

APR15-2015-020039

Abstract for an Invited Paper  
for the APR15 Meeting of  
the American Physical Society

**Einstein's Legacy: Studying Gravity in War and Peace**

DAVID KAISER, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

A popular image persists of Albert Einstein as a loner, someone who avoided the hustle and bustle of everyday life in favor of quiet contemplation. Yet Einstein was deeply engaged with politics throughout his life; indeed, he was so active politically that the U.S. government kept him under surveillance for decades, compiling a 2000-page secret file on his political activities. His most enduring scientific legacy, the general theory of relativity – physicists' reigning explanation for gravity and the basis for nearly all our thinking about the cosmos – has likewise been cast as an austere temple standing aloof from the all-too-human dramas of political history. But was it so? This lecture examines ways in which research on general relativity was embedded in, and at times engulfed by, the tumult of world politics over the course of the twentieth century.