migrants from skilled trades and better-paying jobs. Employers cooperated in confining Blacks and immigrants to manual labor and domestic work, making a clear definition of the work suitable for white men.13 Native white men began shifting away from defining themselves by their landowning freedom and independence. Instead they accepted their dependence on capitalists and the control employers exercised over their lives, and began to defend themselves by their class position as skilled "mechanics" working for better wages under better working conditions than other people. They became proud of their productivity, which grew with the growing efficiency of industrial technology, and began using it to define whiteness—and manhood. The ethic of individual hard work gained far wider currency. Successful competition in the labor marketplace gradually became a mark of manhood, and "white man's work" became the defining characteristic of whiteness.14 Freedom was equated with the right to own and sell your own labor, as opposed to slavery, which allowed neither right. Independence was now defined not only by property ownership but also by possession of skill and tools that allowed wage-earning men to acquire status as a head of household controlling dependents.15

This redefinition of whiteness was built as much on changing gender as on changing class relationships.16 Many native white men and women, including workers, journalists, scientists, and politicians, began questioning married women from working for wages, claiming that true women served only their own families. Despite this claim—the veil of domesticity, or of true womanhood—many wives of working class men actually did work outside the home. They were less likely to do so in those cases where native men were able, through strikes and the exclusions of women, immigrants, and free Blacks, to create an artificial labor shortage. Such shortages gave native working class men the leverage to force employers to pay them enough to afford a non-earning wife. Women in the families of such men frequently did "stay home" and frequently helped to promote the idea that people who couldn't do the same were genetically or racially or culturally inferior.

But native Whites whose wages actually weren't sufficient struggled on in poverty. If a native woman worked for wages, particularly in a factory, the family lost status. Many female factory workers were new immigrants rather than native Whites. Many had no husband or had husbands whose wages, when they could get work, came nowhere near supporting a family.17 It is no wonder immigrant women weren't particularly "domestic." Such families didn't meet the cultural requirements for white privilege—male "productivity" in "white man's work" and dependent female "domesticity." These supposed white virtues became a blunderbuss with which to defend white privilege and to deny it to not-quite-Whites and not-Whites, helping to construct a new working class hierarchy. This new hierarchy reserved managerial and skilled jobs for "productive" native Whites. So, for the price of reserving better jobs for some native Whites, the capitalist class gained native white consent to their own loss of independence and to keeping most of the working class in abysmally low wages.
In the South, where there was less industry, the psychological wage slowly developed an additional role. It was used not only to gain consent to oppressive industrial relations, but also to convince poor farming Whites to support Southern elites in their conflict with Northern elites. Du Bois points out that by the Civil War

... it became the fashion to put the disfavored and poor white man on the back and tell him after all he was white and that he and the planter had a common object in keeping the white man superior. This view increased bitterness and relentless hatred, and after the war it became a chief ingredient in the division of the working class in the Southern States.21

REFERENCES


4. Brown, Good Wives, pays particular attention to control of women’s bodies and status in producing slavery and race (see esp. p. 131, 139–35, 166; also see Allen, Invention, vol. II, 128, 35, 146–7, 17–58; Bennett, Shaping of Black America, 75.

5. For this section see Bennett, Shaping of Black America, 72; Edmund Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1975), 311–3; Allen, Invention, vol. II, 249–53.


8. Allen, Invention, vol. II, 162, 248–53; emphasizes that elites invented white supremacy to protect their own interests, although working-class Whites did much of the “dirty work” of oppression.


10. The quote is from Allen, Invention, vol. II, 346, citing a contemporary traveler.


45. Dau Bois points out that by the mid-1860s, the psychological wage became only to gain consent to oppressive poor farming Whites to support their growing families. His work on class, race, and gender is deeply indebted to previous work. See, for example, David Eltis, *The Rise of the English Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).


49. On the role of labor in the economy, see, for example, Richard D. Sutch, *The Economy of the South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).


51. On the role of the labor movement in the economy, see, for example, Richard D. Sutch, *The Economy of the South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).