

HOW DID JEANS CONQUER THE WORLD?

The surprising story behind your favorite pants BY TOD OLSON

It was 1849, and Americans were dreaming of gold. A lucky man had found chunks of it sparkling in a California stream. Word was spreading fast.

All across the country, people left their homes. Farmers dropped their plows in the fields. Preachers closed up their churches. Seamen deserted their ships.

In just a year, nearly 100,000 people traveled west with a single goal: Get rich quick! The gold rush was on.

But the man who really struck it rich wasn't a miner

looking for gold. He was the man who made the miners' pants.

A Strong Idea

Levi Strauss grew up in Germany and arrived in San Francisco in 1853. He was 24 years old. He made money selling clothes and other goods to miners.

In 1873, Strauss got a letter from a tailor named Jacob Davis. Davis's customers were miners. Their pants took a beating all day. The pockets wore out quickly. All their gold could be lost in a second.



Levi Strauss

Davis had an idea. He fastened the pockets with metal bolts known as rivets—and the pants

were an instant hit. "I cannot make them up fast enough," he told Strauss. But Davis needed a partner with money to really get the business going.

Strauss agreed right away. He made the pants out of a sturdy cotton called denim. He dyed them blue so they wouldn't show the dirt. And pretty soon, workers all over the West were wearing Levi's "waist overalls."