accept whiteness as their defining characteristic. Landless Europeans' only real
similarity to the elite was their European ancestry itself, so that ancestry had to be
given real significance: European ancestry was identified with upward mobility
and the right to use the labor of the non-eligible in their upward climb. No one
land at that time was the source of upward mobility, land had to be made avail-
able, if only to a few.

Meanwhile, Thomas Jefferson advocated the establishment of a solid white
Anglo-Saxon common class of small farmers, who, as property owners, would ac-
quire a vested interest in law and order and reject class conflict with the elite.
These small farmers would, by upholding "law and order," support and sometimes
administer the legal mechanisms—jails, workhouses and poorhouses, and vag-
ganey laws—that would control other Whites who would remain a landless labor
force. They would support the legal and illegal mechanisms controlling Native
Americans, Africans, and poor Whites, becoming a buffer class between the elite
and those they most exploited, disguising the elite's continuing grip on power and
wealth.

The Psychological Wage

The initial construction of whiteness had been based on a material benefit for
Whites: land, or the apparently realistic hope of land. By the 1830s and 1840s,
most families identified by their European descent had had several generations of
believing their whiteness was real. But in material benefit had faded. Many Whites
were poor, selling their labor either as farm renters or as industrial workers, and
they feared wage slavery, no longer certain they were much freer than slaves.13 But
this time, in contrast, the elite had no material benefits they were willing to
part with. Nor were employers willing to raise wages. Instead, politicians and elites
emphasized whiteness as a benefit in itself.

The work of particular white intellectuals, who underscored the already exist-
ing belief in white superiority and the worries about white slavery, was funded by
elites and published in elite-owned printing houses.14 These intellectuals provided
fodder for newspaper discussions, speeches, scientific articles, novels, sermons,
songs, and blackface minstrel shows in which white superiority was praised as if
whiteness in and of itself was naturally a benefit, despite its lack of material advant-
age. This sense of superiority allowed struggling northern Whites to look down
their nose at free Blacks and at recent immigrants, particularly the Irish. This ver-
sion of whiteness was supposed to wake up for them otherwise difficult situation,
providing them with a "psychological wage" instead of cash—a bit like being em-
ployee of the month and given a special parking place instead of a raise.

Many Whites bought into the psychological wage, expressing their superior-
ity over non-Whites and defining them, rather than the capitalists, as the
enemy. They focused, often with trade union help, on excluding Blacks and im-