



## Superpower Blues

By Alan Wolfe;

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**THE DEMOCRACY TRAP** The Perils of the Post-Cold War World. By Graham E. Fuller. 285 pp. New York: Dutton. \$20.

LIKE Salman Rushdie's character Saleem Sinai, who was born at precisely the moment that India achieved its independence from Britain, the largest generation of Americans came into the world simultaneously with the start of the cold war. The generation that routinely ducked under its desks through air-raid drills, attended college during the war in Vietnam, married and started families amid the energy crisis, and prospered (or failed) in the go-go 80's now faces a serious challenge. Can it cohere without the cold war, which had, for so long, defined its existence?

Graham E. Fuller -- a former Foreign Service official who now is a senior political analyst at the RAND Corporation -- believes that Americans will long for the days of the cold war when they begin to face the problems raised by its end. And that is the more optimistic account of "The Democracy Trap," for he also argues that Americans may not be able to face those problems at all.

Mr. Fuller correctly understands that the cold war period was the exception, not the rule. (So, one could argue, were the postwar economic boom, the expansion to the suburbs, the Ozzie-and-Harriet nuclear family and the space race.) For all the angst of the 60's, the baby-boom generation has lived with remarkably little international conflict, in part because of the stability produced by stalemated superpowers possessing nuclear arms. The generation that came before knew a world war and a Great Depression. The generation that comes after, Mr. Fuller argues, is likely to face a world characterized by intense nationalist conflict, frequent civil wars, religious frenzy and hatred and, inevitably, greater violence. The paramount challenge we will face, Mr. Fuller maintains, is preparing

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ourselves for the return to a more "normal" world of war and instability.

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The author does not believe we will be able to rise to the challenge. What stands in our way is what is most precious about us: our democratic system. For all its virtues, he believes, democracy is a trap. It encourages us to indulge in the politics of immediate gratification. It enables interest groups to put their parochial needs before the needs of the whole. It rewards leaders who emphasize good news, not hard work. It exalts individualism when what we need is to work together. Mr. Fuller writes: "The United States with its contemporary designer morality just might have something to gain from looking back to societies in which moral values are less subject to the tides of social preference or the interpretations and rationalizations of sociologists."

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Walter Lippmann, Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau were only some of the influential American intellectuals who also perceived contradictions between the domestic needs of American democracy and the international demands of superpower status. Americans, it seems, are always in need of thinkers who can cut through the cycle of can-do optimism and total withdrawal that characterizes American attitudes toward the rest of the world.

But unlike Lippmann and other realists who were as clear sighted in talking about the United States as they were in understanding the world, Mr. Fuller -- who knows much about Islam, Africa and the Soviet Union -- is dyspeptic when he discusses his own country. It may well be that his many years of service outside this country have colored his views of what takes place inside. Appalled at nearly everything he sees, he delivers a jeremiad against everything he does not like: affirmative action, ethnic consciousness, television, the underclass, drugs and litigation -- without ever demonstrating the role that any of them play in our foreign policy.

Whereas most people around the world want to copy the United States, Mr. Fuller wants this country to copy what he has learned around the world. Intrigued by Muslim notions of determinism and the frailty of man, he suggests, with some seriousness, the virtues of an Islamic republic for America. (He believes that "Arabs are still fair game in American culture for any kind of gross ethnic caricature, racial slur or outrageous stereotype -- they are the only major ethnic group left that can be treated prejudiciously with total impunity.") Surely it is the Orientalist in him who can suggest, in a passage that would make Walter Lippmann blanch, that "we need to be more conscious of the Yin and Yang, the concept of complementarity and balance of virtues that seems somehow alien to our American culture."

"The Democracy Trap" is anything but a tightly argued, well-researched and historically grounded effort to predict the future by studying the past. It is, rather, an odd mixture of whatever is on Graham Fuller's mind, some of it interesting, some trivial. Mr. Fuller is on target when he says that Americans are ill prepared to deal with such issues as global poverty or the

collapse of empire. We may indeed come to wish for the good old days of the cold war, when understanding the world was so much easier. We are surely not at the end of history but rather at the start of a historical era we can barely comprehend. But we will have to wait for books more rooted in a realistic view of the world and our place in it before we can understand the paths before us. CULTURE SHOCKS

Americans generally have little recognition of the extent to which the immigrant culture and society of America, and its deep-rooted Anglo-Saxon sense of rule of law, is absolutely unique in the world. We are therefore less intuitively equipped to understand foreign cultures than almost any other country on earth. Young Americans are generally shocked the first time they encounter in depth the attitudes, thinking and culture even of a European society, much less societies of the third world. The person who grows up in Zaire is better equipped to understand the political and cultural motivations of an Egyptian, a Brazilian or an Indian than is an American. -- From "The Democracy Trap."

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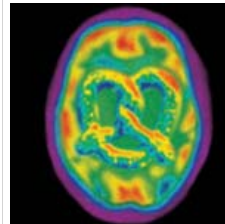
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