to do—and that young people sense it. Like the word *teenager*, high school is essentially a 20th-century invention. Neither of them began to go seriously awry until 1959, when the boomers arrived. A report by James Bryant Conant, a former president of Harvard University, advocated larger, more standardized schools. Quantity, as is its wont, overwhelmed quality.

Even minimal participation in the economic mainstream now requires more years of education than ever before. Yet tomorrow's jobs, Hine believes, will likely demand knowledge and expertise but not much schooling. During the high-tech employment boom of the mid-1990s, several top companies began recruiting people not yet out of high school to work at the forefront of innovation. The kids were able to do the job.

Hine concludes that while it may have been rational, convenient, and even lucrative to consign young people to a protracted childhood, that won't work much longer. In his view, it's time to offer teens a wider range of choices, letting them "coordinate work opportunities with education," "drop in and out of school without stigma," and "try something new and unlikely—and . . . fail at it—without being branded a failure for life."

Hine shares Hymowitz's concern that children are being rushed into adulthood. But he believes that children want to grow up as fast as they can, and that the next generation of teens, having been raised on a diet of advertising, violence, and abundance, will help to shape our culture, for better or worse. Hine thinks we should fret less about what teenagers are doing and more about what we've done to create their subculture. He wants us, as a nation and as parents, to extend rights and obligations according to an individual's signs of maturity, not simply according to age. He doesn't think it's reasonable to try to prevent teenagers from having sex. Forget celibacy, he says; instead, train kids to view serious commitment as a prerequisite to sex.

"The young," he concludes, "persist in wanting to do what their strong bodies make them capable of doing: acting independently, working hard, having sex and families, and making lives." His prescription—to give young people more life options—seems more realistic than Hymowitz's wish to slow the process down.

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History

REFLECTIONS ON A RAVAGED CENTURY.
By Robert Conquest. Norton. 317 pp. $26.95

When a wise and sharp-edged historian of some of our era's greatest traumas reflects on the century as a whole, one should pay attention—especially if that historian also happens to have been involved in public life and is a fine poet besides. Conquest's *Reflections on a Ravaged Century* is short on warmth and fuzziness. Its few understatements are all meant ironically. But Conquest offers a view of our predicament that merits the attention of anyone seeking to look ahead.

For Conquest, ideas count. (His commitment to this notion seems almost quaint when a large part of academia is devoted to the proposition that they don't.) During the 20th century, a kind of "ideological frenzy" seized European minds and gave us communism and fascism, which he correctly sees as related.

"Idea addicts" in Germany, Russia, and elsewhere produced movements that devastated minds and whole countries. The West *had* to struggle against Hitler and Stalin. If anything, Conquest argues, Western policies during the Cold War were too timid, not too bold.

The book's discussion of these points is far richer and more challenging than any telegraphic summary can convey. Conquest is able to draw on his own pioneering research on Stalinism, research that was once bitterly condemned in the West for overstating the death toll under Soviet rule—and therefore the moral deficits of Soviet communism—and is now attacked in Russia for understating it. One also hears the voice that advised Margaret Thatcher during her rise to power, and that encouraged Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson to stand up to the Soviets during the 1960s and '70s. In the face of all those who have written off postcommunist Russia as hopelessly authoritarian and corrupt, Conquest shows great patience. Three-quarters of a century of communism left a "legacy of ruin," he writes, which accounts for the absence of any sense of individual responsibility among Russians, let alone of an honest and selfless political class.

As stimulating and provocative as they are, these sections merely set the stage for Conquest's larger argument: that there is a sure antidote to the ideological passions and the surrender to abstractions that have shattered our century. This antidote is to be found in Europe's consensual tradition, which includes the civic ideal of compromise that enable societies to enjoy a "culture of sanity." British institutions and the British empirical tradition epitomize these ideals, but they have spread to America and to many other peoples who earlier followed very different approaches.

So change is possible. We can do better in the future, and the key is education—but what Conquest sees in this area plunges him into dyspeptic foreboding. It is not enough, he argues, simply to believe passionately in the Good: "To congratulate one's self on one's warm commitment to the environment, or to peace, or to the oppressed and think no more, is a profound moral fault." Any education that brings students only this far is ipso facto faulty in a moral sense. The goal of education is not to fill students with dogmas disguised as ideas, much less to turn them into self-deceiving and hence dangerous "experts." Rather, it is simply to foster thinking, which entails a knowledge of history and an appreciation of human folly, including one's own.

Reading Conquest, one wonders whether we have learned anything from the disasters that befell Europe earlier in this century. But perhaps even this doubt should be more tentatively expressed, in keeping with Conquest's larger argument in this honest and admirable volume.

—*S. Frederick Starr*

DUEL:
Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr and the Future of America.
By Thomas Fleming. Basic. 446 pp. $30

Historians have been hard put to explain just what led Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton to their fateful encounter on a grassy ledge near the Hudson River in 1804. Why did Burr, the vice president of the United States, insist on the fatal "interview"? And why did Hamilton, who now professed to oppose dueling and whose own son had been killed in a duel three years earlier, take part—and throw away his first shot? Was the one man bent upon murder and the other on suicide? Historian and novelist Fleming offers an ingenious, complicated, and plausible explanation in a narrative that affords a superb view of the early republic and its flawed leaders.

The pretense for Burr's challenge was a published letter, belatedly brought to his attention, reporting that Hamilton had stated an unspecified "despicable opinion" of him. At last, exclaimed Burr, here was "sufficiently authentic" proof to enable him to act against his longtime adversary. But *despicable* was mild compared with what (Democratic) Republican editors had called the apostate Republican Burr; and if authenticity was what he required, Fleming points out, an earlier published report "that Hamilton had called Burr a degenerate like Catiline would surely have done as well or better than this single word." Hamilton had played little role in Burr's recent defeat in the election for governor of New York. "If Burr's purpose was to exact revenge for losing the election, his only logical target was Mayor DeWitt Clinton" of New York City.

Fleming says Burr challenged Hamilton because "he was a soldier, competing for the same role Burr was now seeking—the Bonaparte of America." Having lost the governor-