

The American Civil War Considered as a Bourgeois Revolution

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The discussion of the American Civil War as a bourgeois revolution, reopened by John Ashworth's recent work, needs to be based on a more explicit conceptualisation of what the category does, and does not, involve. This essay offers one such conceptualisation. It then deals with two key issues raised by the process of bourgeois revolution in the United States: the relationship between the War of Independence and the Civil War, and whether the nature of the South made conflict unavoidable. It then argues that the American Revolution is unique for two reasons: the non-feudal nature of Southern society and the fact that the Northern industrial bourgeoisie, unlike their European contemporaries, were still prepared to behave in a revolutionary way.

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