

“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-

ship (and with it, any chance of running as the Federalist candidate for president in the fall against incumbent Thomas Jefferson), Burr thought that a triumph in the field of honor over Washington's heir, Hamilton—a triumph that could consist merely in securing a retraction—would help him realize the dream he had begun to entertain: armed conquest of Texas and Mexico.

Hamilton, meanwhile, was “a man riven by conflicting emotions and necessities.” A humble apology was sure to be made public, destroying whatever influence he had in the New York Federalist Party. With Yankee Federalists threatening to secede from the nation in response to the Louisiana Purchase and Virginians' perceived political hegemony, apologizing might also destroy Hamilton's chances to lead a New England army. And it “would certainly disqualify him as the leader of a national army if Napoléon . . . headed across the Atlantic to regain France's colonial empire.”

Hamilton had lately turned to Christianity and may have believed, wrongly, that a Christian must abjure self-defense. Fleming thinks Hamilton was unconsciously seeking to atone for having advised his 19-year-old son, facing a duel with a Jefferson supporter whom the youth had carelessly insulted, to throw away his first shot. In addition, the historian suspects that Hamilton hoped his death, if it occurred, would destroy the hated Burr as a political and military leader. Fleming expertly tells how the gripping drama played out.

—Robert K. Landers

ORPHANS OF THE COLD WAR:

America and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival.

By John Kenneth Knaus. PublicAffairs. 398 pp. \$27.50

Blending history and memoir, *Orphans of the Cold War* vividly recounts a fascinating, hitherto unknown tale of American covert actions in Asia. In 1950, with the State Department still reeling from the victory of the “Chi-Coms” (as the Maoists were called) a year earlier, China invaded Tibet. The United States sought a United Nations resolution condemning the invasion, to no avail. “If it struggled in the diplomatic sphere,” writes Knaus, “the United States showed no signs of hesitation when it came to the secret

war for Tibet.” He speaks with some authority, having been one of the Central Intelligence Agency officers who trained Tibetan soldiers in guerrilla warfare at Camp Hale, Colorado.

Contrary to what has been called “the Shangri-la Syndrome,” the Tibetan people are not mystical pacifists. For centuries they were among Central Asia's fiercest warriors, maintaining a huge empire and even holding the Mongol hordes at bay. In the mid-1950s, when the Chinese imposed “democratic reforms”—a plague of raids, pillaging, and public torture—the Khampa of eastern Tibet (some of whom became Knaus's students at Camp Hale) united in an armed rebellion, which won early victories before being crushed by the superior force of the Chinese. Until the early 1970s, CIA-trained Tibetan guerrillas raided their homeland from bases in Nepal. In 1961 one such foray provided the CIA with classified Chinese documents revealing the famine and chaos of Mao's Great Leap Forward, a debacle of social engineering that cost 40 to 60 million lives.

But the Kissinger Doctrine reversed the policy of isolating Communist China, and the United States stopped aiding the Tibetan guerrillas. Wangdu, the charismatic guerrilla leader, was killed in an ambush by Nepalese troops just miles from India, where he had been offered sanctuary. Some soldiers did escape to India, but many were shot or committed suicide, and others languished in prison cells for years. Tibet was sealed behind the Iron Curtain, largely forgotten until the Dalai Lama won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. Knaus hopes that the growing international interest in Tibet will help bring about a negotiated resolution.

The author makes no pretense of being dispassionate. “When the U.S. government first became involved with Tibet in 1951,” he writes, “its commitments contained a measure of the idealism that was part of the Truman Doctrine of assisting free peoples. . . . The men . . . [chosen] to carry out this program quickly made common cause with the Tibetans. It was not ‘their’ war they were fighting, it was ours, and we wanted them to win it.” We owe Knaus a measure of gratitude, for his work in the field and for writing this engaging book about a tragic Cold War episode.

—Maura Moynihan