Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order

John F. Marszalek
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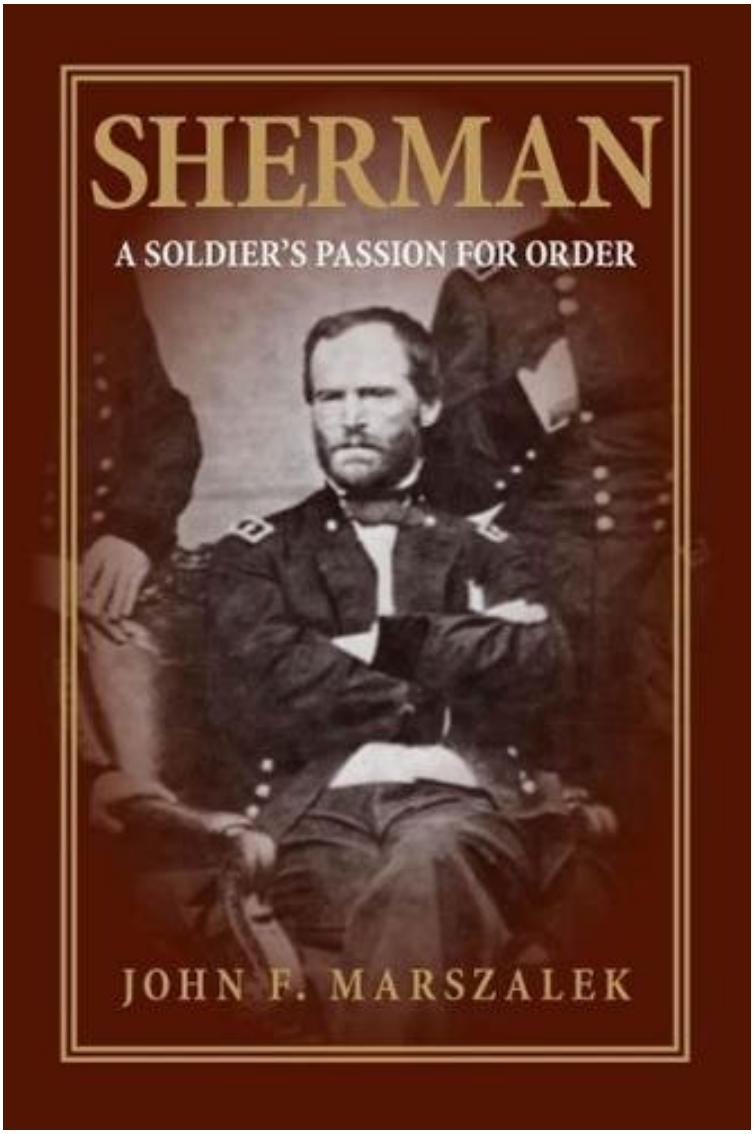

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John F. Marszalek : Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Balanced, thoughtful and well written biographyBy T. Graczewski“Sherman: A Soldier’s Passion for Order” by John Marszalek is military biography at its finest: lucidly written, thoroughly researched, admirably objective and offering penetrating insights into the subject’s motivations and foibles.There are three aspects to this book, all quite different, that made a lasting impression on me.First, to my surprise, Sherman’s tumultuous childhood and his strained relationship with his wife of 38 years, Ellen Ewing

Sherman, who was also his foster sister, form the foundation of Marszalek's narrative. Sherman's father, Thomas, died suddenly in 1829, leaving nine-year-old Tecumseh, his mother and her 10 other children, penniless. Sherman was taken in by a powerful neighbor, the future US Senator, Cabinet member and Whig party leader, Thomas Ewing. "More than any factor," Marszalek writes, "[Sherman's] father's failure had a deep impact on Cump [as Sherman was known in childhood]. Throughout his life, he worried about remaining solvent, afraid that he would become destitute and that his death would leave his wife and children poor and dependent the way his father had left him."Indeed, the circumstances of Sherman's upbringing play a central role throughout this biography. His relationship with his foster father was complicated and left an indelible imprint on Sherman's psyche. On the one hand, the Ewings provided Sherman with material comfort, emotional support, and enormous political advantages throughout life, not to mention his eventual life partner, daughter Ellen. On the other hand, he chafed under the domineering control of the Ewing family and defiantly tried to blaze an independent trail throughout life. The dominating issues in Sherman's life, as described by Marszalek, were: 1) the army (his foster family wanted him to resign his commission early on and work for his foster father's salt works in Ohio, while Sherman relished the camaraderie and relative stability of military life); 2) religion (Ellen relentlessly importuned him to convert to her ardent Catholicism, while Sherman remained stridently secular throughout life); 3) finances (Ellen spent lavishly on furniture and unnecessary household staff, while Sherman continuously fretted about insolvency); and 4) family (Ellen regularly stayed home in Lancaster, Ohio with her parents and raised their children under a strict Catholicism, with one son eventually joining the Jesuit order, while Sherman tried to keep a nuclear family intact and independent). For certain, family battles over Catholicism and personal finances play a larger role in "Sherman" than his Civil War battles at Shiloh and Atlanta.Like many Civil War heroes, Sherman's pre-war years were unremarkable. His early army experience took him throughout the South, from Florida to Alabama to South Carolina, where his time bounced between chaotic engagements with recalcitrant Indians to enervating garrison duty outside of Charleston to the front lines of the California Gold Rush. Sherman finally left the army in 1852 to open a branch of a St. Louis bank in San Francisco. Marszalek shows that Sherman was more than competent at his new job and quickly emerged as a leading citizen of his new city. When failure came, it was more due to his superiors in St. Louis than anything Sherman did or didn't do in San Francisco, Marszalek claims. The years leading up to the Civil War witnessed Sherman at his nadir: "[he] sold potatoes and corn; participated in horse and mule auctions…; and became a notary public." In short, "his father's death, his mother's inability to support him, the uncontrollable Indians in Florida, the chaotic gold rush, the haphazard financial situation in California, the vigilantes, Ellen's lack of financial discipline and her repeated pregnancies [they would have 8 children together], and a host of similar occurrences had brought him a life of failure and distress." Marszalek writes that Sherman desperately wanted order and stability, yet it stubbornly remained beyond his grasp.Second, "Sherman" left me with lingering questions about the general's role in modernizing warfare. Marszalek clearly sees Sherman as the greatest military innovator of the war. Unlikely his fellow classically trained West Pointers, both Union and Confederate, who sought to emulate the set piece battles of Napoleon or methodical positional warfare of Jomini, Sherman recognized that he "was fighting a war not only against the enemy's soldiers but also against the enemy's entire society…[he] saw everyone south of the Mason-Dixon Line as an implacable enemy." Sherman was, in Marszalek's estimation, "an early psychological warrior," his famed March to the Sea aimed at breaking the enemy's will, both military and civilian, ultimately "signaled the future direction of modern warfare."I found that Sherman, as described by Marszalek, shared many qualities with Genghis Khan, the infamous and largely misunderstood Mongol leader of the early thirteenth century. In words that could be readily applied to Sherman's leadership of the Army of the Tennessee, anthropologist Jack Weatherford has written that "Genghis Khan recognized that warfare was not a sporting contest or a mere match between rivals; it was a total commitment of one people against another." And, like Sherman, "Genghis Khan would be more accurately described as a destroyer of cities than a slayer of people." Yet, Sherman clearly missed his opportunity to etch his name into the annals of great military strategists, along with that of great military captains. Why?Sherman published his Civil War memoirs in 1875, a full decade before Grant and before any other commanding officer, Union or Confederate, had the chance to tell their story. His memoirs came in two bound volumes, over 800 pages in length, yet nowhere did Sherman clearly and directly address the controversial nature of his actions, especially in Georgia and the Carolinas. Why? Because "Sherman never thought his campaigns were revolutionary," according to Marszalek. "He would have been baffled by the analyses of the future that crowned him the great innovator of the age," the author says, which presumably includes his own assessments in this book. "He would have preferred the title of grand strategist. He believed he simply took the war to its commonsense ends. It was a war between people, not just between armies, and had to be fought that way."Frankly, I find Marszalek's argument hard to swallow, at least in total. Sherman knew how controversial his tactics had been. In the final months of the war, after Columbia, South Carolina had burned to the ground and the enemy began executing captured Union foragers (or "bummers" as they were known), Confederate cavalry leader Wade Hampton taunted Sherman that "this order shall remain in force so long as you disgrace the profession of arms by allowing your men to destroy private dwellings." In the post war years, former Confederate president Jefferson Davis labeled Sherman's march to the sea as "an act of cruelty which only finds a parallel in the barbarous excesses of Wallenstein's army in the Thirty Years' War." Even

Marszalek refers to the campaigns as “[Sherman’s] war of terror.” Yet, nowhere in his memoirs and rarely during his enumerable speaking engagements after the war did Sherman seek to justify his actions as saving countless lives by robbing the south of the will to resist. As late as 1888, Sherman insisted “all these movements were on a grand scale, strictly in conformity with the lessons of the great masters, and illustrate every branch of the science of war.” If so, why not articulate what that precedence had been and how it aligned with Sherman’s actions? In Marszalek’s words, “Sherman clearly wrote his remembrances to show the world how well he had done in the conflict…He saw himself as a great general, and he wanted the world to agree.” If that is true, why did he skip over explaining the strategic provenance for his punishing marches through the south, the campaigns that made him so famous and infamous?Finally, Sherman may have waged war with the passion of a John Brown, but he preferred to offer peace on terms that would have pleased Vallandigham, if not the entire Confederate Cabinet. Marszalek stresses that Sherman had always sought “a hard war and a soft peace” and he consistently demonstrated his commitment to that philosophy, both at the end of hostilities, when he negotiated extremely lenient general armistice terms with Confederate general Joe Johnston in Raleigh, North Carolina a week after Lincoln’s assassination (terms that were forcefully rejected by Washington and led to a permanent personal rift with his superior, secretary of war Edwin Stanton, and long-time friend, General of the Armies Henry Halleck), and in the immediate post war years when he emerged as a staunch, but steadfastly apolitical supporter of president Andrew Johnson’s “hands-off approach” to Reconstruction. Indeed, Sherman was no liberal. He hated abolitionists, often disagreed politically with his Republican Senator brother, John, and believed that slavery was a useful institution and that blacks should never be treated as political equals. Moreover, he held a pathological disdain for reporters and the press that Donald Trump might admire. In fact, Sherman is the only general in American history to successfully court martial a reporter. He saw the Plains Indians as lazy, dishonest savages that either needed to quickly assimilate to a sedentary lifestyle of farming like white men or face eradication. In short, Sherman is not a man who’s political views have survived the passage of time.In sum, I truly loved this book. I learned a lot (and I’ve read widely on the Civil War years) and enjoyed doing so. I’d heartily recommend “Sherman” to the Civil War buff and general reader alike.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Marszalek does a nice job of portraying Sherman's troubled careerBy JMP in Takoma ParkMarszalek does a nice job of portraying Sherman's troubled career, perhaps soft-pedaling Sherman's occasionally unstable behavior. Sherman's key role in the Union victory is worth understanding, and to see it in light of his affection for his many Confederate friends just reinforces how the country's failure to face the "heart of darkness" that was slavery has painted our history from its founding.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. arrived in good condition. Author provides an insight into Sherman's life ...By GeoBought used, arrived in good condition. Author provides an insight into Sherman's life that other authors may have not presented. The man was clearly brilliant, but had some family issues and if he would have been more flexible in his views with respect to the administration, he may have been president. By far one of the most interesting civil war generals.

Sherman: A Soldier’s Passion for Order is the premier biography of William Tecumseh Sherman, the Civil War commander known for his “destructive war” policy against Confederates and as a consummate soldier. This updated edition of John F. Marszalek’s award-winning book presents the general as a complicated man who, fearing anarchy, searched for the order that he hoped would make his life a success.Sherman was profoundly influenced by the death of his father and his subsequent relationship with the powerful Whig politician Thomas Ewing and his family. Although the Ewings treated Sherman as one of their own, the young Sherman was determined to make it on his own. He graduated from West Point and moved on to service at military posts throughout the South. This volume traces Sherman’s involvement in the Mexican War in the late 1840s, his years battling prospectors and deserting soldiers in gold-rush California, and his 1850 marriage to his foster sister, Ellen. Later he moved to Louisiana, and, after the state seceded, Sherman returned to the North to fight for the Union.Sherman covers the general’s early Civil War assignments in Kentucky and Missouri and his battles against former Southern friends there, the battle at Shiloh, and his rise to become second only to Grant among the Union leadership. Sherman’s famed use of destructive war, controversial then and now, is examined in detail. The destruction of property, he believed, would convince the Confederates that surrender was their best option, and Sherman’s successful strategy became the stuff of legend.This definitive biography, which includes forty-six illustrations, effectively refutes misconceptions surrounding the controversial Union general and presents Sherman the man, not the myth.

From Publishers WeeklyThis comprehensively researched, ably written biography depicts Wiliam Tecumseh Sherman (1820-1891) as unable to accept disorder and uncertainty because of an unstable childhood, reinforced by economic failure in post-Jacksonian America. The Civil War offered the general both an ultimate challenge and an ultimate opportunity. He was, however, anything but a prophet of total war for its own sake, shows Marszalek, a history professor at Mississippi State University. Sherman's objective was not to destroy the South, but to convince southerners to abandon the struggle. Attacking Confederate pride and property, as in the March to the Sea, was a step towards restoration of national harmony and integrity. Marszalek exaggerates the uniqueness and the intensity of

Sherman's "passion for order," for few professional soldiers accept disorder as a desirable social norm. Sherman's approach to fighting the Civil War can be alternatively interpreted as a common-sense response to an evolving reality. Nevertheless, this provocative volume stands as an outstanding modern study of one of this country's great public figures. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.From Library JournalSherman taught America that "War is hell" as he swept through Georgia and the Carolinas to destroy the Confederates' will to resist. The roots of Sherman's philosophy of total war and of his enigmatic personality have fascinated historians since the Civil War, when Sherman was thought both insane and brilliant. Now, in Marszalek's (Grover Cleveland, Greenwood Pr., 1988) full and fascinating biography, we get the whole man--a warrior who hated killing but carried war to civilians; a foster son craving paternal approval who led hardened men; a writer and talker who preferred action to words. Marszalek finds the key to Sherman in his search for order, both in a private life troubled by uncertain financial prospects and relations and in a civil war, and later Indian wars, where old West Point verities did not apply. That Sherman was a troubled soul who sought to make his family appreciate his trials and triumphs is evident in the small cache of Sherman letters published for the first time in Joseph Ewing's Sherman at War (Morningside, 1992). The new letters notwithstanding, Marszalek's psychobiographical musings about Sherman's inner self doubtless will cause some historians to blush. But the rich historical contextual material on everything from Western finances, Indian wars in Florida and the West, and Civil War military policy make Marszalek's Sherman real and powerful. Highly recommended.- Randall M. Miller, St. Joseph's Univ., PhiladelphiaCopyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. “John Marszalek’s no-nonsense biography covers all the bases.”—Washington Post Book World