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BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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## Kit Carson -- Hero Or Villain

Just finished Hampton Sides' new book "Blood and Thunder: An Epic Of The American West." Originally intended to focus on The Long Walk of the Navajos -- a forced relocation of the tribe -- Sides' book expanded into a biography of trapper, soldier, explorer and national hero Kit Carson and his role in Manifest Destiny. Carson's personal journey is fascinating and pretty moving. Illiterate and devotedly faithful to anyone he saw as a "superior," Carson married an Indian woman and grew to know their ways. But he also fought bitterly with their warriors, was a brutal attacker when he felt wronged and took the lead role in some of the greatest defeats for various tribes. But Carson also respected each tribe, knew their differences, condemned massacres of them and -- while misguided -- championed various "remedies" in a sincere desire to see Indian tribes "protected" and very late in life realized most of their miseries were the result of white men. Carson was as pure a symbol of Manifest Destiny as there was -- he might have felt sorry about it, he might have even sort of tried to minimize the damage, but he knew that the white people were coming and it never occurred to him they didn't have the right to do so. All of this makes this book sound a bit dry, but it's filled with exciting battles, thumbnail sketches of various tribes, colorful depictions of leaders on all sides who were stubborn and proud and wrong-headed and once in a great while actually enlightened. A model of popular history. \*\*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\*.

POSTED BY MICHAEL IN NEW YORK AT 11:26 AM



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