
CURRICULUM GUIDE

LEVI STRAUSS: A HISTORY OF AMERICAN STYLE



CONTEMPORARY
JEWISH MUSEUM

ABOUT THE CURRICULUM

All images:
Levi Strauss & Co. Archives

This curriculum is organized into five chapters, and follows the life of Levi Strauss as a guide to studying the history of San Francisco. This resource expands upon Levi's story by speaking to the diverse range of experiences that marked the California Gold Rush period. Alongside Levi's achievements, we see the development of a city, the rise of industrialization, and the emergence of the blue jean as a symbol of durability and perseverance. Through Levi's story, we can examine the larger story of nineteenth-century immigration to California and its impacts on Native peoples and the transformation of the West.

The settlement of the American West is a complex story, because in the process of westward expansion and migration, Native American peoples were subjugated and dispossessed. This period is also characterized by slavery, the Civil War, and exclusion of and discrimination towards Chinese immigrants. This curriculum is focused on Levi Strauss's immigrant story and the invention of the blue jean, and through the prism of this particular story, students and teachers are also asked to engage in contemporary dialogue on the various historic aspects of this time period.

Levi Strauss: A History of American Style, on view February 13–August 9, 2020 at The Contemporary Jewish Museum (The CJM), is the largest public display of materials from the Levi Strauss & Co. Archives ever assembled. Drawing from the garments, objects, and ephemera in their remarkable collection, this curriculum provides students an opportunity to engage and analyze primary source materials of the late nineteenth century. In the 1850s, California represented a far-off utopia for people around the world—an escape from harsh political conditions, famine, and strife. Through this curriculum, students will gain insights into how this early wave of global migration, coupled with the advent of industrialization, transformed the western United States.

IMPLEMENTATION

This curriculum is designed as a modular workbook. Each chapter contains subsections, each with a core text that students may read on their own or that the teacher may cover. This is followed by a combination of historical photographs with archival notes and close examination prompts; primary source quotes with questions for analysis; student extension activities; and additional questions to consider.

The appendix includes:

- a “How to Analyze an Historic Photograph” worksheet
- a glossary for vocabulary words that are found throughout the curriculum in **bold** type
- a timeline interlacing the life of Levi Strauss with San Francisco’s history
- high-resolution images that can be printed and shared with students.

The images in this curriculum are drawn from the Levi Strauss & Co. Archives. In this resource guide, students are asked to use the skills of an archivist in their exploration—to be inquisitive in their consideration of historical materials, to find ways to “read” material by considering historical information alongside primary source documents, and to gain deeper insights into the time period throughout this process.

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EMIGRATION



Miniature reproduction of Buttenheim house where Levi (Löb Strauss) was born, 2016.

THE OLD COUNTRY

During the late 1840s and 1850s, over 250,000 **immigrants** traveled to the gold fields and new cities of the western U.S. Opportunities in California drew people from all over North America and at least twenty-five more countries, including Chile, Australia, China, France, England, and Morocco, among others.

Emigrants were leaving their homes for many reasons. Some left to flee persecution and famine in Europe, Africa, and South America; others to find new opportunities away from crowded East Coast cities like New York; and still others to travel the world in search of fortune and adventure.

Levi Strauss was born Löb Strauss in Buttenheim, **Bavaria** in 1829. The son of a **peddler**, Levi had six siblings, all of whom eventually came to America. For hundreds of years in many European countries, including Bavaria (now part of modern-day Germany), Jewish people experienced oppression and **anti-Semitism**. They were banned from many professions, and only permitted to practice specific trades such as peddling and raising cattle. Jewish people could not own land and were only allowed to live in certain areas. They were often not allowed to attend universities.

Levi's father Hirsch, like his many relatives before him, was a peddler. A peddler was a person who sold goods from town to town or door to door. A peddler might haul goods in a large wagon drawn by animals, or carry household items by foot and display them on a tray held by a strap locked around their neck. Peddlers were crucial to commerce and essential to local economies, and without railroads linking communities, peddlers also passed along news from town to town.

In Bavaria in the early nineteenth century, Jewish people lived under many harsh laws. In 1813, a new edict was put forth by the government that limited the Jewish population by restricting who among them could marry and have children. Typically, only the eldest child could marry, and any other sibling from that family could never be officially married or have children. The edict also restricted Jewish people from continuing to be peddlers. Without the possibility to have a family and with limited prospects for a profession, many Jews left to go abroad.

LOOKING CLOSELY

What do you notice about this photo?

Who do you think is in this picture?

What can you learn about these people just through close examination?

Where and when do you think this picture was taken?

What questions do you have?

ARCHIVISTS' NOTES

Levi Strauss was born Löb Strauss in Buttenheim, Bavaria in 1829.

This photograph is part of the Levi Strauss & Co. Archives. An **archive** is a collection of historical documents and items related to a particular topic. The Levi Strauss and Co. Archives contain items from the entire history of blue jeans, starting with Levi Strauss's early life in Bavaria more than 150 years ago.

This is a photo of the Strauss family in front of their home in Buttenheim, Bavaria, in what is now Germany.

Levi's father was a peddler.

Out of all the children in the photo, only the eldest child was allowed by law to marry.

In 1837, when Levi was eight years old, eighteen residents of Buttenheim decided to board ships and leave home. Among them were Levi's sister Rosla and his brother Jacob. Two more Strauss siblings set sail and joined them within the next five years.



PRIMARY SOURCE

Read the below excerpt from the edict of 1813:

The number of Jewish families in places where there already exists a Jewish settlement is not allowed to increase as a rule, rather it should be gradually diminished if it is too large.

ANALYZE

What is this edict saying?

What is the purpose of this law?

Why is this law significant for Levi's family?

What consequences do you see this law having?

Yondorf, Eric G., "The Edict of June 10, 1813 Regarding the Status of Persons of Jewish Faith in the Kingdom of Bavaria." [www.rjo.homepage.t-online.de/](http://www.rjo.homepage.t-online.de/pdf/EN_BY_JU_edikt_e.pdf). http://www.rjo.homepage.t-online.de/pdf/EN_BY_JU_edikt_e.pdf (accessed December 1, 2019).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Given the laws against Jews in Bavaria, what do you think were the conversations around emigration during Levi's childhood?

How did the law limiting marriage affect Jewish families?

ACTIVITY

ORAL HISTORY

The vast majority of Americans can trace their roots to somewhere else. Investigate the immigrant histories of your own family.

Conduct an interview with an older family member(s) in order to create a presentation that answers some of the following questions:

- When did members of your family first arrive in this country?
- Where did they come from? Why did they leave their homes?
- How did they get here? What was their journey like?
- Did they come together or at different times?
- What were their experiences like in their new home?
- What part of their story do you want to learn more about?

FIRST STOP: NEW YORK

In 1846, Levi's father died. In 1847, one year before Levi arrived in the U.S., the Strauss brothers had opened their own storefront, J. Strauss & Brother.

In 1848, Rebekka, Levi's mother, set sail for America with her three remaining children. By the time Levi came to the United States, his brothers were already American citizens. Living with his brothers Jonas and Louis, Levi quickly set to work in the family's dry goods business, J. Strauss & Brother.

Once in New York, Levi's siblings married and set up a peddling enterprise. A culturally familiar and common practice for many immigrants, peddling was an ideal profession for Jews of the time who had little resources to get started. As in Europe, Jews in America dealt extensively in **dry goods**. Essentially, dry goods referred to products that were distinct from foodstuffs and hardware. Dry goods included coats, pants, vests, and other clothing, as well as shoes, boots, needles, thread, scarves, and hats. Portable and nonperishable, dry goods could be carried on one's back or on a wagon. Secondhand garments, in particular, were affordable and easy to sell. Indeed, prior to the Civil War, trade in "old clothes" outweighed that in new clothing.

Peddling was usually the first step in making a living selling dry goods, followed by a storefront if business was good, and then on to larger-scale manufacturing and wholesaling. Peddling had the potential to catapult immigrant families into the middle class in as little as two generations, a goal many immigrants worked towards. In addition, New York offered professional and personal freedoms that had not been available in many immigrants' places of birth.

In New York, the most populous destination in the United States, the Strauss Brothers dry goods store did good business. A testament to their success, the Strauss brothers decided to send their youngest brother, Levi—who was only twenty-three at the time—to California to start the western branch of the family firm.

In January of 1853, soon before he sailed to San Francisco, Levi Strauss also became an American citizen. His citizenship papers were the last time he signed his name as Löb—from then on, he would be known as Levi.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Why did Levi and his siblings become peddlers in New York?

Why was it important for Levi's family to have a storefront?

Would this have been possible in Bavaria? Why or why not?

Why do you think Levi changed his name from Löb before he landed in San Francisco?

GOLD!

When President James K. Polk shared the news that gold had been discovered in California in his message to Congress on December 5, 1848, newspapers across the globe began publishing sensational reports. People all over the world who were seeking opportunity or fleeing persecution began to make their way to California.

By 1850, New York's first Jewish newspaper, *The Asmonean*, was reporting on the numbers of Jews leaving the city to travel to California. While New York was a haven from persecution for many Jews and provided strong infrastructure, communal ties, and networks, the lure of California's riches offered even more possibility.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Jewish people comprised barely two-tenths of 1 percent of the American population, but they “numbered in the thousands on ships' passenger lists”—a high percentage of those daring enough to take part in the dangerous voyage. The overwhelming majority of the Jewish people who went to California hailed from German-speaking lands in Central Europe.

At this same time, Ireland was facing extreme hunger and famine, and by 1860, Irish immigrants represented almost 10 percent of the population of California. Immigrants from Southern China also faced famine and unrest in China and came in large numbers to San Francisco. In addition, the revolutions of 1848, a series of revolts against monarchies throughout much of Europe, brought great unrest and violence to many countries, causing many more to immigrate to new lands.

Robert E. Levinson, *The Jews in the California Gold Rush* (New York, 1978), 4.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Excerpt from President Polk, State of the Union Address to Congress,
December 5, 1848

It was known that mines of the precious metals existed to a considerable extent in California at the time of its acquisition [in 1848]. Recent discoveries render it probable that these mines are more extensive and valuable than was anticipated. The accounts of the abundance of gold in that territory are of such an extraordinary character as would scarcely command belief were they not corroborated by the authentic reports of officers in the public service who have visited the mineral district and derived the facts which they detail from personal observation....

The explorations already made warrant the belief that the supply is very large and that gold is found at various places in an extensive district of country.

ANALYZE

List three things President Polk said that you think are important.

Why do you think he is telling people about gold in California?

What do you think the impact of this speech was?

If you were listening to the speech, would you want to go to California?

Why or why not?

Polk, James K. "December 5, 1848: Fourth Annual Message to Congress." Millercenter.org. <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-5-1848-fourth-annual-message-congress> (accessed December 1, 2019).

CALIFORNIA BOUND



Levi Strauss & Co. trade cards, c. 1899

THE JOURNEY TO SAN FRANCISCO

When word traveled throughout the world that gold had been discovered in California in 1848, it prompted vast numbers of people to leave their homelands in search of fortune and new beginnings. The options for this travel were limited and tenuous, and one could not be sure of safe passage to the West Coast. To embark on such a journey required a true pioneering spirit, perseverance, a sense of adventure, and an ability to handle the unexpected.

There were three main options for travel to San Francisco from the East Coast. One option was to board a ship that sailed around South America's southern tip, Cape Horn, which took approximately five to eight months. It was a long and dangerous journey—many people were concerned that the gold would be gone by the time they arrived. However, this route provided the most viable option for transporting large amounts of goods.

The second option was to cross the Isthmus of Panama, a route originally used by the Spanish as far back as the sixteenth century. A traveler on this course would journey from the East Coast, down through the Caribbean to eastern Panama, to finally arrive at the mouth of the Chagres River. There, passengers loaded into a *bungoe* (a flat-bottomed boat), which took an average of two days and two nights to cross the river. Next, passengers either walked or rented a mule for the eighteen-mile trek to Panama City, and then waited days or weeks for another ship to take them up the Pacific Ocean north to San Francisco.

By 1853, construction on the Panama Railroad had begun and Levi was able to take the train for twenty-three miles, cutting down on the time it would have taken on the *bungoe* by one day.

The Panama voyage, while only six to eight weeks—a great deal shorter than sailing around Cape Horn—was nonetheless an arduous journey. Many did not survive, whether from illness, exposure to the heat, fever, or other elements.

The third option was to travel overland across the United States from the East Coast to the West Coast. These wagon routes began mostly in Missouri, which was a crossroads for goods and transport because of its key location along the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. Missouri's landscape allowed for goods and passengers to arrive via steamship from points in the north, south, and east to help supply all the tools that caravans needed to head west. The main cross-country routes included the Oregon Trail, the Mormon Trail, the Pony Express Trail, and the California Trail. The challenges of overland travel, which

could take one to two years, included crossing mountains—like the Rocky Mountains or the Sierra Nevada mountain range—winter weather, robbery, and illness. During the course of these journeys, Native Americans who had occupied these lands for centuries were often violently attacked by many travelers going west.

For those traveling from Asia, the ocean voyage across the Pacific to San Francisco could take up to eight weeks. For those traveling from Latin America, both overland routes and ships were used to reach California.

HISTORICAL FOOTNOTE

PANAMA

Completed in 1855, the Panama Railroad was a huge step from dugout canoes and mule trails through the jungle that were barely suitable for passengers. With the building of the Panama Railroad, bulk transport became feasible with port facilities at both shores, in Colón and Panama City. This was a major achievement not only for passengers looking for a transcontinental passage to California, but in establishing a trade route for goods as well.

The railroad service continued to be profitable after the gold rush and throughout the nineteenth century, facilitating trade and determining the route of the Panama Canal, a feat of engineering completed in 1914. The Panama Canal route is still one of the most significant shipping routes worldwide.

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

You are living in New York in 1848 when you learn that gold was discovered in California. You decide to join the gold rush.

What route would you choose to get to California and why? Give three reasons.

ACTIVITY

MAPPING



Draw the compass rose (a figure used to show north, south, west, and east) on the edge of your map.

Label the following locations on your map:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> North America | <input type="checkbox"/> Caribbean Sea | <input type="checkbox"/> Bavaria |
| <input type="checkbox"/> South America | <input type="checkbox"/> China | <input type="checkbox"/> Latvia |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Europe | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Ocean | <input type="checkbox"/> New York |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asia | <input type="checkbox"/> Atlantic Ocean | <input type="checkbox"/> San Francisco |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cape Horn | <input type="checkbox"/> Panama | |

Use green dots to show the Panama route from New York, across the Isthmus of Panama, and north to San Francisco.

Use red arrows to show the Cape Horn route from New York to San Francisco.

Use blue dashes to show the overland routes from New York to San Francisco.

Use orange dashes to show the route from Asia to San Francisco.

Use purple dashes to show the route from Latin America to San Francisco.

Color the water blue and the continents yellow.

Include a key in your map.

NATIVE PEOPLES

For thousands of years, a diverse population of Native American tribes flourished in California. Prior to European settlement, an estimated 300,000 Native Americans lived in villages throughout the region. The Native American people in the Bay Area region predominantly included the Ohlone and the Coastal Miwok people, which were made up of many different tribes. By 1848, the Native American population had plummeted to 150,000 due to violence and killing, exposure to European disease, and resource depletion from the the influx of Spanish and Mexican settlers.

The California Gold Rush, from 1848–1853, prompted the largest westward migration in this country’s history. Gold-seekers came not only from the Eastern United States, but from Asia, Central and South America, the Pacific Islands, Australia, and Europe. San Francisco was the natural port of entry to reach the gold mines of the Sierra Nevada mountains. The California Gold Rush was one of the first times that people from all over the world convened in one place on such a large scale. In San Francisco, you could meet people from Chile, Australia, China, France, and England, among others.

Diverse cultures of newly arrived migrants came together with those who had been established in the region before 1847, primarily the Native Americans, but also much smaller numbers of Californios (Spanish-speaking Californians), the U.S. military, Spanish, Russian, and Mexican traders, and early prospectors.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which formally ended the Mexican-American War, gave California to the U.S. in 1848. Many American migrants who moved to California viewed this new U.S. territory as their property, and considered all other people, even those indigenous to California, “foreigners.”

Native Americans were seen as competition or barriers to access to the gold mines, and many new immigrants used violence to remove Native Americans from desirable land. The flood of immigrants continued, and many miners destroyed Native American villages. The Act for the Government Protection of Indians (a term used for Native Americans) passed in California in 1850, allowing settlers to enslave Native Americans as laborers. Many Native Americans were abducted and enslaved to be miners. Many tried to fight back or hide from being taken. The mining techniques that miners utilized also had significant impact on the environment, often redirecting waterways, filling rivers with sediment, and depleting food supplies that had been stewarded by Native Americans for centuries.

During this period, many Native communities were wiped out entirely. The impact of this westward migration—which brought with it disease, displacement, and **genocide**—was so extreme that the population of Native Americans in California declined from approximately 150,000 in 1848 to less than 30,000 by 1870, most of whom were displaced to reservations and deprived of access to their homelands. The settlement of the American West is a complex story because in the process of westward expansion and growth, Native Americans were violently attacked and dispossessed.

Today, the Bay Area is home to a large population of diverse groups of Native Americans. Much work remains to be done to teach and help people learn about Native American history and contemporary culture.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Consider how the miners impacted the land of early California.

How do you think the environmental shift affected the Native American people?

How might the Act for the Government Protection of Indians have affected the mindset of new settlers in the region?

How might the act have affected the mindset of a Native American?

What are some ways we can ensure that Native American history and culture are honored?

MERCHANTS AND MINERS

Having perfected peddling in Europe and then retail merchandising on the East Coast, many merchants who went to California, including young Levi Strauss, were prepared. With connections to families running wholesale houses back east to supply California retailers, merchants supplied goods to shops throughout the region's gold country. Meanwhile, back in New York, ships loaded with clothing, dry goods, and hardware set sail for San Francisco.

At the same time, vast number of immigrants came as **prospectors**, in search of gold and other minerals. In most cases, the miners did not fare as well as the merchants.

LOOKING CLOSELY

What do you notice about the men in the photo?

Where do you think this photograph was taken?

What type of clothing are they wearing?

What types of tools do they have? For what purpose?

What questions do you have?



ARCHIVISTS' NOTES

This photograph was taken in 1870. Note that the miners are wearing what appear to be denim pants, although this was three years before Levi Strauss began manufacturing them.

Unlike the prospectors who arrived in search of gold, merchants, such as Levi Strauss, did not intend to seek gold, but rather to sell supplies to those who did. In the early gold rush years of 1848–1850, panning for gold with simple tools was possible. Early miners may have found \$10 to \$15 worth of gold dust a day (worth \$320 to \$475 dollars in 2020). While that was actually quite a good living for the time, the cost of goods was so exorbitant that miners were left with very little profits. By 1855, the more easily accessible placer gold found along stream beds had been mostly depleted, and only bigger mining companies could access gold by using heavier equipment.

ACTIVITY

A DAY IN THE LIFE

You are a miner in 1850. It is very expensive! Head to the dry goods store to stock up. You have \$50 to purchase the goods you think you will need for a month in the mines. Choose the items you will need, and stay within your monthly budget. Then, use the internet or a grocery store to find the prices of those items today.

GOODS	1853 COST	WHAT THAT WOULD COST IN 2020 DOLLARS	WHAT THAT WOULD COST TODAY IN A GROCERY STORE
Beef (per lb.)	\$10.00	\$326.11	
Butter (per lb.)	\$20.00	\$652.23	
Cheese (per lb.)	\$25.00	\$815.28	
Coffee beans (per lb.)	\$0.15	\$4.89	
Crackers (per tin)	\$0.15	\$4.89	
Eggs (each)	\$3.00	\$97.83	
Flour (per bag)	\$13.00	\$423.95	
Rice (per lb.)	\$8.00	\$260.89	
Pair of pants	\$1.25	\$40.75	
Pair of boots	\$6.00	\$195.67	
Flannel shirt	\$1.50	\$48.92	
Blanket	\$5.00	\$163.06	
Shovel	\$36.00	\$1174.01	

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

In your opinion, what are the most important items for a miner to have?

What would you do if you did not strike gold within the first month?

POPULATION SPIKE

California qualified for statehood in 1850, only a few years after it was ceded by Mexico. The population spike brought on by the gold rush continued to rise in response to the resources California afforded ambitious settlers, such as fertile land for farming and grazing, access to ports, and a temperate climate. Indeed, the first federal census conducted in California in 1850 counted 92,597 residents; by 1860, the residents numbered 379,994—the population had more than quadrupled. By contrast, territories such as New Mexico and Arizona did not witness this quick rise of population, and only become states in 1912. It is important to note that Native Americans were not counted in the United States census until 1900.

When Levi arrived in San Francisco on March 14, 1853, he found himself in the midst of a bustling city. San Francisco had grown from 1,000 people in 1848 to over 36,000 by the end of 1852. When the world rushed to San Francisco, it became one of the most diverse places in North America.

By 1853, San Francisco had:

- 160 hotels
- 66 restaurants and coffee saloons
- 63 bakeries
- 5 public markets
- 43 private markets
- 20 bathing houses
- 15 flour and saw mills
- 18 public stables
- 19 banks
- 10 public schools
- 18 churches
- 14 fire companies
- 200 lawyers

In 1855, Levi's sister Fanny and her husband David Stern, along with their children, also made the voyage to San Francisco. As the Strauss family business expanded, bringing a brother-in-law into the firm was not only traditional, but also practical.

Levi Strauss originally set up a western outpost of J. Strauss & Brother as a wholesale dry goods business to distribute goods to retail shops throughout the region, carrying a “letter of introduction” from J. Strauss & Brother. Within a decade, Levi's business grew so much that he renamed the company to Levi Strauss & Co., as it is still called today.

ACTIVITY

POPULATION GROWTH

Visit the University of Washington's Great Migrations Project. Scroll down to the Birthplace of California Residents 1850–2017 section that utilizes data for the U.S. Census to create a visual representation. Use the decade slider to see immigration numbers to California from both countries and states in the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s. Analyze below.

<http://depts.washington.edu/moving1/California.shtml>

ANALYZE

Why do you think people came from so far away?

How do you think people communicated with each other given that they were from so many different places?

According to the graph's note, who is not included in the censuses of 1850 and 1860? Why might this be?

What challenges might the sudden increase in population bring to San Francisco?

A CITY TRANSFORMED



Rex cast iron riveter, c. 1900

AN ECONOMIC CENTER

The population growth in California created the need for economic infrastructure. Gold dust was the primary means of exchange, and people like Levi Strauss actually had scales in their stores to weigh the dust to figure out its value. Customers would use the gold dust to pay for goods. In 1854, San Francisco opened its first **mint** and set up an **assay office** where gold bars were made and shipped.

The gold rush had spurred the growth of San Francisco and California, but the discovery of a major source of silver further developed it. The 1859 silver strike in Nevada, called the Comstock Lode, produced ten times more wealth than the gold rush. This resulted in new towns springing up throughout the area, all of which required dry goods for the miners, creating new markets for Strauss. By 1869, Levi Strauss & Co. was sending goods as far afield as Montana, Oregon, Hawaii, Canada, and Mexico.

LOOKING CLOSELY

Who do you think this is?

What is he wearing?

What might you infer about this man from this photograph?

What questions do you have?

ARCHIVISTS' NOTES

During the dry summer months of 1854, Levi traveled to sell his goods. Records from 1854 show that he had customers in Auburn, Folsom, and Sacramento.

This is the first photograph taken of Levi Strauss as he was developing his wholesale business. Levi Strauss never wore blue jeans. He wore a black suit, a white shirt, a silk tie, and a top hat.

The photo dates to the late 1850s or early 1860s.



FACTORIES, WAREHOUSES, AND THE RAILROAD

The nineteenth century experienced a burst of technological innovation. The era saw the invention of the sewing machine (1846), the elevator (1853), and the typewriter (1874). With the invention of the telegraph (1844) and the electric light (1879), business began to accelerate in ways never seen before.

In 1850s San Francisco, mail was delivered by **stagecoach**. However, beginning in 1860 with the creation of the **Pony Express**, mail was delivered by horse and rider in half the time it took to arrive by stagecoach. Less than two years later, telegraph lines were extended coast-to-coast. By 1861, messages could be carried over long distances using electricity, allowing them to be delivered throughout the country year-round, regardless of weather conditions.

San Francisco was transforming from a place where goods just passed through to one where goods were manufactured. During the gold rush, the city developed an industrial sector, which included foundries (which forged iron for parts) and machine shops (that manufactured completed machines). These were first established to repair the ships coming into port, then to manufacture heavy equipment needed for large-scale mining, which was much too expensive to import. These early factories were located in the city's South of Market district in what would one day become the home of San Francisco's industrial hub.

On March 30, 1853, just two weeks after Levi first arrived in San Francisco, a shipment of goods that had taken the route around Cape Horn arrived from Levi's brothers in New York. In that very same year, there is a permanent address listed for his warehouse at 9 Sacramento Street, between Sansome and Battery streets.

San Francisco's rapid transformation now necessitated a quicker link to the rest of the United States. Underscoring the city's importance was the decision to build the first Transcontinental Railroad, a train line that connected the eastern and western United States, with the San Francisco Bay in Oakland as the final stop. Upon completion in 1869, and with new links to the eastern United States, San Francisco dominated the West Coast as the center for distribution in all four directions. This allowed California to enter a new business relationship with the rest of the country, widely distributing the goods produced in the new factories of the West. This also greatly expanded California's agricultural business, as produce could now be shipped from California via train.

With the completion of the railroad and the demand for his clothing so high, it no longer made sense for Levi to receive finished clothing and goods from his brothers in New York. Instead, by 1873, Levi had established his own factory in San Francisco's South of Market district at 415 Market Street, to manufacture products to be sold and distributed by Levi Strauss & Co.

LOOKING CLOSELY

What do you notice about the building and the environment around it?

What do you notice about the other businesses?

What questions do you have?

ARCHIVISTS' NOTES

In 1867, the company moved to a four-story warehouse at 14–16 Battery Street on the southeast corner of Pine Street, where it would remain until the earthquake of 1906.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Why would the invention of the sewing machine, electric light, elevator, typewriter, and telegraph help business accelerate?

What could the new Transcontinental Railroad mean for Levi Strauss & Co.?

Why was the decision to make the San Francisco Bay the final stop significant?



JACOB DAVIS AND THE RIVET

Jacob Davis was born Jacob Youphes in 1831, near the city of Riga, formerly in the Russian Empire, now the capital of the country of Latvia. Having learned tailoring as a teenager, a vocation known to many Jewish people from the area, he soon sought his fortune elsewhere. In 1854, Jacob left Riga for New York, arriving in San Francisco by 1856, where he changed his name and plied his trade as a tailor throughout the gold country and eventually settling in Reno, Nevada.

After a silver strike in 1868, Jacob began to specialize in making tents, wagon covers, and horse blankets. Stagecoach companies bought the wagon covers, **teamsters** bought the horse blankets, and **prospectors** bought the tents.

In 1870, Jacob needed to buy more fabric. One of his wife's cousins knew about a wholesaler named Levi Strauss & Co., and they travelled to the company headquarters on Battery Street in San Francisco to place an order. Pleased with the quality of his purchase, he continued to order goods from the company.

Jacob innovated a new technique to make seams much stronger—instead of sewing blanket straps, he began using **rivets**, permanent mechanical fasteners, to attach the blanket straps.

One day, a customer came into his shop and said that her husband was pretty rough on his trousers, and asked Jacob to make the pants as strong as possible. Using the fabric he had bought from Levi Strauss & Co., the tailor sewed up the pants, thinking about how to make them sturdier. As he recalled,

I was making horse blankets and covers for the teamsters at the time, and had used rivets for the straps in the blankets . . . Those straps were not sewed with seams—but were just riveted together. So when the pants were done—the rivets were lying on the table and the thought struck me to fasten the pockets with these rivets. I had never thought of it before.

By 1870, pants with the dark metal rivets on the pockets were worn all over Reno.

Jacob Davis affidavit, *Levi Strauss v. H. B. Eifelt, et al.*, District of California Circuit Court of the United States, Ninth Judicial Circuit, June 17, 1874.

ACTIVITY

ROLE PLAY

In groups, do a role play of the interaction between Jacob and his customers as he gets the idea for the invention of the rivet.

CHARACTERS

- Jacob Davis
- Customer who suggests sturdier pants for her husband
- Husband who tears his pants while working
- Customer 1 who thinks the rivet an ingenious idea
- Customer 2 who thinks it will not work and will just make the pants more expensive

PATENT GRANTED

Workingmen needed pants that did not have to be continually mended or replaced when torn at the seams or pockets. The riveting reinforcement helped solve these problems, making it a big improvement.

In 1871, Davis unsuccessfully tried to **patent** the process of fastening seams with a rivet. Patenting an invention could be difficult and time consuming, and the legal fees expensive. He saw an opportunity to patent his new style of pants, but he needed a partner who could provide the necessary resources to support the patenting process. On July 5, 1872, Jacob Davis sent a letter and a sample of his idea to Levi Strauss & Co.:

I have bought a great many Peces of you, hand have made it up into Pents, such as the same the sample the secratt of them Pants is the Rivits that I put in those Pockets and I found the demand so large that I cannot make them up fast enough. . . . Therefor Gentleman I wish to make you a Proposition that you should take out the Latters Patent in my name as I am the Inventor of it, the expense of it will be about \$68, all complit and for these \$68 I will give you half the right to sell all such Clothing Revited according to the Patent . . . I knew you can make a very large amount of money on it if you make up Pents the way I do.

By this time, Levi had been importing and distributing clothing and dry goods for twenty years. His retail base stretched from Montana, Nevada, Arizona, California, and the Pacific Northwest to Canada, Mexico, Hawaii, and Japan. The need for sturdy work clothing was only increasing, and manufacturing it seemed a sound financial decision—and Jacob himself said he could not meet the demand alone. Thus, within five days, Levi wrote up an agreement to send to Jacob.

By July 29, the completed patent application and samples of the riveted pants were packed up and sent to Washington. The new invention

Levi Strauss, Louis Strauss, Jonas Strauss, William Sahlein, and Jacob W. Davis, v. Henry W. King, E. W. Dewey, and William C. Browning, Complainant's Record, 2044-45. (LD 116)

was described as an “improvement in fastening seams.” Meanwhile, Jacob continued to make riveted pants for the workingmen of Reno and throughout Nevada, always ensuring that “Patent Applied For” appeared on each pair. Jacob asked Levi to secure the patent as soon as possible, as Jacob could not “supply the demand with my present system of working alone.”

Levi Strauss, Louis Strauss, Joanss Strauss, William Sahlein, and Jacob W. Davis, v. Henry W. King, E. W. Dewey, and William C. Browning, Complainant's Record, 2051.

Because of the cost of the rivets, and the additional labor time needed to apply them, the newly invented pants cost one dollar more. At \$3 (\$58 today), salesmen had to convince potential customers that pants with rivets were worth the extra dollar.

Strauss and Davis needed to resubmit the patent application with revisions a few times before they were successful. Almost a full year after the application was submitted, on May 20, 1873, Patent Number 139,121 was issued in the names of Jacob Davis and Levi Strauss & Co. of San Francisco, California. Thus marks the invention of the blue jean!

LOOKING CLOSELY

What do you notice about the image?

How would you describe the man's clothing? Does it seem familiar?

What is the purpose of this document?

Why is it important?

What questions do you have?

ARCHIVISTS' NOTES

On May 20, 1873, Patent Number 139,121 was issued in the names of Jacob W. Davis and Levi Strauss & Co. of San Francisco, California. Levi and Jacob now had the exclusive right to make and sell clothing strengthened with rivets for the next seventeen years.

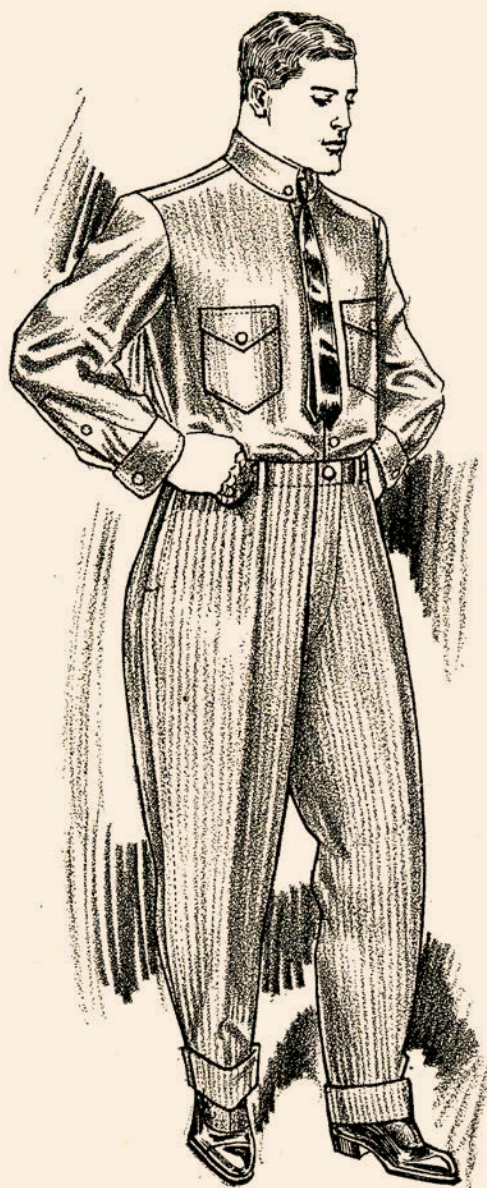
Oral tradition states that the initial batch of the newly patented riveted overalls were made by women working in their homes. Jacob may have done the riveting after the pants were sewn up, but we do not know. Before long, the seamstresses could not keep up with demand, and rather than paying people to sew at home, Levi and Jacob hired dozens of seamstresses and opened a factory at 415 Market Street. Levi was now manufacturing, not just importing, clothing and merchandise.

Jacob moved himself, his wife, and their five children to San Francisco near the factory, at 407 Folsom Street, between Fremont and First streets. He would run the riveted clothing side of the business for most of his life.



CHAPTER FOUR

CIVIC LIFE IN SAN FRANCISCO



Levi Strauss & Co. spring catalog, 1912

EARLY JEWISH IMMIGRANTS

When people around the world rushed to San Francisco, it became one of the most diverse places in North America. Compared to many larger cities, this instant city had minimal hierarchy on which to base a new social class. This resulted in many distinct stories of immigration to San Francisco, and helped define the new city's unique character.

However, the access to opportunity, while seemingly wide open in California, was not equitable. Immigrants from certain countries were not allowed access to jobs, or were unfairly taxed, and the settlers violently discriminated against Native Americans throughout California.

However, for many new residents, social mobility was possible in early San Francisco. As a result, when waves of Jewish people arrived in 1850, they were able to establish a place in society without the restrictions and anti-Semitism they faced in Europe and even the eastern United States.

The first Jewish services held on the West Coast celebrated **Rosh Hashana** on September 26, 1849 in a wood-framed tent on Jackson Street near Kearny Street. A group of thirty people or so, including one woman, responded to a notice in a local newspaper to gather for the holiday.

As early as 1849, Jews had set up benevolent societies to provide care and comfort for sick or needy Jews. By 1850, two **synagogues**, Temple Emanu-El and Sherith Israel (both still in existence), opened in the same week. Levi Strauss was a member of Temple Emanu-El and attended **Passover Seder** there in 1853. At that time, the next-nearest synagogue was 2,000 miles away in St. Louis, Missouri.

In San Francisco, Jewish people practiced Judaism in a new way while still maintaining a sense of tradition. In the eastern United States, as well as in Europe, Jewish people were usually forced to live in tightly-formed communities. In California, however, Jewish people were able to live within society in ways unavailable to them elsewhere. Liberated newcomers could now decide for themselves what it meant to be Jewish, choose their professions, and even serve in high civic positions.

San Francisco's government not only tolerated the Jewish community—they supported it. In 1858, **Steamer Day**—the most important day of the month when the ships came to port—fell on **Yom Kippur**, the most important holiday on the Jewish calendar. All sorts of hustle and bustle occurred on steamer days and the day was often described as having a carnivalesque atmosphere. In order for Jewish merchants to observe the holiday, Steamer Day was postponed that year.

By 1860, Jews in San Francisco made up 9 percent of the city's inhabitants. At the time, the entire country included only 150,000 Jews, 0.5 percent of the total population of the United States.

By 1875, San Francisco's Jewish community was the third largest in the United States.

LOOKING CLOSELY

What do you notice?

How would you describe the large building in the photo?

How might you feel entering a building like this? What purpose might the building serve?

Noticing the year this photo is from, does the building's scale or ornateness surprise you? Why or why not?

What message does this building send about its community's confidence in its new city?



ARCHIVISTS' NOTES

This is a photo of Temple Emanu-el in 1867. Built in 1864 near Union Square in the center of town, the synagogue, officially established in 1850, is the oldest synagogue west of the Mississippi. In 1926, the congregation moved to a new site where it remains today.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Why do you think there was such a large Jewish presence in San Francisco?

Why do you think so many Jews stayed in San Francisco rather than going home?

If you came to San Francisco at that time, would you keep your traditions and culture alive or would you **assimilate**? Why?

CHINESE IMMIGRANTS

Not all immigrant communities experienced welcome in the newly formed city. During the 1840s, South China was a center of social unrest, floods, famine, and widespread poverty. When the news hit in 1848 of the discovery of gold in San Francisco, many people from China looked to California, called the *Gam Saan*, which meant “Gold Mountain.” In 1852 alone, 20,000 of the 67,000 people who came to California were from China.

Chinese immigrants in San Francisco and the mining towns of California experienced deep discrimination. At the start of the gold rush, “American” miners were resentful of the other national groups represented in the mining camps. While they usually accepted non-English-speaking Europeans, they had less tolerance for Latin American and Chinese miners.

In 1850, the new California legislature adopted a Foreign Miners License Law, charging all non-U.S. citizens \$20 per month to mine. This fee proved unreasonably high. Many Chinese people left the mining camps, moving on to larger towns such as Coulterville and San Francisco. Those who moved to San Francisco soon established themselves in the city’s business community and created America’s first “Chinatown.” The State of California and the city of San Francisco created numerous laws meant to control and restrict Chinese laborers from 1850–1890.

Chinese laborers, who were excluded from other work, became integral in the building of the Transcontinental Railroad during the 1860s and came to make up 80–90 percent of the workers who toiled on the railroads. Chinese workers were incredibly industrious in this hazardous work, laying much of the tracks through the treacherous Sierra Nevada mountain range. By the 1870s, there was much unrest due to high levels of unemployment throughout the region and white labor leaders organized workers to assert pressure on companies to not hire Chinese workers. There was a great deal of anti-Chinese sentiment in California and many instances of violence against Chinese communities. Like many other iconic figures in American history, Levi Strauss was not always on the right side of history. Intimidated by anti-Chinese riots in 1877, Levi Strauss & Co. fired all of its 180 Chinese employees.

In 1882, the United States Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which closed immigration entirely to Chinese laborers. This marked the first time that the United States federal government used a law to fully exclude a group from entering the country based on ethnicity.

Not only was Chinese immigration affected, but it also became very complicated for Chinese people living in the United States to visit family in China, as they might not have been allowed to return to their homes in America.

A decade later, when the act expired and was up for renewal by Congress, Levi, along with other prominent San Francisco businessmen, denounced the exclusion policy in a telegram saying that the continued exclusion was an act of “gross injustice.” Unfortunately, the act was renewed as the Geary Act, creating further discrimination against Chinese immigrants.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Why would so many people leave China for California from 1848–1860?

Why is it important to learn about stories of discrimination in history?

What other instances of discrimination do you know of, either current or in the past?

LOOKING CLOSELY

What do you notice about the photo?

Judging from the landscape, where do you think this picture was taken?

What does the name of the building tell you?

What do you think this building was used for?

Why is it important to learn about stories of Chinese immigrants who had thriving businesses in America, alongside stories of discrimination towards Chinese immigrants?

ARCHIVISTS' NOTES

The Sun Sun Wo Store in Coulterville is the lone remnant of one of the gold rush’s largest Chinatowns.

Built in 1851, this store is named after its original owners, Mow Da Sun and his son, Sun Kow. It was the largest store in Coulterville under Chinese ownership, and it filled orders from the surrounding mines and ranches, not just the local Chinatown. The store remained in continuous operation from 1851 to 1926, and the original shelves and counters are still inside. At the rear of the building are storerooms, a blacksmith shop, and the store’s office.



WOMEN IN CALIFORNIA

According to the census, the population of California was just 4.5 percent female in 1850, as many of the early immigrant miners and merchants were single men without families. However, women from diverse continents, social statuses, and ethnicities came to California during the years of the gold rush. With very few women in the population, those who did make the journey found many opportunities. For example, food made by women was such a rarity that women were able to charge large sums of money for items such as a homemade pie.

Additionally, some of the traditional restrictions that women experienced in other places did not apply in San Francisco. By 1852, women gained the right to own property in California. This was revolutionary at the time, as only one other state (Texas) granted this right. Many women owned businesses and supported their families.

As cities across the globe industrialized, opportunities for women's employment increased. For example, On July 19, 1873, an advertisement in the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran:

Wanted—Fifty First-Class Female sewing machine operators, who can bring their own machines with them . . . at 415 Market Street . . .

Women made the first blue jeans.

LOOKING CLOSELY

What do you notice about this image?

Who are the people working? How old do you think they are?

Note the text. How are those who work there described?

What questions do you have?

ARCHIVISTS' NOTES

Men who worked in sewing factories did the support labor, such as cutting the denim, maintaining the equipment, stoking the boilers, and sweeping the floor. Women did the sewing. This flyer from 1880 shows women at work making jeans on the Levi Strauss & Co. factory floor. Women were most desirable in this line of work, as they had already mastered the sewing machine at home and could bring their own machines to the factory each day.



CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

Slavery was outlawed in California under the Compromise of 1850, but many San Franciscans supported slavery, and when the Civil War broke out between the states in 1861, the city was divided. Those in support of the Union (anti-slavery) held what was called by newspapers “The Great Union Demonstration” at the junction of Market, Post, and Montgomery streets, a site that later became known as Union Square. A Union committee of thirty-four citizens was formed, and charged each member with protecting the cause of the Union and public peace. Among these thirty-four committee members was Levi Strauss.

Giving back to the city that had given him so much was vital to Levi Strauss. He gave money to many charities, including the Hebrew Benevolent Society and the San Francisco Orphan Society, and he helped pave San Francisco’s streets. He was a benefactor for the California Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf, and he funded two dozen scholarships at the University of California, Berkeley, which are still in place today.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Read the quote by Levi Strauss from the March 30, 1887 edition of the *Daily Alta California*.

Yes sir; I want to have the city improved, and have not the slightest objection to having my taxes increased for that purpose...I am in favor of everything that can benefit San Francisco. Fix up the streets, overhaul the sewers, overhaul the Park as fast as possible, and in every way make the city attractive . . . I am entirely in sympathy with any movement to give San Francisco a vigorous and healthy boom.

ANALYZE

What do you think are the most important things for a city to have? List your top three things and explain why.

Downey, Lynn. *Levi Strauss: The Man Who Gave Blue jeans to the World*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2016. pg 189.

LOOKING CLOSELY

What do you observe happening in this photograph?

Where and when might this have been taken?

What do you know about San Francisco just from this photograph?

ARCHIVISTS' NOTES

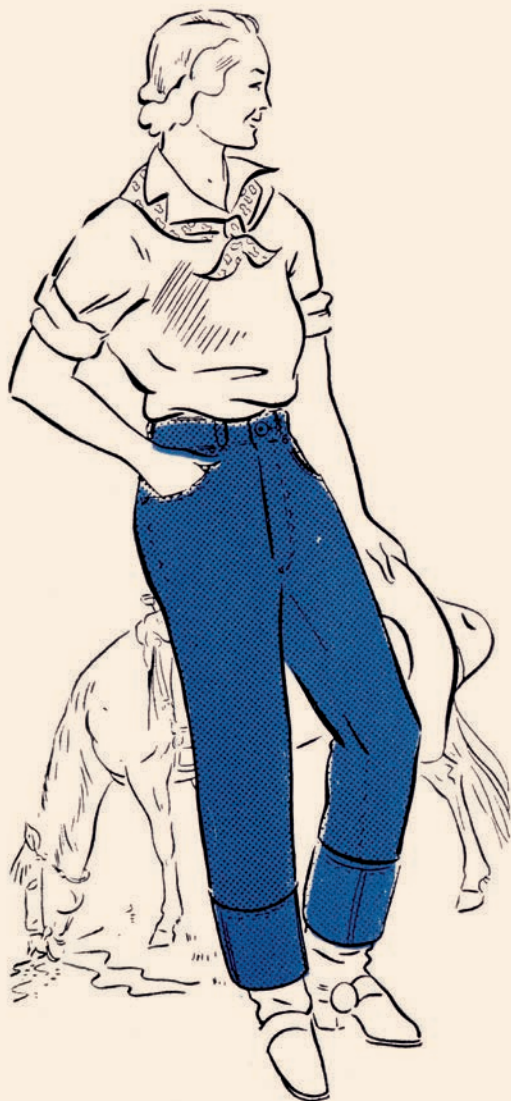
This photo was taken on Market Street in downtown San Francisco in 1908 during the Fourth of July Parade. Note the Levi Strauss & Co. advertisement painted prominently on the side of the building.

By the time this photo was taken in 1908, San Francisco had built Golden Gate Park, an enormous feat that was 20 percent larger than New York's Central Park. Carved out of sand dunes that were known as the Outside Lands, the park was in an unincorporated area west of San Francisco's then borders.

In 1873, San Francisco built its first cable car lines, three of which are still in use today.



BLUE JEANS, BRANDING, AND LEGACY



Women's jeans advertising pamphlet, date unknown

THE LOOK OF THE FIRST BLUE JEANS

In the nineteenth century, “overalls” meant sturdy pants worn by miners, cowboys, lumberjacks, and other laborers. The 1873 Levi’s® overalls (what we now know as blue jeans) were a bit baggy, had only one back pocket, and instead of belt loops, had suspender buttons. They had a button fly and a buckle at the back of the waistline, allowing them to be cinched up. Even with these distinctions, the overalls looked a lot like our blue jeans today.

The overalls were made with cotton denim, one of the most rugged woven fabrics available at the time. Levi had to source the cotton fabric from his brothers’ New York firm. Denim could be made in any color, but by far the most popular was blue made with **indigo**, the blue dye homegrown in the American South. Levi’s brother Jonas found sources for this fabric in the East to be shipped out to Levi.

The first overalls had eleven copper rivets stamped with “L.S. & Co. S.F. May 1873,” which represented the company’s initials, followed by “SF” for San Francisco, and the date of the patent. Orange thread, chosen specifically by Jacob Davis, was used to sew the overalls. The stitching on the back pocket, resembling an “M,” was most likely to help distinguish the pants from the other denim overalls on the shelf. They were called XX Overalls.

Once the patent expired in 1892, the copper rivets no longer featured the patent date. From then until today, the rivets read “L.S. & Co. S.F. Cal.” The original XX riveted overalls also received the new name, or rather number, of 501.

The pants eventually earned the name “jeans.” The word “jean” originally referred to a type of fabric similar to denim—but since the 1960s, the word jean has been adopted to describe pants made from denim fabric.

ACTIVITY

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Compare and contrast an original pair of Levi’s® from 1890 with a modern pair, looking for similarities and differences.



ACTIVITY

WHO WORE DENIM?

LOOKING CLOSELY

Examine both pictures. Answer the following questions for each.

- What do you notice?
- What type of scenery is in the picture?
- What are the people in the picture doing?

Based on these pictures, who do you think Levi Strauss & Co. overalls were intended for?

ARCHIVISTS' NOTES

Although by 1873, workingmen from California to Montana were purchasing the overalls, originally called “XX,” they were still for workingmen only, and considered a strictly western phenomenon.

These photos show miners and cowboys wearing Levi's®.

Though priced at a premium, the overalls were flying off the shelves. Levi explained the garment's popularity:

The goods were made up excellently and gave good satisfaction to all who bought them, and the demand kept on the increase . . . and they have a wide-spread reputation.



Levi Strauss, Louis Strauss, Jonas Strauss, William Sahlein, and Jacob W. Davis, v. Henry W. King, E. W. Dewey, and William C. Browning, Complainant's Record, 2020. (LD 153)

THE TWO HORSE DESIGN

In 1886, a design was added to the leather patch found on the overalls and other products. In place of the company information was now a finely drawn image of two horses wearing harnesses and attempting to pull apart a pair of riveted overalls. A visual image, or a logo, associated with the company's rugged riveted overalls could communicate the pants' strength to a potentially illiterate audience, and become recognizable so that loyal customers knew that they were buying a pair of Levi's®. The Two Horse Design is one of the longest continually used logos in the world.

LOOKING CLOSELY

What do you observe happening?

What might this image communicate to loyal customers?

Why would competition arise after the patent expired?

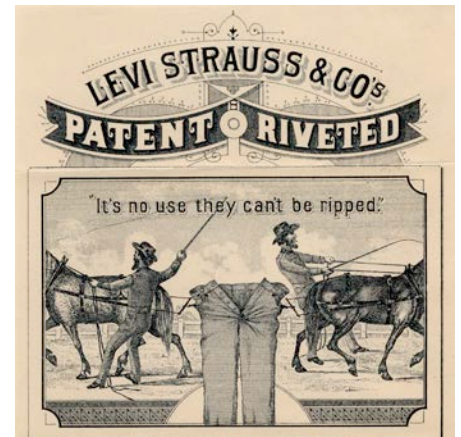
What questions do you have?

ARCHIVISTS' NOTES

A man with a whip stands next to each horse, encouraging them to tear the pants apart—obviously a futile effort. Above the men and horses is a banner saying “Copper Riveted,” with the patent date in the space below.

The Two Horse Design was quickly registered as a **trademark** and is still in use to this day.

Many westerners were illiterate or did not speak English as their first language, and a label with an image meant instant brand recognition.



LOOKING CLOSELY

What props and characters are used in this image? How do they tell a story?

Locate the Two Horse Design logo. Why is this included?

Who do you think the advertisement is geared toward?

What can you infer about the jeans just from looking at this image?

What questions do you have?

ARCHIVISTS' NOTES

This is an 1897 Levi Strauss & Co. handbill. The illustration portrays Levi Strauss hopping a fence with a dog biting him. More than just the company president, Levi Strauss was a daily staple of company business. In fact, workers in his factories speak of how he always went by Levi, never Mr. Strauss.

Advertising certainly helped sell product, and by 1876 the riveted goods were on shelves in California, Nevada, Colorado, and the territories of Utah, Montana, Idaho, Arizona, and New Mexico. In fact, the overalls were so popular that Levi's brother Jonas began to sell the pants to his New York clientele. The riveted overalls could now be found coast to coast.

Around this time, other retailers also began to fasten rivets on their clothing, infringing on the patent. Through the courts, Levi and Jacob upheld their patent in each case, securing their rights to be the sole producers of riveted clothing and goods in the entire country and beyond.



LADY LEVI'S® AND FREEDOM-ALLS

In the fall of 1934, Levi Strauss & Co. introduced the world's first jeans made exclusively for women: Lady Levi's®. Western women working on family farms and ranches had been wearing men's Levi's® for years. Levi Strauss & Co. had recognized this need early on and issued a short-run, hybrid precursor for women in 1918. These "Freedom-Alls" had a belted tunic top over matching pants. In the early 1900s, women in the United States wore skirts almost exclusively, except when engaged in sports or particularly physical work. Early women's rights advocates, including Amelia Bloomer, encouraged changing women's skirts into more functional pants-like options as early as 1851. However, Freedom-Alls were discontinued in 1919 as the market at the time proved too small to support production of the product.

Lady Levi's® came on the scene in 1934. First developed for women living in the western U.S. on farms and ranches, the pants were also advertised to women vacationing at dude ranches—working cattle or horse ranches that welcomed guests. Decades ahead of more widespread acceptance of women wearing pants as daily wear, Lady Levi's® provided a new option for women's wardrobes.

In 1935, *Vogue* magazine featured an article on the new style:

Your uniform for a dude ranch or a ranch near Reno is simple-but-severe blue jeans or Levi's, turned up at the bottom once, laundered before wearing (to prevent stiffness), cut straight and tight fitting, worn low on the hips, in the manner of your favorite dude Wrangler.

Prior to this article, most of the country only knew denim to be worn by male laborers, cowboys, and factory workers who required the sturdy material for their work. By the 1930s, the influence of the dude ranch brought jeans to women's fashion magazines and further opened the door for changes in women's fashion.

Burt Strathers. "Fashion: Boccaccio in Chaps."
Vogue 85, no. 10 (May 15, 1935): 72-73.

LOOKING CLOSELY

What do you notice?

Where do you think this is supposed to be? What tells you that?

What do you think the woman is doing?

What does the text tell you about what the jeans are for?

How is this different from Levi's® marketing in the 1800s? What might Lady Levi's® symbolize?

What questions do you have?



ARCHIVISTS' NOTES

Western women working on family farms and ranches had been wearing men's Levi's® for years when Levi Strauss & Co. recognized the need to begin its line for women's jeans in 1934.

However,

Women wearing pants—especially denim Levi's®—was considered inappropriate and unacceptable in the 1930s and most of the 1940s with few exceptions. Independent-minded western women and others who first donned jeans might even be considered a bit edgy.

Lady Levi's® were cutting-edge fashion, considering women's pants were not accepted as mainstream dress until decades later.

Levi Strauss & Co. Historian Tracey Panek

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND LEGACY

Levi Strauss died in 1902 surrounded by his family. He left his company to his four nephews, whose descendants continued to run Levi Strauss & Co. Maintaining Levi's sense of social responsibility and civic mindedness, the company has sought to uphold the ethics and ideals of its founder. The company was an early adopter of socially progressive policies in a number of ways. For example, in 1975, Levi Strauss & Co. took an important step in the functional fashion movement, launching functional jeans.

In the late 1950s, recognizing that many people with disabilities faced barriers in the task of getting dressed, American fashion designer and early innovator Helen Cookman created the Functional Fashions line. This clothing line featured high-fashion as well as everyday, stylish clothing with accessible features designed for people with disabilities.

Over the next two decades, the line included clothing collaboratively made with top designers across the country, Helen’s own designs, and other clothing already deemed functional. Helen’s own disability, as well as her direct work with individuals who shared their particular needs with her, helped her patent innovative designs for accessible clothing.

In 1975, Levi Strauss & Co. released the country’s first line of functional jeans, designed collaboratively with Helen Cookman. Widely distributed through doctors’ offices, hospitals, and rehabilitation clinics, as well as available through mail-order, the jeans’ features included full-length zips along the side seams that opened from the top or bottom, and a belt that kept the front in place when the back was unzipped. The exceptionally popular clothing staple of the blue jeans was now even more widely accessible.

Levi Strauss created a company that embodied the industrious, civic-minded, can-do spirit of San Francisco. Levi Strauss & Co. continues Levi’s legacy.

LOOKING CLOSELY

Look carefully. What do you notice about these jeans?

Why is it important to have jeans that are accessible for everyone?

ARCHIVISTS’ NOTES

The functional Levi’s® jeans included many accessible features including:

- Full-length zips in the side seams that opened from the top or bottom
- A roomy seat and easy-to-reach pockets
- Stretch denim

These jeans represent an incredibly important part of disability history and legacy, and continue to influence new generations of inclusive fashion designers.



CONCLUDING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Many laws played large parts within the history of the American West. These include the 1850 Law for the Protection of Indians, the Miner Tax of 1852, and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Each of these laws reflects the mindset of many people at that time, and all three were discriminatory.

What laws addressing equality and civil rights do you know of today? Why are these so important?

The California Gold Rush spurred a global race for resources and opportunities that had devastating impacts on many people, and particularly for Native Americans. The California Gold Rush also prompted mass immigration and the development of the city of San Francisco, alongside many innovative inventions, from the telegraph to the Transcontinental Railroad to the blue jean.

Why is it important to study history from many points of view, and not just learn the narratives that are happy?

Levi Strauss was active in supporting social institutions of San Francisco and other civic pursuits.

How are you involved in your community?

Blue jeans were invented to be durable, high-quality clothing for miners, farmers, and cowboys. Today, their use and popularity has evolved to become the most widely owned piece of clothing in the world. For many people today, blue jeans have come to represent freedom and individuality.

What do blue jeans mean to you?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Chinese Historical Society of America: Classroom materials for teaching Chinese American Exclusion/Inclusion

<https://chsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Chinese-American-Classroom-Materials-1.pdf>

California Historical Society: Classroom-ready resources for teaching California History-Social Science Framework

<https://www.teachingcalifornia.org/>

East Bay Regional Parks District: Ohlone curriculum with Bay Miwok content and introduction to Delta Yokuts

https://www.ebparks.org/activities/educators/ohlone_curriculum.htm

APPENDIX

HOW TO ANALYZE A HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH

GLOSSARY

TIMELINE

IMAGES



Levi's® advertisement, 1930s

HOW TO ANALYZE A PHOTOGRAPH

OBSERVE

Quickly scan the photo. What do you notice first?

Type of photo (check all that apply):

- Portrait
- Landscape
- Aerial/Satellite
- Action
- Architectural
- Event
- Family
- Panoramic
- Posed
- Candid
- Documentary
- Selfie
- Advertisement
- Other

Is there a caption? If so, what does it say?

QUESTION

What is going on in the photograph?

List the people, objects, and activities you see.

PEOPLE	OBJECTS	ACTIVITIES

HYPOTHESIZE

Answer the following questions as best you can. The caption, if available, may help.

Who is in the photo?

Where and when is the photo from?

What was happening in history at the time this photo was taken?

Who took this photo? Why was it taken?

List evidence from the photo or your knowledge about the photographer that led you to your conclusion.

PREDICT

What did you find out from this document/image?

What questions does it raise for you?

Where might you be able to search for more information?

GLOSSARY

Archive: a collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people

Anti-Semitism: hostility to or prejudice against Jewish people

Assay office: an office where objects made of gold, silver, or other metals are given an official mark to show how pure the metal in them is

Assimilate: to absorb the cultural traditions of a population, group, or community

Bavaria: the largest German state by land area today, comprising roughly a fifth of the total land area of Germany; it shares borders with Austria and Switzerland, and Munich and Nuremberg are the largest cities in Bavaria

Denim: the word “denim” comes from the French “serge de Nîmes,” meaning a twill fabric (whose threads run along the diagonal rather than vertical) woven in the town of Nîmes, about 450 miles south of Paris

Dry goods: fabric, thread, clothing, and related merchandise, especially as distinct from hardware and groceries

Emigrant: a person who leaves their own country in order to settle permanently in another; people are emigrants when they leave their country of origin; when they arrive at their destination, they are **immigrants**

Genocide: acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group

Indigo: a tropical plant of the pea family, widely cultivated as a source of dark blue dye

Isthmus: a narrow strip of land with sea on either side, forming a link between two larger areas of land

Jean: all-cotton twill fabric, usually in blue or black; known as a fabric for workingmen prior to the twentieth century

Mint: a unit of the Department of the Treasury responsible for manufacturing and distributing coins for the United States to conduct its trade and commerce, as well as to control the movement of gold and silver

Passover Seder: a Jewish ritual performed by a community or by multiple generations of a family, involving a retelling of the story of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt

Patent: the exclusive right granted by a government to an inventor to manufacture, use, or sell an invention for a certain number of years

Peddler: a person who sells door to door and may travel from town to town

Pony Express: a mail service delivering messages, newspapers, and mail using relays of horse-mounted riders that operated from April 1860 to October 1861 between Missouri and California

Prospector: a type of explorer specifically looking for mineral deposits

Rivet: a permanent mechanical fastener that is hammered to secure pieces together

Rosh Hashana: the Jewish New Year

Steamer Day: the most important day (or two) of the month for merchants, miners, and all manner of San Francisco residents, when ships from Panama arrived in San Francisco to ports, and merchants scurried to call in all outstanding debts, pay off their own, and send gold and orders to East Coast partners and suppliers; and letters came in for many residents eager for news from the East.

Synagogue: a building where a Jewish assembly or congregation meets for religious worship and instruction

Stagecoach: a large, closed, horse-drawn vehicle used to carry passengers and/or mail along a regular route between two places

Teamster: a driver of a team of animals

Registered Trademark: A trademark (also written as ®) is a type of intellectual property consisting of a recognizable sign, design, or expression that identifies products or services of a particular source

Yom Kippur: The Day of Atonement, the most holy day in the Jewish calendar

TIMELINE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SAN FRANCISCO AND LEVI STRAUSS

This timeline illuminates key events that helped shape San Francisco as we know it today. It also provides context for understanding how the development of Jewish life in San Francisco informs and is informed by the general history of the region.

4000 BCE

Indigenous Ohlone and Miwok peoples thrive in what is now known as the Bay Area of California.

1769

Spanish navigators José Ortega and Gaspar de Portola locate the entrance to the San Francisco Bay and claim the area for Spain.

1776

Spanish evangelists found Mission San Francisco de Asís (now Mission Dolores). The original adobe church remains the oldest intact building in San Francisco.

1812

Russian fur traders establish Fort Ross north of San Francisco. Russian Hill is named for these early settlers.

1821

Alta California, including Yerba Buena (now San Francisco) and the rest of the Bay Area, becomes a Mexican territory when Mexico gains independence from Spain.

1829

Levi (born Löb) Strauss is born in Buttenheim, Bavaria (in modern day Germany) to Rebekka and Hirsch Strauss on February 26.

1831

Jacob Davis (born Jacob Youphes) is born in the city of Riga when it was part of the Russian Empire.

1837

Levi's brother Jacob and sister Rosla emigrate to North America from Bavaria. Other Strauss siblings soon followed.

1848

Gold is discovered in Coloma, California, marking the start of the gold rush. At the same time, revolutions arise throughout Europe, with citizens demanding participatory democracy and better living conditions. Great famines occur in both Ireland and China.

1848

Levi, his mother, and his two sisters set sail for New York City to join the rest of their family. Levi begins working in his brothers' dry goods store in New York City.

1849

The first Jewish religious services are held in San Francisco.

1850

California is admitted to the United States as the thirty-first state.

1853

Levi Strauss arrives in San Francisco via the Isthmus of Panama.

1854

The San Francisco Mint opens. Within a year, the mint turns four billion dollars of raw gold into currency.

1855

Levi Strauss makes his first shipment of two million dollars in gold back to his brothers in New York.

1856

Jacob Davis arrives in California's gold country.

1858

Steamer Day is postponed in observance of Yom Kippur.

1859

A major silver strike in Nevada, known as the Comstock Lode, brings in ten times more wealth than the gold rush.

1861-1865

The American Civil War takes place.

1867

Levi Strauss & Co. moves its headquarters to 14-16 Battery Street, where it remains until the 1906 earthquake.

1869

Leland Stanford ceremoniously drives in the last spike of the Transcontinental Railroad.

1870

The boundaries of Golden Gate Park are set by the State Legislature, marking the park's inception.

1873

Levi Strauss & Co. obtains a United States patent with tailor Jacob Davis for “an improvement in fastening pocket openings” by attaching metal rivets to stress points in pants to increase their durability. This is recognized as the birth of the blue jean, now a worldwide phenomenon worn around the globe.

1873

San Francisco's first cable car railway opens on the Clay Street hill north of Market Street.

1879

San Francisco's California Electric Company, now Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) supplies customers with electricity to light their homes, the first to do so in the country.

1881

A PG&E substation is built on Mission and Third streets, which later houses The Contemporary Jewish Museum.

1882

The Chinese Exclusion Act is passed, and affects United States immigration policy for decades.

1886

Levi Strauss & Co. creates the Two Horse Design, a symbol of quality and strength, which depicts two horses attempting to pull apart a pair of Levi's® jeans and remains one of the oldest continually used trademarks in the world.

1892

Levi Strauss & Co. renames its most popular XX overalls to 501®. This name is still in use.

1902

Levi Strauss peacefully dies in his sleep at seventy-three years old. His company is passed along to his nephews.

1906

On April 18, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake centered in San Francisco destroys many of the city's buildings and much of its infrastructure. The resulting fires lead to even more devastation. The Levi Strauss & Co. warehouse at 14–16 Battery is completely destroyed along with all of the company's archives.

Support for *Levi Strauss: A History of American Style* is generously provided by Maribelle and Stephen Leavitt; Gaia Fund; John Pritzker Family Fund; Lisa and Douglas Goldman Fund; Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund; Mimi and Peter Haas Fund; The David Berg Foundation; John & Marcia Goldman Foundation; Suzanne and Elliott Felson; Colleen and Robert D. Haas; Dana Corvin and Harris Weinberg, in honor of Paulette Meyer and David Friedman, and Catherine and James Koshland; Kendra and Tom Kasten, in honor of Robert D. Haas; Michael Righi; Dorothy R. Saxe; David Saxe; Marilyn and Murry Waldman; and Rosanne and Al Levitt.

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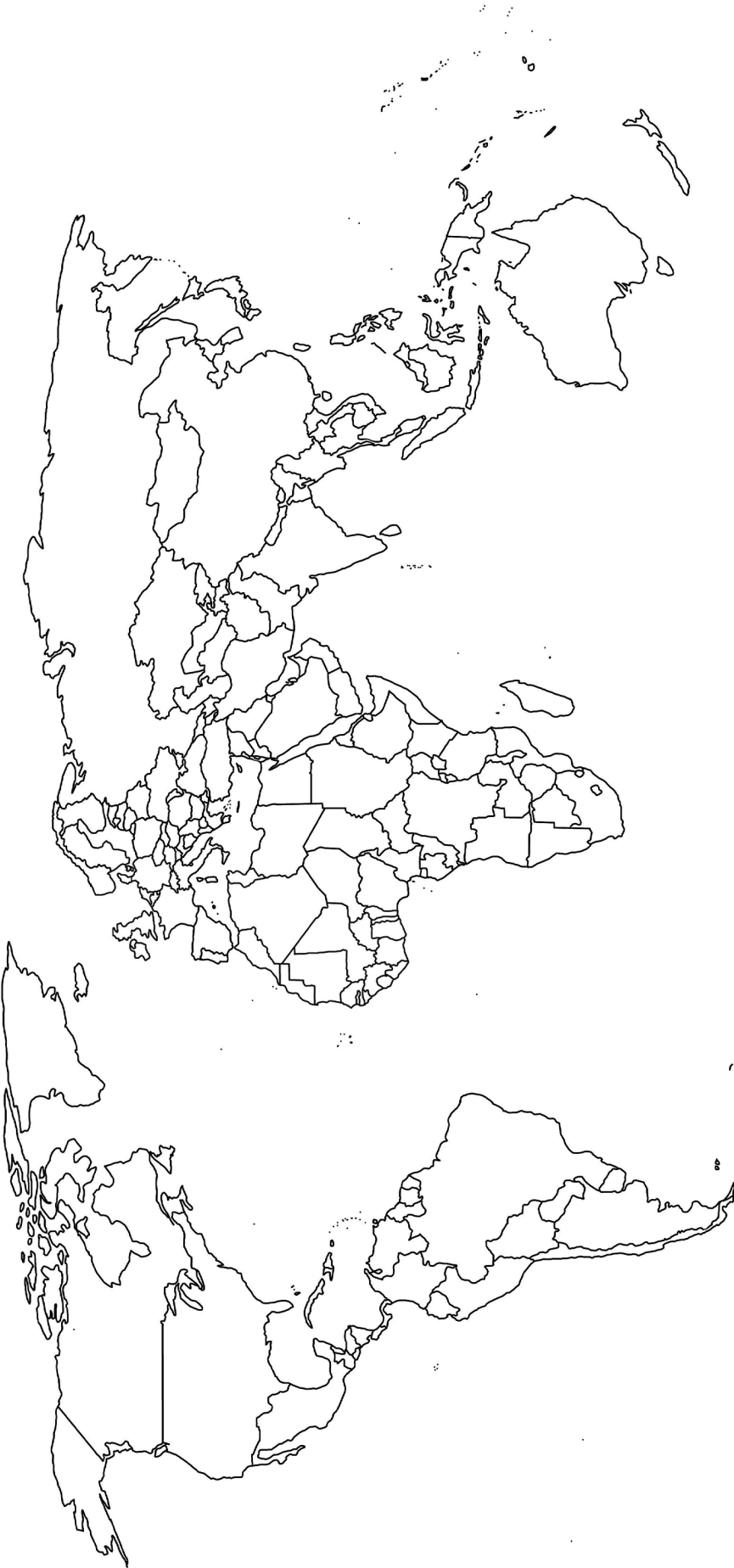


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IMAGES





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J. W. DAVIS.
Fastening Pocket-Openings.

No. 139,121.

Patented May 20, 1873.



Fig. 1.

Witnesses

J. L. Bone
C. H. Richardson

Inventor

Jacob W. Davis
per *Amos G. Allen*



233. Jewish Synagogue, Congregation Emanu-El,
Sutter street, San Francisco.

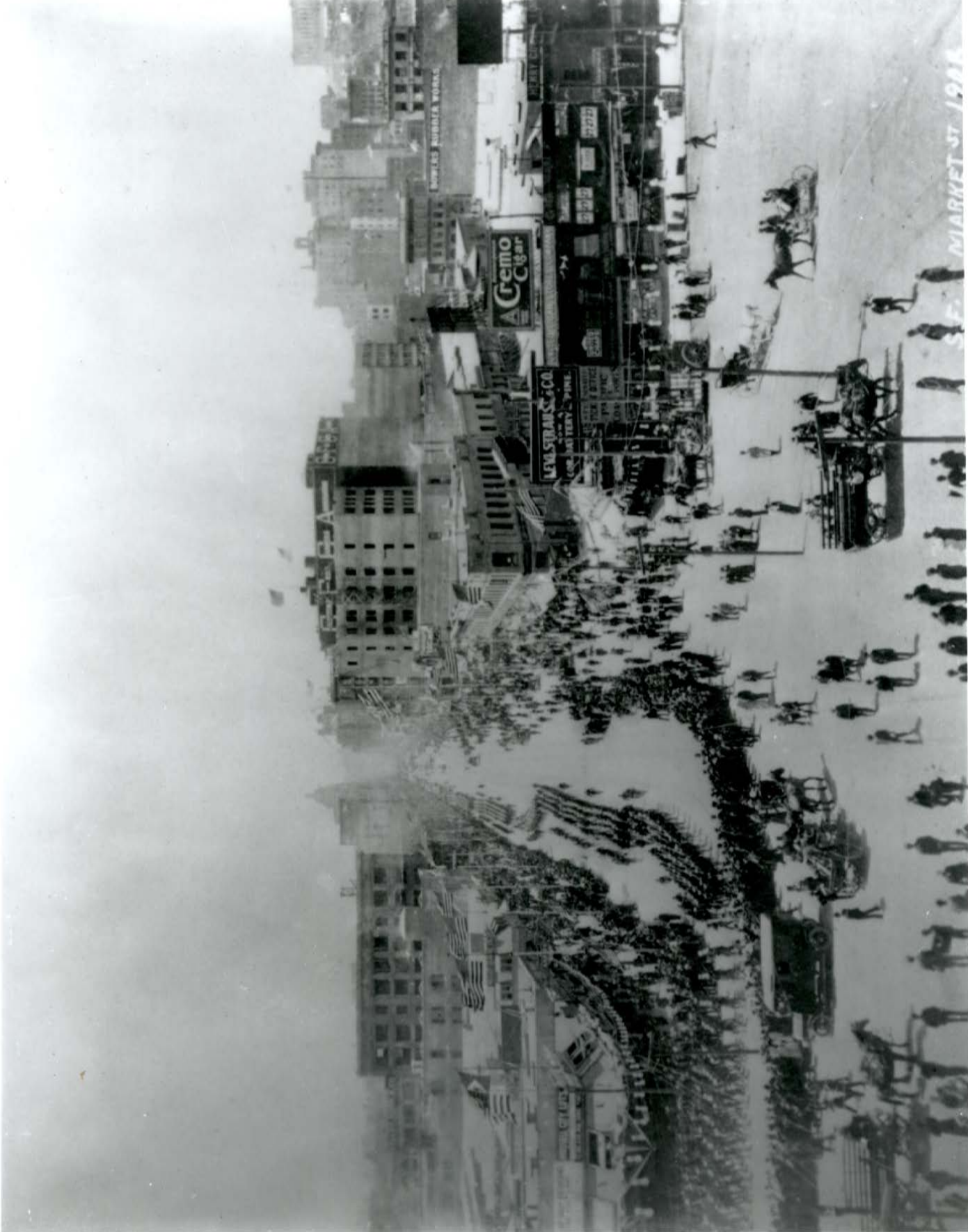


HOME INDUSTRY



SECTION OF
LEVI STRAUSS & CO'S OVERALL FACTORY.
THIS FACTORY GIVES EMPLOYMENT TO OVER 500 GIRLS.

IMAGES



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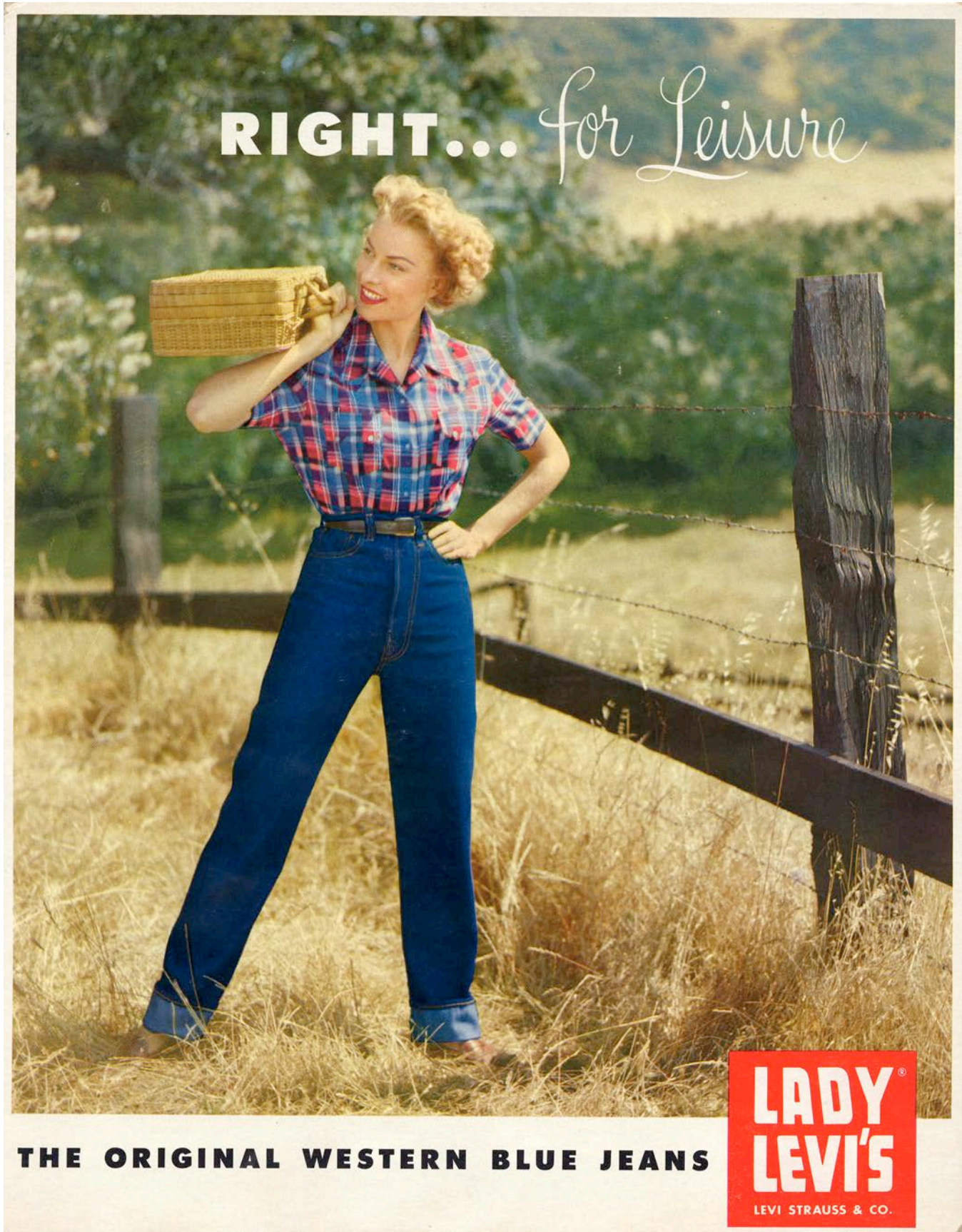


2349. Montana Mine.
Photo and copyright by Grabill, 1889.









RIGHT... *for Leisure*

THE ORIGINAL WESTERN BLUE JEANS

LADY LEVI'S
LEVI STRAUSS & CO.

IMAGES

