



**Buenaventura Section Mixer
Rising Stars and Old Nebulas
By Zak Cohen**

Rising Stars and Old Nebulas

The History and Sociology of Blue Jeans

Levi Strauss Patent – May 20th

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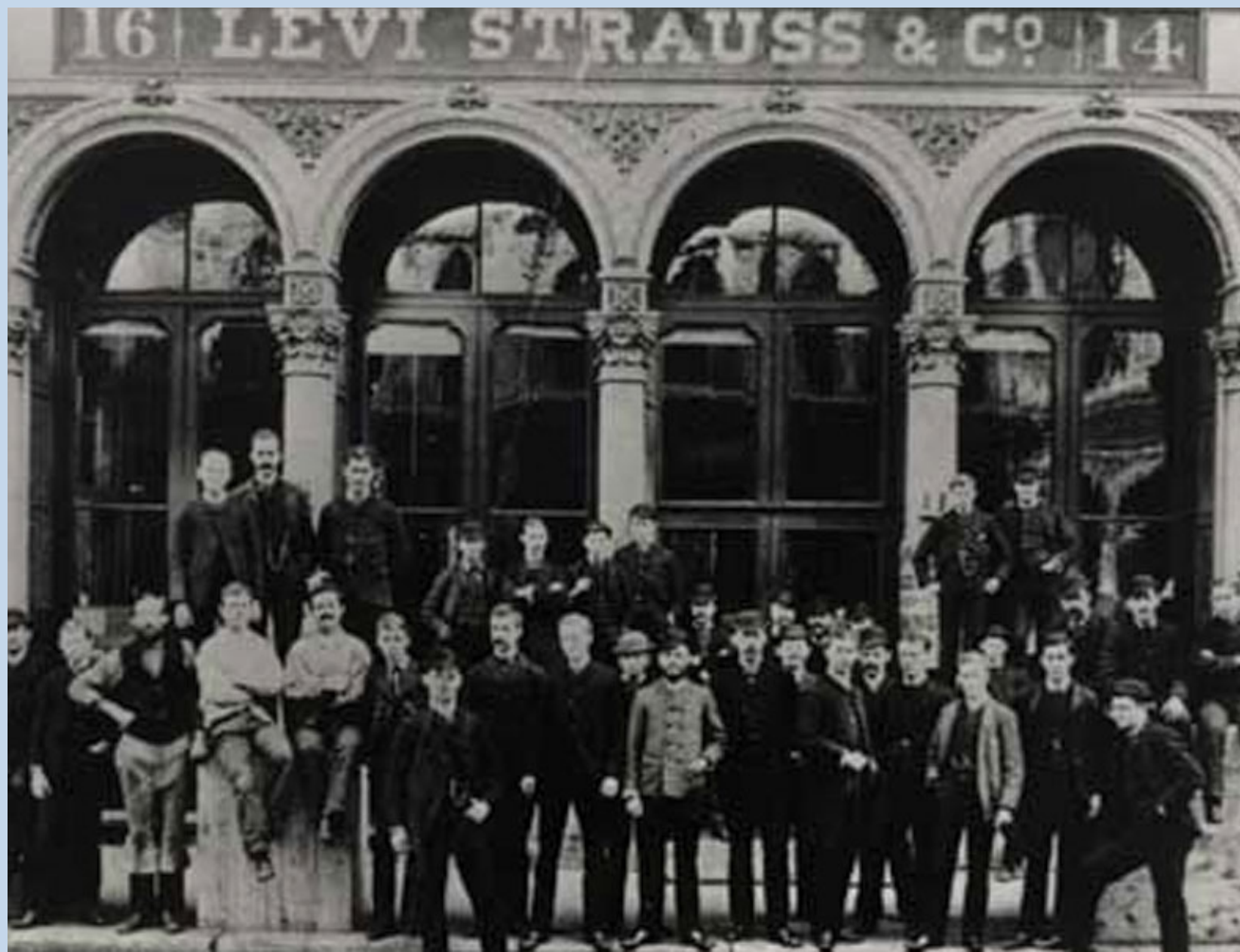
Tonight's Program

- Part 1 – The Man
- Part 2 – The Product
- Part 3 – The Sociology



Levi Strauss

- Born in Kingdom of Bavaria in 1829 – the family moved to Kentucky
- The Strauss family opened a dry goods store in Kentucky and then decided to open up a store in San Francisco during the gold rush in 1853
- He called the store Levi Strauss & Company and sold his family wares sent from Kentucky
- became a US citizen in 1853



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Levi Strauss

- Jacob Davis, one of Levi's customers invented a pair of riveted denim pants and went into business with Strauss - they both patented the idea in 1873
- Levi supplied the denim and Davis created the addition of rivets in the pocket corners and base of the bottom fly – points of strain – the product was called “riveted waist overalls”
- He died in 1902 and his company was given to his four nephews because he never married



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The Product

From the 17th century to the present, denim has been woven, used and discarded; made into upholstery, pants and awnings; found in museums, attics, antique stores and archaeological digs; worn as the fabric of hard honest work, and as the expression of angry rebellion; used for the sails of Columbus' ships **in legend**; and worn by American cowboys **in fact**

Fabric

- In France the cloth was named Serge de Nimes and it was also known in England at the end of the 17th century - so is this fabric imported from France or is it an English fabric bearing the same name - called denim
- In 1864, an East Coast wholesale house advertised that it carried 10 different kinds of denim, including “New Creek Blues” and “Madison River Browns.” (Sound's rather contemporary)

Fabric

- Jean's and denim were two very different fabrics in the 19th Century. They also differed in how they were used. In 1849 a New York clothing manufacturer advertised topcoats, vests or short jackets in chestnut, olive, black, white and blue jean. Fine trousers were offered in blue jean; overalls and trousers made for work were offered in blue and fancy denim
- Other American advertisements show working men wearing clothing that illustrates this difference in usage between jean and denim. Mechanics and painters wore overalls made of blue denim; working men in general (including those not engaged in manual labor) wore more tailored trousers made of jean

Fabric

- In 1942, jean is listed as a cotton serge with warp and woof of the same color, used for overalls, work and sport shirts, doctors and nurses uniforms and as linings for boots and shoes
- Denim, was advertised as “The most important fabric of the work-clothing group. Denims are strong and serviceable; they are particularly strong in the warp direction, where the fabric is subjected to greater wear than the filling”

Fabric

- Denim came from the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company in New Hampshire, in 1831 – their denim production dated to the mid-1860s (this being the time of the American Civil War, the company also manufactured guns for a few years)
- Sewing with linen thread, etc. Doubtless the Amoskeag denim has contributed in no small degree to the success of Levi Strauss & Co. and, in return, that concern has contributed in an equal degree to the success of Amoskeag denims, advertising as it does, their superiority over all other denims.”
- In 1914 LS&CO said “In spite of the many cheaper grades offered in competition, the sale of the Amoskeag denim garment has kept up due in part to the superior denim used in its construction and in part to superior workmanship

Fabric

- But by 1915 the company was buying the majority of its denim from Cone Mills, in North Carolina (by 1922 all the denim came from Cone)
- The company also made jackets out of denim and duck; they also branched out into shirts of plain or printed muslin

1930's

- Denim was now associated less often with laborers in general, and more as the fabric of the authentic American as symbolized by John Wayne, Gary Cooper and others. LS&CO. advertising did its part to fuel this craze
- Easterners who wanted an authentic cowboy experience headed to the dude ranches of California, Arizona, Nevada and other states, where they purchased their first pair of Levi's



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1930's

- Western movies and the West in general captured the American imagination. Authentic cowboys wearing Levi's® jeans were elevated to mythic status
- Western clothing became synonymous with a life of **independence and rugged individualism**

1940's

- American G.I.s took their favorite pairs of denim pants overseas; guarding them against the inevitable theft of valuable items. When the war was over, massive changes in society signalled the end of one era and the beginning of another
- Denim pants became less associated with workwear and more associated with the leisure activities of prosperous post-war America

1950's

- Zippers was used in the classic waist overalls for the first time in 1954. This was in response to complaints from non-Westerners who didn't like the button fly (the jeans they were used to wearing had zippers).
- Strauss Company did offer both products all over the country, but making changes to people's favorite pants is always a risk.

1950's

- To counteract the attitude that denim clothing was appropriate only for hard, physical labor the company used a news item
- In 1951. Singer Bing Crosby was wearing his favorite pair on a hunting trip to Canada with a friend. They tried to check into a Vancouver hotel, but because they were wearing denim, the desk clerk would not give them a room - denim-clad visitors were not considered high-class enough for this hotel

1950's

LS&CO. heard about this, and created a denim tuxedo jacket for Bing, which was presented to him at a celebration in Elko, Nevada, where Bing was honorary mayor

1950's

The portrayal of denim-clad “juvenile delinquents” in films and on television during this decade led many school administrators to ban the wearing of denim in the classroom, fearing that the mere presence of denim on a teenager’s body would cause him to **rebel against authority** in all of its forms

1950's



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1950's

- Even as some Americans tried to get denim out of the schools, there were just as many who believed that jeans deserved a better reputation, and pointed to the many wholesome young people who wore jeans and never got into trouble. But no matter what anyone thought or did, nothing could stop the ever-increasing demand for Levi's® jeans
- A 1958 newspaper article reported, "...about 90% of American youths wear jeans everywhere except 'in bed and in church' and that this is true in most sections of the country."

1950s

- Events in this decade also led the company to change the name of its most popular product. Until the 1950s we referred to the famous copper riveted pants as “overalls;” when you went into a small clothing store and asked for a pair of overalls, you were given a pair of Levi’s®
- after World War II our customer base changed dramatically, as referred to earlier: from working adult men, to leisure-loving teenage boys and their older college-age brothers. These guys called the product “jeans” - and by 1960 LS&CO. decided that it was time to adopt the name, since these new, young consumers had adopted our products

1950's

- From the 1950s to the present, denim and jeans have been associated with youth, with new ideas, with rebellion, with individuality. College-age men and women entered American colleges in the 1960s and, wearing their favorite pants (jeans, of course), they began to protest against the social ills plaguing the United States
- Denim acquired a bad reputation yet again, and for the same reasons as it had a decade earlier: **those who protest, those who rebel, those who question authority, traditional institutions and customs, wear denim**

1970's

Quotes in the trade papers included:

- “Jeans are more than a make. They are an established attitude about clothes and lifestyle.”
- This attitude could be seen very clearly in the “decorated denim” craze which saw beaded, embroidered, painted and sequined jeans appearing on streets from California to New York and across the ocean. Personalizing one's jeans was such a huge trend in the United States

2000's



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2000's

“Throughout the industrialized world denim has become a symbol of the young, active, informal, American way of life. It is equally symbolic of America's achievements in mass production, for denim of uniform quality and superior performance is turned out by the mile in some of America's biggest and most modern mills. Moreover, what was once a fabric only for work clothes, has now also become an important fabric for play clothes, for sportswear of all types.”

Summary

Today, employees wear Levi's® jeans to work. Looking back, we see that the very first people to wear Levi's® jeans worked with pick and shovel, and though our tools are computer keyboard, PDA and cell phone, we have both been moved to wear the same thing each and every work day: denim jeans



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