

Professor pens book on presidential political thought

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Presidential attitudes about political theory and how those theories have been applied to the presidency are the subjects of a new book by University of Wisconsin Oshkosh associate professor of political science David Siemers. The book, "Presidents and Political Thought," was published on January 29 by the University of Missouri Press.

Each chapter looks at specific presidents' attitudes about political theory, the political theorists he read and admired and how he applied the theories to his presidency. Siemers said he wanted to do more than simply examine the ideas of Karl Marx, John Locke and other political theorists.

"To me, that's useless unless someone has tried to apply their ideas," he said. "I was interested in people who actually tried to use their ideas, if there were presidents who thought they could apply them to their jobs."

Each chapter focuses on one of six presidents, including John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Bill Clinton. He also mentions others like Abraham Lincoln, George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

"I include the six people who interest me the most," he said. "But I don't want people to think I researched these six presidents and that was it. I mention others along the way."

In the book, Siemers discusses how President Barack Obama likes the ideas of Reinhold Niebuhr, a Christian realist who says the world is not ideal, so one should do the best he or she can.

"He has what many other presidents have had, a rejection of theories, of them being too set, too neat," he said. "That real life is more complicated than that."

Siemers got the idea for the book about five years ago. He plans to use part of it in his class "The American Presidency" next semester. He said the information in the book is useful for any American.

"All I'm doing is what a really dedicated citizen should do," he said. "So I guess the target audience is really the 305 million people that are American citizens. I know that is unrealistic, but I hope people who are not just professors read it."

Siemers also is the author of "The Antifederalists: Men of Great Faith and Forbearance" and "Ratifying the Republic: Antifederalists and Federalists in Constitutional Time."