Rush to San Francisco. He carried many kinds of fabric to sell to dry goods stores. Business was booming in California during the Gold Rush. Levi quickly became a successful businessman.



Levi Strauss founded Levi Strauss & Co.

The miners in California had a problem with their pants. When they found gold or **ore**, they carried it in their pockets. But the metal was heavy, and the pockets ripped. In 1873, Levi became partners with a tailor named Jacob Davis. Jacob and Levi made tough denim pants with copper **rivets** sewn into the seams. Rivets are strong metal fasteners. The miners loved the “waist overalls,” as they were called, and they quickly became popular.



California miners in the 1880s loved waist overalls.

Changing Fashions

Levi's® jeans were work pants. Male workers wore them all the time. But a gentleman wouldn't think of wearing jeans. Women didn't wear pants at all. But this changed when Western movies became popular. All the cowboys wore jeans. People thought the cowboys looked tough and cool. But jeans still weren't proper for places like school, stores, or offices.



Cowboys and a cowgirl sport denim pants.

During World War II, off-duty U.S. soldiers wore jeans. They made jeans seem like tough, **casual** American pants. They became a symbol of America in many other countries.

Jean or Denim?

Today, we call denim pants “jeans.” But jean and denim are two different fabrics. Denim is a strong all-cotton fabric. Jean is a thinner, weaker fabric made of cotton and **linen**. But both fabrics are dyed blue with **indigo**. They look very much alike, and the names became confused. Eventually, so many people called Levi’s pants “jeans,” the company officially changed the name.





President Obama wore jeans to open the 2009 All Star Game in St. Louis.

Back in the U.S., fashions changed. Movie stars wore jeans in their films. Teenagers everywhere loved them. Some schools **banned** jeans because of their “rebel” image. But casual clothing, including jeans, became popular for more and more occasions. Eventually, jeans were so common that it became okay for anyone to wear them. You can even find pictures of the president wearing jeans.

In the 1980s, clothing designers made new styles. They bleached, decorated, and stonewashed (wore out) jeans. They made them baggy, stretchy, and flared. In 2000, the Italian designer Gucci sold a pair of jeans for \$3,715.00.

Designer jeans
walk the runways
of fashion shows.



Jeans are dyed every color of the rainbow. Denim is used to make almost everything, including jackets, hats, skirts, shoes, and wallets. **Antique**, or old, jeans are also popular. You can find them in thrift stores for a very low price. Or you can find them in specialty stores, where they are very expensive.



These Levi's jeans from the 1930s are very valuable.

Do You Know?

You may have noticed that many blue jeans are sewn with orange thread. This is unusual. Most clothing is sewn with thread the same color as the fabric. The orange thread matches the copper rivets. Many kinds of jeans use two stitches side by side to make the orange show up.

How Jeans Are Made

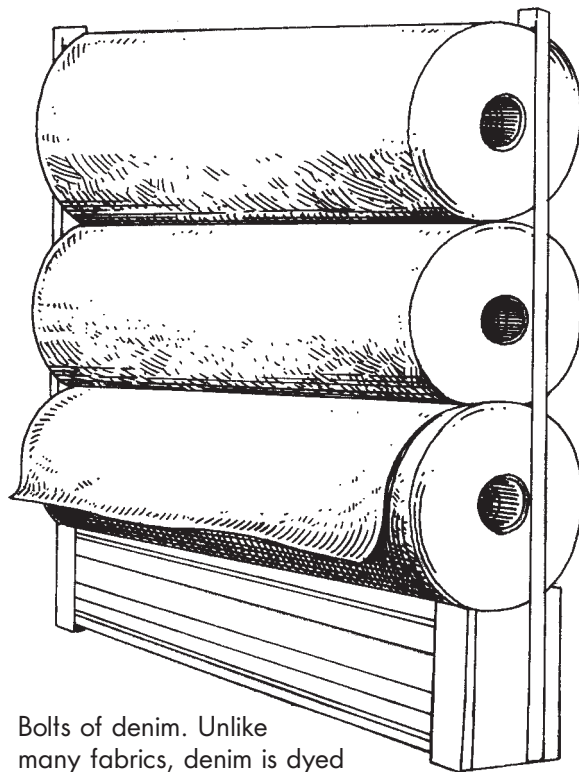
Most jeans begin as fibers growing on the cotton plant in puffs called **bolls**. The bolls are picked and the seeds are removed. Then the fibers are combed to untangle them. The fibers are called lint, like the lint in your pocket. Machines twist the lint into a thick rope. The rope is pulled, twisted, and stretched into a long, thin thread called yarn.



White bolls on cotton plants

Making Blue Jeans Blue

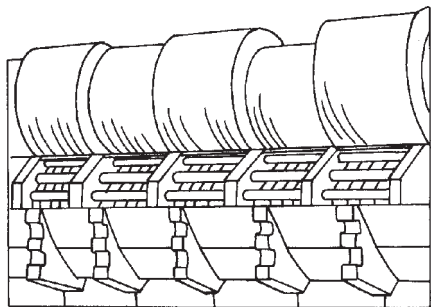
The original jeans were dyed with indigo, which comes from special plants. The plant leaves are first soaked in water. Then the water is stirred, in order to mix in oxygen. This changes the plant mixture from orange to yellow to green to blue. But indigo is very expensive. For many years, jeans makers used dye from coal or oil. But these dyes cause pollution. Some jeans makers have found special bacteria that make blue dye. The next pair of blue jeans you buy may have been dyed by bacteria!



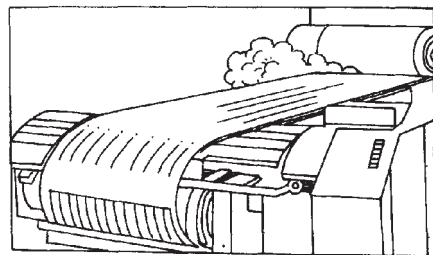
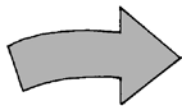
Bolts of denim. Unlike many fabrics, denim is dyed before weaving, rather than after.

Yarn is dyed before it is woven into denim. Blue denim is made from both blue and white yarn. When your jeans wear out or rip, you can see the white threads showing through. Denim is woven in a **diagonal** pattern. The fabric is so sturdy that it is used in some paper money. That's why money doesn't fall apart if you accidentally wash it in your pocket.

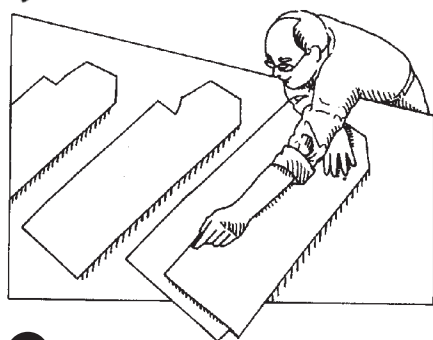
Bundles of fabric are called **bolts**. One bolt of denim weighs 500 pounds (227 kg). It can make 60 pairs of adult-size jeans. Electric saws cut through 120 layers of cloth at once. The cloth is cut into many sizes and sewn together. One pair of jeans goes through 37 different sewing steps. It takes 213 yards (195 m) of thread to sew one pair of jeans.



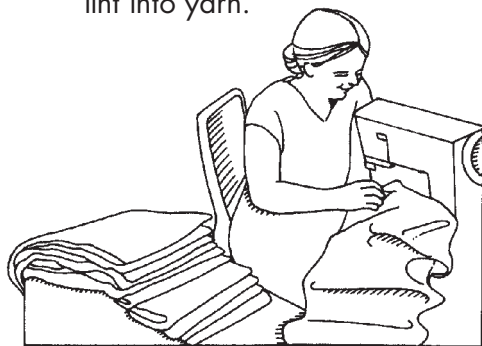
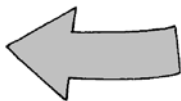
- 1** Round bobbins pull and twist lint into yarn.



- 2** Looms weave the yarn into strips of cloth.



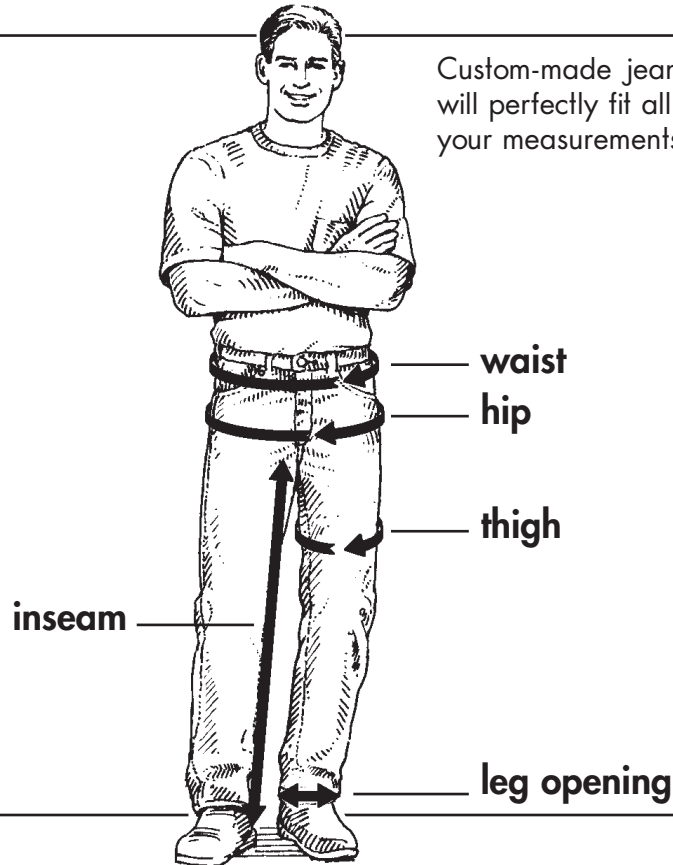
- 3** The fabric is cut into patterns and sizes.



- 4** The cut fabric is sewn together to make jeans.

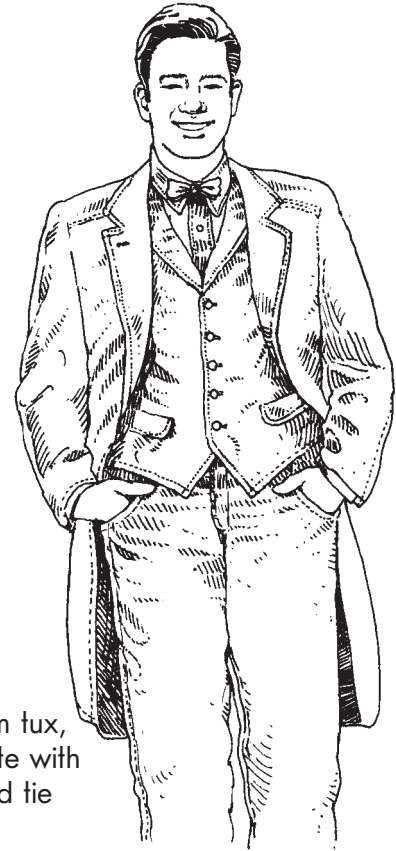
Now, people can even order custom-made jeans. You can send all your measurements to a **custom** jeans company. They will make a pair to fit you perfectly.

Custom-made jeans will perfectly fit all of your measurements.



Conclusion

Today, all kinds of people around the world wear jeans. People wear them everywhere. Designers have even made denim tuxedos for the most formal occasions. Jeans are popular today for the same reasons they were popular when Levi Strauss first made them. They look good, they last long, and they are comfortable. That's probably why you own a pair or two, or seven, yourself.



A denim tux,
complete with
vest and tie

Glossary

antique (<i>adj.</i>)	valuable and old (p. 11)	indigo (<i>n.</i>)	a dye made from plants; also, a deep, dark blue color (p. 8)
banned (<i>v.</i>)	forbade (p. 9)		
bolts (<i>n.</i>)	puffs of cotton (p. 12)		
bolts (<i>n.</i>)	wide, rolled-up strips of fabric (p. 14)	linen (<i>n.</i>)	a thin, light fabric made from a plant called flax (p. 8)
casual (<i>adj.</i>)	relaxed; not formal (p. 8)	ore (<i>n.</i>)	rock with precious metal in it (p. 6)
custom (<i>adj.</i>)	made specifically for one person (p. 16)	rivets (<i>n.</i>)	bits of metal that hold things together (p. 6)
diagonal (<i>adj.</i>)	slanted; at an angle (p. 14)		

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The Story of Jeans

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Written by Elizabeth Austin

with research by Heidi M. Powers

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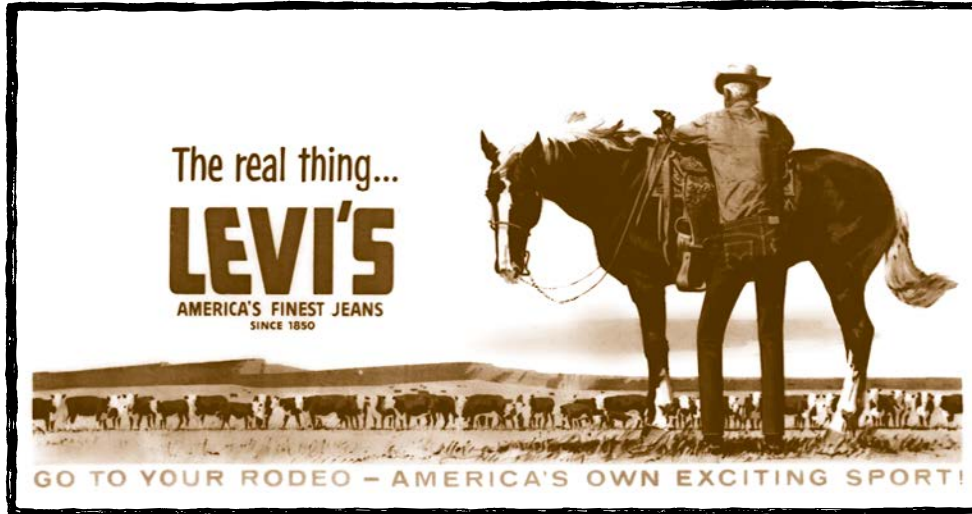
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