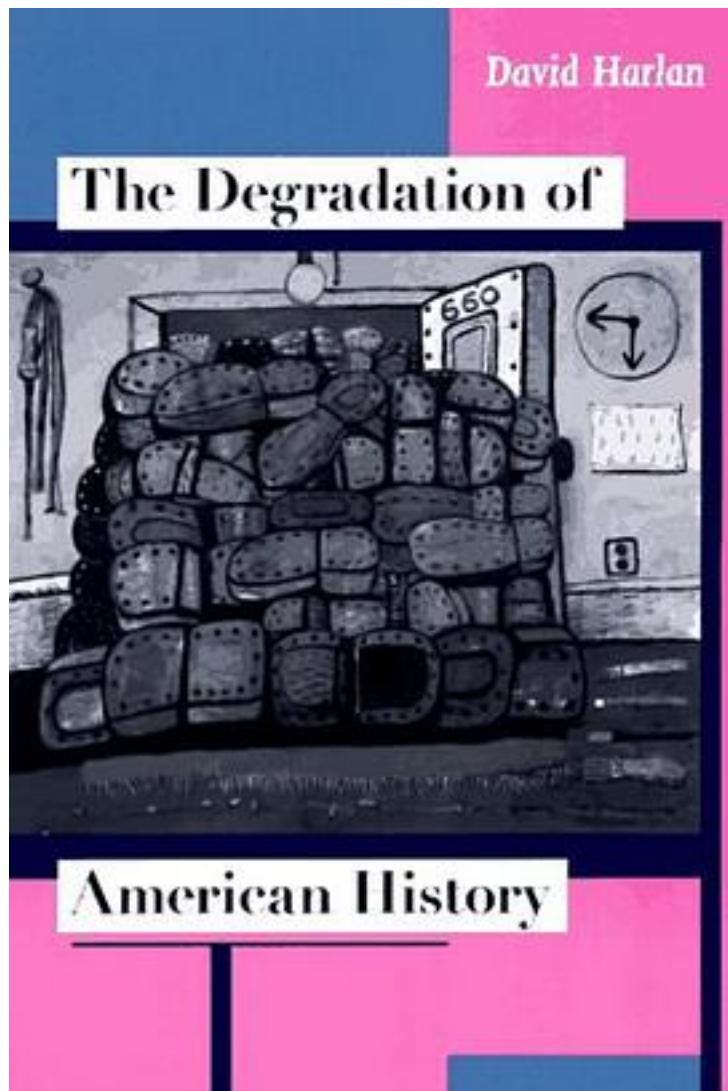


The Degradation of American History



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出版者:University Of Chicago Press

出版时间:1997-11-10

装帧:Paperback

isbn:9780226316178

American historical writing has traditionally been a primary form of moral reflection. However, this study argues that, in the disillusionment following the 1960s, history abandoned its redemptive potential, and adopted the methodology of the social sciences. It describes the reasons for this change to objectivity and professionalism, explains why it failed, and examines the emergence of a new traditionalism in American historical writing. The first section describes the impact of literary theory in the 1970s and beyond, the rise of women's history, the various forms of ideological analysis developed by historians on the left, and the crippling obsession with professionalism in the 1980s. The second part focuses on the contributions of John Patrick Diggins, Richard Rorty, Elaine Showalter, Henry Louis Gates Jr, and others. The author argues that at the end of the 20th century American historical writing may become again, not one of the social sciences in historical costume, but a form of moral reflection which speaks to all Americans.

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