14th Annual Lincoln Legacy Lectures
Lincoln and Reconstruction: America’s Struggle for Equality

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“Reconstruction as a Bourgeois Revolution”

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Synopsis

From W.E.B. Du Bois to Eric Foner, historians on the Left have presented Reconstruction as an “unfinished revolution” – a missed opportunity for an oppressed class to rise up and establish a communal society on the ruins of the defeated Confederacy and to link arms with the rising industrial proletariat of the capitalist North. All the evidence, however, is that Reconstruction was a “bourgeois revolution” – an attempt to plant a Northern, capitalist society in the Confederacy – and its defeat was due to Southern Romantics and their Northern Jacksonian allies, re-establishing a feudal economy on the backs of both poor white and black labor.