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Kit Carson: A Pattern for Heroes. By Thelma S. Guild and Harvey L. Carter. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. Maps, illustrations, index. 367 pp. \$18.95.

An illiterate, bandy-legged, plain-looking, short man, Kit Carson yet remains one of the more celebrated figures of the nineteenth-century American West. His exploits as trapper, guide, Indian agent, and army soldier have made him, according to Thelma Guild and Harvey Carter, "the personification of the great westward surge known as Manifest Destiny, so ardently supported by a majority of the people of the time." As is the case with other legendary heroes, Carson's reputation has risen and fallen according to the various preoccupations of American audiences. With the growth of interest in Native American studies over the past two decades, Carson's role as standard bearer of Manifest Destiny in the early 1860s during the U.S. Army campaign against the Mescalero Apaches and the Navajo Indians has proved detrimental to whatever remains of his popular reputation. While professing their aim to narrate Carson's life chronologically, and in the process provide detailed information about his social milieu and physical surroundings, the authors of this standard biography clearly hope also to reestablish Carson as "one of America's most widely known and most deserving heroes."

Guild and Carter urge us to see Carson as a simple, honest, fearless, and modest man whose attitudes toward Indians and the landscape were typical. Within the biography's presentation of a logical sequence of career changes are two major themes: the development of Carson's more sympathetic and humane attitude toward Indians, and his

continuing struggle to reconcile both his responsibilities to his family and his duties as a public servant or defender. The two themes come together in the narration of Carson's role before, during, and after the Navajos' Long Walk to the Bosque Redondo. Using Carson's letters to his superiors, the authors describe his greater tolerance and understanding of the issues involved, credit him for sticking with Carleton's directives, even though he chafed against them, and disassociate him from major responsibilities for the reservation experiment's problems.

The authors' extremely restricted sense of the concept of "responsibility" leads me to question some of their conclusions. Suffice it to say here that in their vigorous defense of Carson they have not considered another pattern to his life, one that does not merely relegate Carson's life to the heroic pattern of an adventurous past age. Whether alongside Fremont in California or Carleton in New Mexico, Carson, for all his simple virtues, exhibits all the attributes of a good company man, one who may doubt but who will in the end obey orders regardless of their rightness. And if his private intentions to resign or disobey various orders were preempted by his pressing economic situation, then this too should be pointed out to amend our culture's overemphasis on the free, self-sufficient, centered self. This may not be a heroic pattern, but it is a relevant pattern that contemporary audiences can well understand.

Kit Carson fulfills its authors' hope of providing a readable and reliable biography of its subject. It has helpful maps and illustrations; for the most part it reads well, although the Fremont expedition narrative was the only series of chapters conveying any excitement or enthusiasm. It should appeal to Carson buffs and to history buffs interested in the American Southwest. If it had been more venturesome in speculating at key points on the man's motivations and intentions, and if it had offered intelligent insights on the sociocultural milieu which accorded this unlikely man fame, the biography perhaps would have even appealed

to the kind of general audience which is making Evan Connell's superior book about Custer, *Son of the Morning Star*, a popular success.

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