

Humzah Butt

Jeans: The Old vs The New

As the world revolves, there are a lot of changes that happens in the world. For example, in terms of technology, there are a lot of improvements already. Back then, for example, features of mobile phones were only call and text. But more ideas have been developed and people have started to think about how to improve some things so that they can attract more consumers. The result is there are now more, in this case, high-tech phones with carious incredible features such as access to social media, hi-quality camera's ability to upload to and download from the Internet, e-readers, and video calls for quicker and easier communication.

In the world of fashion, there is denim. It is one of the world's oldest fabrics, and has been modified and remodeled to go with the latest fashion trends. The first ones who wore this fabric are workers in the California Gold Rush era, designed by Jacob Davis because of its sturdy material that withstood the harsh working conditions. Not just them, even sailors from Italy use this material too as their sailing uniform. Then, it started appearing as an actor's apparel, and that's when denim started to become one of a fashion item. People started wearing jeans as part of their daily apparel and even adding their own ideas, such as studs and coloring it with different shades of denim. It doesn't only stop around that era, but today, they are seen everywhere and has become a major clothing piece for almost all of the age groups. As a reference, we can see young children already wears jeans as part of their clothing, the teenagers added jeans to their wardrobe, and even for the seniors, they consider jeans as a simple and comfortable clothing pieces.

The Early Days of Denim and Jeans

Most jeans are blue, while some are dark, looking similar to black. The blue color is from the indigo plant, which produces a dark blue

extract for the clothing. Before indigo was found in them, *Isatis tinctoria*, commonly known as woad—which is also the moniker of the blue dye obtained from the plant—was used for coloring. The flowering plant, however, yields less apparent blue color compared to indigo.

The extraction of woad began with the chopping of woad leaves into a horse-driven mill, which then made into balls by hand and left to dry afterwards in special drying sheds for about four weeks until they were hardened. The dried balls then underwent a procedure called couching, where the balls were crumbled into powder, sprinkled with water and allowed to ferment. When the couched woad was dry, it was packed into barrels ready to be used by the dyer. The dyer poured hot water onto the couched woad in the vat. This mixture would be allowed to ferment for three days before the dye bath was ready, and cloth was wetted before dipped into the vat.

Jeans in the beginning of the 20th century had adopted a kind of anti-fashion- a pointed statement that goes against the fashion norm and says: " I am different and especially not like you" - by a group of artists in the Santa Fe area. Basically, the smart individuals connected to wearing jeans as a way of identifying their own group identity and individual status. They were identifying themselves with the bleakness, the openness of the blue-collar laborer and were putting themselves as a part of the Western scene. They also adopted a unisex appear.

In the early 1900's, these individuals continued to wear jeans, but they were also showing trying to showcase in the fashion world. Levi's top executives began supporting the individuals who were under the then recently coveted "dude ranch" vacations to outfit them with jeans or waist overalls and then the apparel became more accessible for the first time in New York City. In April 1935, Levi Strauss & Co. started running advertising in Vogue Magazine: "true Western chic was invented by cowboys". This advertising made the fashionable clients more confident to take on this particular kind of

lifestyle by wearing jeans.

There is one event that has a very big role in the world of denim. When Mexico owned California, its government feared American immigration and rarely gave land to the foreigners. But John Sutter, a Swiss immigrant, was one exception. Sutter had visited the Mexican governor in 1839. In 1848, he sent a carpenter named James Marshall to build a sawmill on the nearby river, called American River. One day Marshall inspected the canal that brought water to Sutter's Mill. He later said, "My eye was caught by a glimpse of something shining... I reached my hand down and picked it up; it made my heart thump for I felt certain it was gold." Because of that discovery, from all over California, people raced to the American River, which started the California gold rush.

The miners looked for gold in the surface dirt of riverbanks. They have to spend long hours every day and this habit makes their regular clothes easily torn because the material that built up their clothes can't withstand the condition of the dirt on the riverbanks. This leads up to miners looking for something stronger, and can face up the condition in the riverbanks. One of the wives of the miners came to Jacob Davis—a tailor at that time whose business failed rather quickly—requested pants that can be worn by her husband to be able to withstand the condition in the mine or riverbanks. He started to design the pants using materials from LS&CO, one of the largest wholesalers in San Francisco, which was owned by an Eastern European immigrant named Levi Strauss. The material that he got from Levi Strauss is called denim, a blue cotton-based fabric, which is strong enough to withstand the condition of the mine or riverbanks.

After all the pieces of the pants were sewn together, he pondered on how he could prevent them from tearing at the pockets. He thought about rivets and used them to fasten the pockets. Because of that great invention, workers and miners started to get themselves a pair, which was well known as "waist-overalls" by the miners. Within 18

months, he had sold over 200 pairs of the pants.

He then thought of getting a patent protection, to keep his design original. But the patent fee was quite high, and he can't afford to pay for it, so he asked for help from Levi Strauss, to pay for his patent fee and so the money that he got from selling the pants will be shared together. Several months later, they got the patent of "improvement in fastening pocket-openings". Besides being used by workers in the mine, there are also Genose sailors, a group of sailors from Italy, who use this uniform for their sailing purposes. They called it 'Dungarees', and originate from the Hindi word dungri, meaning a type of coarse, sturdy cloth, which uses denim as its base fabric.

The Start of Denim and Jean Popularity

The Genose sailors once travelled to India, and found the best cotton to make their sailing uniform. They then create their uniform with cotton as a base fabric. Cotton is a plant that produces white fibers in its seed case, and when the seeds are removed, the white fibers can be combed and twisted into thread and woven into cloth. They use this because of the heap amount of cotton in India, and also because it is easily washable and comfortable. They also use denim fabric, to make their sailing uniform strong and durable that will definitely be sturdy enough to withstand the worst possible condition that sailors might face. Because India has the best quality for *Indigofera tinctoria* plant and cotton, a lot of denim was produced in India. It was not some kind of daily apparel in India, but was all part of the costume for the films. Almost all of the actors and actresses wore jeans– denim in pants form–in their movies, or even at their movie premieres.

While in America, people were also very hyped about denim. At one time, Marlon Brando, an American actor who is famous for his Oscar-winning performances in *On the Waterfront*, wore jeans like the cowboys. The cowboys wear denim because it protects them and durable enough to handle the job of a cowboy. When James Dean, who was also an American actor who is famous for his role in *Rebel*

without a Cause, is getting involved in the world of jeans by using a pair of Levis 501 Riders jeans, every teenager at that time wanted to get themselves a pair of jeans.

Along with rock 'n' roll star Eddie Cochran, it was James Dean more than anyone else who made denim jeans such a potent symbol of rebellion. James Dean wore the kind of jeans that every child wanted, but none could get. The jeans, like Dean himself, only really existed through the lens. He had created cinema's benchmarks of teenage coolness, even if it was only an illusion. The one-dimensional association continued for another decade before jeans became increasingly exaggerated in style and cut. The swinging '60s led to a jeans explosion reaching into shocking seventies, which ensured their adaption as a way of life for everyone, not just teenagers.

Starting from the year of 1960 to 1980, people started to personalize their own pair of jeans. It was also the start of the flower power generation—a slogan during that time as a symbol to non-violent ideology, which later became generalized as a hipster and bohemian style. The teenagers who were influenced with James Dean's jeans style, personalize their own jeans by adding some rhinestones, or stonewash effect to add some fresh look.

Another trend of denim that started to become popular was 'double denim', meaning to wear denim as a top, followed by jeans. To make it more 'denim-licious', the pockets of a denim top were sometimes designed to match the back pocket of jeans, and besides that, designers also add some highlight by putting different shade of denim at some places such as the knee or the elbow. If not, they usually combine it with leather.

Not just that, Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake, who was an item back in 2001, showed up at the 2001 American Music Awards in coordinated denim outfits. They were wearing all custom-made clothes in denim, and was said to be one of Hollywood's worst

red-carpet outfits. They still rocked it out, anyway.

21st Century Denim and Jeans (DISTRESSED) and Its Influences on the Fashion World

Denim has made a comeback in recent years and in every possible form. It has been remodeled in such amazing ways so that it could fit into today's fashion trends. Examples of today's denim clothing that range from shorts to caps. Denim has come a long way since its quiet beginnings in the 19th century. Jeans went from being blue and straight bootcut to now being distressed and having zippers on the slit of the bottom cuffs of the jeans. Jerry Lorenzo's Fear Of God made distressed jeans the new fashion in today's generation of streetwear. Besides all the clothing, people nowadays are getting more creative in inventing new stuff that uses denim or looks like they're made from denim, judging from increase in the sales of denim in the past few years. There are a lot of new inventions that is made from denim, from handbags to sofas.

Denim is universal; everyone from any generation can freely wear denim in any occasion. It's just a matter of being able to mix-and-match it with other clothing pieces to suit the occasion. Jeans are also versatile. You can pair jeans with almost anything. You can either bring out a rebellious look with a rider jacket, or you can just play it safe with dark raw denim and blazer to attend a casual meeting. There are limitless possibilities.

Levi's VS FOG

Levi's and Co

Levi's and Co form the biggest group in the denim industry as the first jeans' material was from Levi's and Co, which was first invented during the Gold Rush. Since then, they have produced a lot of jeans, and starting from the uniform for the miners. Levi's and Co today is commonly known as "Levi's", and it has evolved into one of the top denim brands in the world, and is the world's favorite. They have invented a lot of styles that can easily match the body shapes, especially the women with the Levi Curve ID program. It classifies the body shapes into three main styles as seen in the illustration below.

Fear of God

Fear of God is Streetwear's most coveted high-end brands as of right now. Jerry Lorenzo start the company in 2014 and introduced jeans with zippers on the leg opening which now has become the must have in every hypebeast closet. His jeans range anywhere from 560-1000 dollars and all of them are destroyed (distressed to the fullest). Social Media has made Fear of God become a successful brand due to his celebrity friends ***cough* Kanye West *cough***

Denim is INTERNATIONAL

Denim has played a big part in the growth of Indonesia's fashion trends. A lot of people are wearing jeans everywhere, in dark blue or light blue color. It has become one of the main fashion items in Indonesia because of its casual and versatile feature that makes it easy to pair with anything for any occasion. Indonesia has a lot of traditional clothes and one of them is Kebaya. The women usually wear Kebaya to attend formal occasions such as weddings. Nowadays, they like to combine Kebaya with jeans, and it already considered 'semi-formal', so it also proves the theory that jeans is

universal.

Denim from Japan has a reputation among denim enthusiasts as being the best in the world and for good reason. While it doesn't have nearly as long of a history, Japanese denim is known for its premium construction and the skilled, artisanal craft required to make it. In the 1960's, vintage clothing and the general American culture intrigued the Japanese youth so much that they start buying American jeans and putting their own twist on them. The high demand combined with the Japanese fascination led to the jeans made from Japanese denim to take off. Brands like Ksubi and Needles have become prominent in today's fashion world due to their jeans made from Japanese denim.

Jeans are simple, non-intellectual stuff, but it abounds in dualities. It ages gracefully, yet signifies an eternal bond with youthfulness. It glories in its ubiquity, but it looks different on everyone who wears it. It has a big impact on the fashion trends today, and has never been considered outdated. What makes it last in the industry is its versatile fabric that can be remodeled and modified to follow the fashion trend, which prevents people from getting bored with it. Even though there are other eye-catching apparel, somehow people tend to choose jeans because of their uniqueness and chameleon-like quality to blend in in any occasion, such as a casual meet-up with friends, or even to semi-formal occasion such as a birthday party, you can just put on a nice top with some accessories to make it more blinglicious.

Jeans is not just apparel, but has become a must-have item. Today, a lot of denim-based products are not just apparel, but also other things such as handbags, carpet, and even a sofa. (elaborate more). In conclusion, denim does have a very big impact on the world, especially in the fashion industry. Almost the entire garment store has a denim product on sale, and it keeps on varying. People keep on inventing new ideas to bring out fresh denim products so that the fabric is up to date.

Bibliography

- Polkki, Thomas. "The California Gold Rush." Prezi.com, 10 Mar. 2015, prezi.com/lvkrn_5_r7w/chapter-13-section-4-the-california-gold-rush/.
- Keachie, Jane. "Distressed Denim: a History." The newspaper, 18 Dec. 2013, www.thenewspaper.ca/the-arts/distressed-denim-history.
- Espinoza, Joshua. "Fear of God Founder Jerry Lorenzo Discusses His Brand's Origins and Signature Aesthetic." Complex, Complex, 20 Oct. 2016, www.complex.com/style/2014/11/fear-of-god-founder-jerry-lorenzo-discusses-his-brands-inception-inspiration.
- Cardiner, Brock. "Japanese Denim: A History of the World's Best Denim." Highsnobiety, Highsnobiety, 18 Nov. 2012, www.highsnobiety.com/2012/11/16/japanese-denim-a-history-of-the-worlds-best-denim/.
- Person. "Jeans." LoveToKnow, LoveToKnow Corp, 23 Mar. 2015, fashion-history.lovetoknow.com/clothing-types-styles/jeans.
- "Levi Strauss." Biography.com, A&E Networks Television, 3 Oct. 2014, www.biography.com/people/levi-strauss-9496989.