



The Ninth Wave

Eugene Burdick

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A political novel which opens with protagonist surfing and waiting to catch a Big One, a "9th wave" generally the largest in a wave sequence, and if possible , a NINTH ninth wave, etc. This concept of the gathering propitious moment becomes a conscious often reflected-upon metaphor throughout the story.

The Ninth Wave Details

Date : Published 1956 by houghton mifflin/riverside press,cambridge mass.

ISBN :

Author : Eugene Burdick

Format : Hardcover 332 pages

Genre : Fiction

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From Reader Review The Ninth Wave for online ebook

John says

A re-read from high school. I loved the book, though the ending was rather unrealistic to me, as though the author was reaching his maximum page count

Benjamin says

Read this book as a teen. At the time, it made a great impression on me.

P.S. Winn says

This author writes books with underlying messages. The ninth wave is an interesting read. Readers get a bit of a history lesson as they follow along on the story and if you think about when it was written it is a prophetic look at where technology can lead us. Good or bad.

Charlene Gordon says

I read this well over 50 years ago and really don't remember much about it.

Chris Gager says

More 50's sex for me to covertly glean from my sister's bookshelf. She was 5 years older than I was and "allowed" more leeway. Date read is a guess.

I just found a paperback copy of this at the town transfer station. Maybe I'll read it again. I do that with some of those books from the 50's, 60's and 70's when it seems like the contrast between the "old"(actually young) me and the now me would make a big difference. It certainly worked with "Lolita".

Thom Dunn says

I read this book over 50 years ago. It was in paperback around the time when Failsafe was in, I think, Life magazine. It was about the first time I ever tried to track books by author. No. First would be A. A. Milne. About all I remember was the "ninth wave" business....that received great reinforcement from the Beach Boys'

"Catch a wave" . Funny how things stick with you. I think this work should probably be shelved with the whole era of Ban the Bomb/Ugly American/Eisenhower Fifties/Cold War stuff. When I finish reading it

again, I will amend this review. SEE GOODREADS LISTOPIA: "IF YOU LIKE MAD MEN" (They mean the TV show, Madmen)

Mike says

The ninth wave is the always a good wave to surf. The ninth ninth wave (the 81st) is the best of all.

Jay says

There is a handful of books that I read in my youth that had a significant impact on how I began to see and understand the world about me—books, if you will, that forged what the Spanish identify as a “vision del mundo.” Some were classics, others were contemporary fiction. Eugene Burdick’s *The Ninth Wave* (published in 1956) is one of the latter.

The Ninth Wave was Eugene Burdick’s first novel. It was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and won for him a Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship. He went on to write *The Ugly American* and *Fail Safe*, both of which became popular movies. With the success of the last two works, *The Ninth Wave* seemed to disappear. I recently ran across a 2006 opinion piece by a Steve Tollefson that suggested that *The Ninth Wave* deserved to be resurrected. Tollefson concluded that the book is one that “provokes the reader to look-at both the physical and political environments-through a new lens.”

For me, the book did provide in the late 1950s a “new lens.” Reading it at the age of 15, I began to gain a new way to understand the political processes that were emerging in the years of the Eisenhower presidency. It was, for someone nourished on the myth of American superiority and exceptionalism (to use the now current claim from the Political Right), a sobering suggestion that our democratic political structures were also capable of manipulation by special interests that could be antithetical to community or broader societal needs.

At its most basic level, Burdick’s novel is the chronicle of Michael Freesmith, who could almost be a fictional prototype of the non-fictional Carl Rove. (Clever of Burdick to anticipate Mr. Rove.) Michael, while a young college student at Stanford before World War II, discovers what he believes to be a political equation that will enable him to manipulate human political behavior: fear + hate = power. Acting on that equation in the aftermath of the Second World War, he goes about orchestrating a California gubernatorial election.

Not all are happy with that orchestration, most notably his best friend, Hank Moore and his mistress, Georgia Blenner. Both, but particularly Hank, grow increasingly convinced that Michael needs to be stopped—that he is, for all his charisma, pernicious.

Michael is, in many respects both heartless and soulless—someone emotionally disengaged from the world around him. He is, at his core, a callous man disengaged from other people, even those who form his inner circle. At one point, Georgia tells him: “You’re like one of those little glass balls that has artificial snow and a winter scene inside of it. You shake it and the snow swirls-around the scene. Except that all one sees of you is the swirling, the snow. All the things are there inside, but I can’t get a fingernail into the glass to pry it open. It’s all smooth and tough. ...And you don’t want anyone inside. You’d fight it; you’d keep them out.”

Even his long term friend doesn't know what makes Mike tick:

Why do you hang around Mike?" Georgia asked.

"Because I've known him for a long time and I like him," Hank said. "I don't know why, but I do. I like him and there's something curious, attractive about him. I keep thinking if I hang around I'll find out some answer that will make the whole thing sensible.

But neither Hank nor Georgia find that answer. In the end, they are forced to conclude that Mike's disengagement is what gives him power. "See, Hank [notes Georgia], it doesn't make any difference now whether Mike is right or not about how people act in politics. He's persuaded enough people that they act in a certain way...and now, they're acting the way he believes they do."

The novel is, however, more than a chronicle of one man's rise and fall. It is a snapshot of California from the end of the 1930s through the 1940s and into the 1950s. Burdick's chapters on World War II are lyrical and engaging. His surfing descriptions at the beginning and end of the novel are equally vivid. And the several vignettes that punctuate the story—the drunk that Michael talks into suicide; the man who makes and loses a fortune growing avocados; the history of gold mining and its impact on the environment—are miniature jewels.

Pat says

Eugene Burdick, known to friends and colleagues as Bud, was one of those authors with an incredible c.v.: a decorated Naval officer in WWII, a Rhodes Scholar, a political science professor at Berkeley. He studied writing under Wallace Stegner at Stanford and went on to publish numerous books. His most famous were co-written: *The Ugly American* with William Lederer and *Fail-Safe* with Harvey Wheeler. Both were made into films.

The Ninth Wave was Burdick's first novel and a Book-of-the-Month club selection. It's a sprawling California epic the main themes of which are power, personal ambition and politics. The book, which is flawed in many ways (e.g., there are too many long, descriptive passages and some characters -- especially the female characters -- are thinly drawn and lack credibility), takes a very dark and disturbing view of humanity, perhaps befitting a combat veteran who saw action at Guadalcanal.

That Burdick is scarcely remembered today is probably due to his untimely end. He suffered a heart attack and died on a San Diego tennis court at age 46. The obituaries inevitably noted that he won the match.
