
NEW TITLES

History

**RUSSIA IN THE AGE OF
CATHERINE THE GREAT**
by Isabel de Madariaga
Yale, 1981
698 pp. \$40

Catherine the Great (1729–96), pictured by many historians as a cruel, tyrannical woman of monstrous appetites, receives far more sympathetic treatment here. De Madariaga, a University of London historian, argues that the Empress, enthroned by a 1762 military coup, brought her subjects reasonable government and greater personal freedom. In the spirit of the *Nakaz* (Instructions) of 1767, her distillation of Enlightenment texts, she promoted the concepts of British law (which the Russian judiciary never fully digested), broadened the franchise for municipal elections, and established a number of social services. The Empress still believed that some must rule and some obey. While loosening the bondage of the serf to the landlord, she felt that it was logical to restrict Ukrainian peasants' freedom of movement: Russia's food output, after all, depended on a stable peasant population in the wheat-growing Ukraine. Abroad, Catherine's victories were significant; she took Poland and the Crimea—and gained access to the Black Sea. Her shrewdness and fair-mindedness degenerated into impatience and intolerance in old age, but her profound love of Russia remained.

GRANT: A Biography
by William S. McFeely
Norton, 1981
592 pp. \$19.95

Recognizing early on that Ulysses lacked business sense, Jesse Grant got his son into West Point, because, McFeely explains, "he did not know what else to do with him." McFeely, a historian at Mount Holyoke College, develops the unflattering thesis that the course of Grant's varied career was shaped less by great brilliance or understanding than by fortune, which often smiled on him. When Captain Grant retired after the Mexican War (1846–48), he struggled to make a go of farming. The Union's disintegration was his salvation. In war, Grant's instincts worked; he became Lincoln's first winning general and