

Leon Godchaux's trek from an illiterate, penniless Jewish immigrant to the "sugar king of the South" began with an insult. In 1837, the 13-year-old Godchaux arrived in New Orleans from the Alsace-Lorraine region of France and began peddling needles, thread and other dry goods at plantations up and down the Mississippi River.

Legend has it that he was chased away from one of the first plantations he visited, in the town of Bonnet Carre, with this angry admonition from a would-be client: "This town is reserved for white people!" The legend also says that when he came back 13 years later with enough money to buy the whole town, Godchaux remembered that rude treatment and decided to change the town's name to Reserve.

Godchaux had already established the Leon Godchaux Clothing Co. on Canal Street at age 21, a department store that would anchor the downtown shopping district for almost a century. After buying farm land in St. John the Baptist Parish, Godchaux would go on to build a sugar empire, with a network of 12 plantations across southeast Louisiana.

Godchaux set up in Reserve what would become the largest sugar mill in the United States, creating a true company town. Narrow-gauge trains powered by small, efficient locomotives brought cane from as far as Raceland to the central plant. Three years before his death, Godchaux owned 30,000 acres of sugar cane fields and produced more than 27 million pounds of refined white sugar a year.

Hammer, David. "Leon Godchaux" The Times-Picayune, New Orleans, LA; February 02, 2012

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GRAND OPENING OF THE SEASON

Fall and Winter Styles,

— AT —

Godchaux's,

81, 83 - Canal street - 81, 83

NEW ORLEANS.

Our departments are now filled with a large stock of Fine and Medium CLOTHING, FURNISHING GOODS and HATS, for men's, youths', boys' and children's wear.

I will offer the Best Bargains to be found in the city.

**STYLES THE MOST FASHIONABLE.
WORKMANSHIP THE BEST.
SATISFACTION GUARANTEED.**

LEON GODCHAUX,

81 and 83 Canal street.

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A Godchaux's ad from 1878.
Many ads, from clothiers especially, ran with a catchy slogan but rarely with prices.

175 years of history

- [New Orleans through the years, as covered by The Times-Picayune](#)



Godchaux sugar refinery, Reserve, St. John the Baptist Parish, Louisiana

Contributor Names - Johnston, Frances Benjamin, 1864-1952, photographer

Created / Published - 1938.

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