



## Levi Strauss: The Man Who Gave Blue Jeans to the World

**Lynn Downey**

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Denim pants have never been so interesting as in Lynn Downey's new biography of the very man who birthed blue jeans. *Levi Strauss* is a fresh, in-depth, groundbreaking look at an American icon.

The first official historian for Levi Strauss & Co., Downey has had access to company records other biographers could only dream of, though many of those records were destroyed by earthquake and fire in the early days of San Francisco. Still, her comprehensive research has produced a full, true-to-life account of Levi Strauss that sometimes contradicts the company's own mythology surrounding its founder.

From the first chapter on, the prose is accessible, leanly descriptive, and flows at a nice narrative clip. Downey writes as if narrating a novel and provides historical detail from the point of view of Strauss himself. But as much as Downey relishes the minutiae of time and place, her real genius lies in the larger macro histories she weaves together in a complex tapestry. For example, she explores Jewish Bavaria extensively, especially the discriminatory laws that caused Jews to emigrate to America in the nineteenth century. The California Gold Rush also plays a crucial role in the biography.

Even if Strauss's transition from distributing dry goods to manufacturing blue jeans was in fact not as capricious or entertaining as previously thought, *Levi Strauss* reveals the inspiring story of a man who ultimately transformed modern fashion. It is a quintessential immigrant story with fascinating insights into American history.

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