



Don't Stop the Carnival

Herman Wouk

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It's every parrothead's dream: to leave behind the rat race of the workaday world and start life all over again amidst the cool breezes, sun-drenched colors, and rum-laced drinks of a tropical paradise.

It's the story of Norman Paperman, a New York City press agent who, facing the onset of middle age, runs away to a Caribbean island to reinvent himself as a hotel keeper. (Hilarity and disaster -- of a sort peculiar to the tropics -- ensue.)

It's the novel in which the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of such acclaimed and bestselling novels as *The Caine Mutiny* and *War and Remembrance* draws on his own experience (Wouk and his family lived for seven years on an island in the sun) to tell a story at once brilliantly comic and deeply moving.

Don't Stop the Carnival Details

Date : Published May 15th 1992 by Back Bay Books (first published 1965)

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Author : Herman Wouk

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Genre : Fiction, Humor, Travel, Literature, Classics, Novels, Literary Fiction, Contemporary, Book Club, American, American Fiction

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From Reader Review Don't Stop the Carnival for online ebook

Sara says

This book... objectively is a 3-4 star read but I'm too close to it to be objective (this is a reread for me). Bad news first: its attitudes towards women, Caribbean people, and the LGBTQ community are ANTIQUATED. Capitalized. Underlined. Antiquated.

However, considering that it was written in 1965 it's 'forgivable' in that it does accurately capture the zeitgeist of the time.

The good news: the story is a tragicomedy about the illusionary paradise of running a hotel as an outsider in the Caribbean and it really, really is just like that. What can go wrong will go wrong and often in the most uproarious ways. The author would know as Herman Wouk did spend some time running a hotel (The Royal Mail Inn) on Hassel Island in the US Virgin Islands before writing the novel.

The title of the book is a cheeky play on the Caribbean meaning of the word carnival = party / fete, and the western meaning = circus. Hotels really are sort of like freak shows... especially down here where people tend to take on their 'cutting loose' vacations with vehemence.

I was handed this book with a wink and a smile when I started in the Caribbean hospitality industry and read it then, and now a few years in it warranted a reread to see just how accurate this 'field guide' is. And it is. Unfortunately here in the Caribbean a lot of the antiquated attitudes are still accurate too, but that aside, whenever something goes wrong at one of the hotels I work with (which it inevitably will, even things you never imagined could go wrong) I often hear the phrase (or I say it myself) 'don't stop the carnival' uttered in reference to this book. When nonsense occurs that you want to fix, ignore, or mask you simply don't stop the carnival!

Jennyb says

Here's the problem: you can't write 380 pages of comedic farce, then abruptly switch to tragedy for the last 20 pages. You're humming along contentedly with this colorful Caribbean pageant, and all the sudden, it's rather like being kicked in the gut. Too bad about the ending, because I mostly enjoyed the book up to that point, except for the abundant racism and homophobia.

Jeremy Proctor says

This is a hateful, toxic book. Reading it felt like being beaten up. I cannot compass how it has earned so many positive reviews; I would rate it at less than zero if this site permitted negative numbers of stars. The main characters are so dissolute and debauched that it is impossible to care about them. Worse, the author has an egregious habit of "type-ing" every character, no matter how fleeting, in a most debasing manner: Negro, Jew, gentile, whore, Turk and just about every homophobic deprecation he can think of. Whatever skill the author may have as a storyteller is completely undone by his bigoted, blighted world view. It would be charitable to say that this is a book written and published before conventions of political correctness could moderate Wouk's mordancy, or to say that the cruel callousness that suffuses the narrative belongs more to the protagonist than to the author. However, "Don't Stop the Carnival" is just too relentlessly and

gratuitously crass to concede Wouk that courtesy: this book is utterly poisonous, and not nearly funny enough to palliate its venom. Moreover, as another reviewer here points out, the author imperiously assumes a White male (and very narrow-minded) reader -- and even that demographic must surely find many passages offensive. I was eager to read this book because I once lived in St. Croix, and know well the places, and the quirks of Caribbean life, that inspire the story. Instead of kindling my nostalgia for the Virgin Islands' natural beauty and the spirit of the Cruzan people, though, it brought back wince-worthy memories of the strident, gluttonous, piña colada-swilling scumbags who swanned around in sports cars and speedboats, indulging their Master-race status on the island to distract from midlife crises and sundry failures back in the States. Nothing redeeming in that exercise -- and yet the author somehow feels entitled to have us actually empathise with such boorish boozers. In his 1998 forward to "Don't Stop the Carnival" Wouk writes, "My métier is social portraiture." Spiteful caricature is more like it; peppered with snide stereotyping and imprecation that veers toward flat-out hate speech. He also states that while writing this novel he, "had in mind the feel of a Chaplin movie." Well, the slapstick is certainly there -- minus Chaplin's sparkling humanity. This one belongs in the dustbin. Or better still, the fireplace. My recommendation: Don't read the horrible "Don't Stop the Carnival".

Fiona says

Hilarious! I laughed out loud.

This book was recommended to me because some of the antics that happened on the island of Amerigo happens on Caye Caulker. Maybe if I ran a business here on the caye, I would agree whole-heartedly with that thought. Here's one example: on Amerigo, Columbus Day is January 2nd because Columbus stopped on Amerigo on that day to get water so it's the holiday on January 2nd. I laughed because Mother's Day in the US this year was May 11. In Belize it's May 10 and in Nicaragua it's May 30.

Norman Paperman is a Broadway press agent in NYC in 1959. He's fallen in love with the tropical Caribbean island of Amerigo so he buys the Gull Reef Club, a hotel on a little island off the main island. He learns the hard way that owning a hotel in the Caribbean is not Paradise. He has troubles with immigration, taxi cab drivers who stop in the middle of the road to talk to passer-bys (yes, that happens on Caye Caulker too), lack of potable water, broken cistern and foundation, and every type of employee possible. Murphy's Law applies to him everyday; if it can happen, it will happen to him.

Then, there's the lovable Iris Tramm who lives in the Pink Cottage. And, can he get everything together well enough for the Tilson Christmas party?

Fun read and a laugh a minute.

craige says

At first, I was into this book as the writing is good, the story zips along, and I enjoyed picturing NYC in the 50s. But as it progressed, I found it harder and harder to keep at it. Every bad thing that could happen does happen and poor Norman could never catch a break. I know I should not feel sorry for him, but I did. It wasn't even all the typecasting and slurs that bugged me so much since I was able to let those go as being the norm when this was written in 1965. It was that one disaster after another befell Norman. Ah well, maybe he

deserved it all.

In any event, I skipped over the latter half of the book to the last few pages, learned some sad tidbits and was ultimately very glad I chose not to read the rest of the book. Onward!

Rebecca says

I adore this book. I read it when I was probably 13 and found an old hard back copy in one of my parents stacks of books. Neither of them knew where it came from or had read it. I thought that was so odd but adored reading it and have gone back to it many times since. I own very few books though I am a voracious reader. If it isn't a book I really love and see reading multiple times it isn't worth it for me to have it on a shelf. This book makes me giggle and smile with it's eccentric characters and hilarious snafus surrounding the running of a tropical hotel. I also love how out of character it is compared to Herman Wouk's other books and what that adds to my pondering of who he was. I had no idea of the connection to Jimmy Buffet until many years later. Buffet has phenomenal spirit and music. He created a play based on the book. I've not seen it but like the idea of a combination of these two fine artists.

Tami says

The great comic drama - if it could go wrong, it did. Sometimes I found myself covering my eyes (makes it hard to read) knowing already what was going to befall poor Norman Paperman. As I read, some little gnome in the back of my mind kept poking me, asking "and you think you want to run away to the tropics and never come back? See what happens?" Well, yes, I still do (and the gnome can just shut UP already) - a fun look back at New York society of years gone by, and of island life that is probably just about the same today as when Mr. Wouk wrote his semi-fable. My biggest problem with this book? Not only did I want to miss work & curl up on the couch to finish reading it (it's mid winter in Illinois, what can I say), I also ended up with Jimmy Buffett songs playing endlessly in my head. Not usually a bad thing, but there are only so many days I can wake up with "We're Kinja! Still Kinja!" in my head before I start to get a little freaked out.

Sorry, not a professional review, just a little fun from someone who had a lot of fun reading a great book. It'll get you thru the last of the winter 'mush' if you're in it. And if you're not, if you're already on an island somewhere? Well, I'm jealous. Maybe you should read a book about driving on ice or dog sledding or something, just to make us northern folk feel better.

Susan Ludwig says

I enjoyed this light, dated (1965) novel by the master, Herman Wouk. He's the master of research and historical writing, but this was a clever and fun story.

conrad says

I was standing in the office of a tire shop in my small, East-Texas hometown. The air conditioner was ineffectually humming, failing to contest the heat coming through two doors open to the stale baked air outside. A small man was hunched over a small desk, fingers pecking awkwardly at a keyboard, squinting into an undersized monitor. There was a 2013 calendar on the wall.

I can't tell you how I would have felt witnessing this scene before reading "Don't Stop the Carnival" - but I can tell you that I had nothing but overwhelming fondness for everything around me. The mechanic, regaling me through broken teeth with his heroics as a young man. The customer in sneakers, white socks and camouflage shorts - chewing on his mustache and scratching at a faded tattoo.

I didn't want to leave. I wanted to pour burnt coffee into a Styrofoam cup and help them whittle away their pre-lunch hours.

Kaethe says

I'm going to finish this, but more out of grim determination than anything else. There are so many isms that seem to come so naturally to the period. I don't know why they shock me so. It isn't as if I never read older works. I think one of the things I find most distressing is his casual assumption that it's perfectly okay for men to have affairs, but not women. He divides his characters along strict moral and gender lines, and it never occurs to him to do differently. There are good women and bad women and sluts everywhere. When someone like Siddons writes about the period it is with the understanding that good girls would like to be doing it, no, that isn't it. Siddons doesn't assume that some girls are good and some are bad. She has characters who play by the rules and others who don't but she takes the time to explain why and how. A character may be shocked if another one has sex, but Siddons isn't shocked. Someone may call someone else a slut, but Siddons doesn't. Wouk on the other hand keeps letting his male characters sleep with girls and discard them like used Kleenex, and neither the characters, nor Wouk think that's wrong. He agrees with the stereotypes, and he's lazy about it, and that I do not approve of.

I finally finished it. It was a chore, I didn't really want to. When I was done I wished I hadn't made myself do it. Do you know how he ends the thing? I'm infuriated. Night of the big party Hyppolite the murderous one comes for Atlas, and after a week or so of heavy drinking and no food, Janet/Iris dresses up and comes to the party. Nothing happens. Hyppolite frightens Esm and she goes into labor, but manages to have her baby in the hospital and all. Janet/Iris falls down and scratches up her face and her dog is slashed by Hyppolite. That's all. Essentially everything goes off without a hitch. And then the next day a policeman comes to get the facts on Hyppolite and ends up shooting Hassim and killing him. No good reason, just a stupid thing. And then Janet/Iris borrows Norman's car to go pick up her dog at the vet, and she has an accident and dies. She's not drunk or anything. A cab driver stops in the middle of the road to talk to a girl, and she comes up and runs into him, and goes flying out the windshield. Stupid. For all the concern about her drinking herself to death, she dies in a perfectly normal car accident. For all the fear of the murderous Hyppolite, he doesn't harm anyone. There are two other big expectations: that Norman will go broke and that his wife will leave him if he has another affair. Norman pulls out of the island hotel business at least even, maybe ahead a little, and when Henny realizes that he slept with Janet/Iris (after she's dead) not only does she not leave him, she ends up comforting him.

The worst thing about it all is that Wouk hasn't set up these expectations in order to fulfill them in an unexpected way, nor has he set it all up to make a joke of how the things we worry about never come true. It's as if he'd worked on this novel, painstakingly crafted it, and someone else came along and wrote the last chapter using the same characters. The characterizations are so poor that I can't figure out who

Norman all of a sudden decides to leave. It's crazy. One of the most frustrating books I've ever read.

D Gibson says

A good holiday read.

TheTick says

I read this a few years ago, after listing to Jimmy Buffett's concert CD of the play he made out of it. A fun cautionary tale about a middle-aged Broadway PR guy who has a mild heart attack and buys a hotel on a fictional Caribbean island. Very quickly Norman runs afoul of the trials and tribulations of building ownership in the tropics, such as a wonky water cistern, crazy employees, and his financial backer who managed to get one of those crazy employees mad enough to hunt him down with a machete. I winced a bit at some of the portrayals of the native islanders, and of women for that matter, but it was written before I was born so I sort of expected a bit of that. Doesn't make it okay, but it only detracts a bit from the adventure. If it's something that would bother you, though, best to avoid the book.

Kelly ... says

Have you ever wanted to run away from life and begin again in the tropics? If you are anything like Norman Pepperman it is a bad idea! But I am so glad that he suffered from this particular midlife crisis and that Herman Wouk allowed me the pleasure of witnessing the antics that followed. If anything could go wrong ... it did. And poor Norman tried so hard to stay positive and upbeat. He tried so hard to make his new beach life work. This book made me laugh out loud when I was listening in bed next to my sleeping husband. Oops. Wouk is a master and this book proves it ... not because it is his best, because it isn't. I like *The Winds of War*, *War and Remembrance* and *The Caine Mutiny* all better. But this book is a complete departure from the above with absolutely no similarities to those more recognized titles. And yet it is still written with such beautifully and carefully chosen words that it is unmistakably his. And the differences in setting and style are so distinct that it emphasizes the greatness of his talent.

A strong 4 stars.

Linda says

I brought this 1960s-era novel along to read on our recent vacation, and it ended up being a really good choice. In it, native New Yorker Norman Paperman chucks his stressful show-biz/theatre life in the city to buy a run-down hotel on a small Caribbean island, and what ensues -- the constant hotel disasters, the quirky new friends he meets, his naïveté about island politics and work ethics, etc. -- makes for really funny and entertaining reading. It was so easy to imagine the hilarious missteps and misunderstandings that he experienced really happening on some of the islands we visited, especially on those that aren't overly sophisticated about tourism. Author Herman Wouk is usually considered a serious writer (at least he is to me), but this was a wonderful departure into humor by him. It was an easy, enjoyable book, and I would recommend it as a fun vacation read.

Bob Arbogast says

Wow! Norman Paperman had a gigantic, mind-numbing, mid-life crisis and I'm glad I was allowed to witness it. This book had me howling with laughter throughout, but being a story populated with very real people, there were consequences and casualties. The end of the book was painful. Painful, because of what happens to the characters, but also because the story had ended and I wouldn't get to spend more time all the people I had met.

The change in tone toward the end of the book, was initially surprising, but upon reflection, it seemed to be the correct ending. If you haven't had your own mid-life crisis, be prepared for something completely ridiculous, incredibly exciting and extremely nerve-racking. Fifty is very similar to fifteen; it's awkward, you do things you shouldn't, you have fun, and you make mistakes. You can survive it, but not with your dignity intact, and not without regrets.

Herman Wouk has written a very fine book. The book was written in the mid-sixties, but the themes are still relevant today. Read it to be entertained and read it to learn something about people and different cultures. This book gives us a glimpse of what the world could be and some hard facts about what it really is.
