

RPECnews

The newsletter of the Richmond Peace Education Center

July-August 2015

VCU Professor Examines U.S. Secrecy

By Grant Rissler

*High-profile leaks about secret surveillance efforts by the U.S. government have heightened debate about secrecy and transparency. Jason Ross Arnold, a professor of political science at VCU, recently published a book, *Secrecy in the Sunshine Era: The Promise and Failures of U.S. Open Government Laws, which compares secrecy in presidential administrations from Reagan to Obama. I sat down with Arnold to learn about his views on open government in the United States. The following is an edited transcript of our talk.**

What inspired your interest in secrecy in government?

I've been into what I call information politics for a long time. In grad school I got interested in the question of public ignorance: to

Continued on Page 5



Jason Ross Arnold



The Outer Bank beach at Duck, reachable by a winning auction bid

It's a Fact — RPEC's Auction Is Coming!

The 2015 RPEC Auction, RPEC's biggest fundraiser of the year, is rolling out again. The auction committee and many volunteers are busily soliciting items for bidding throughout the summer. Here are the facts:

WHEN: Saturday, November 7, 5:30-9:00

WHERE: The Crowne Plaza Hotel on 6th and Canal Streets in Richmond

WHAT: The silent auction, with hors d'oeuvres, cocktails, and lots of socializing with RPEC friends followed by the silent auction with a buffet dinner

HOW MUCH: \$45 for single tickets or \$360 for a table of eight. This is the same price as last year and includes a complimentary drink, hors d'oeuvres, and dinner

As the biggest fundraiser of the year, the Auction raises 14 percent of RPEC's total budget. It is carefully planned so that ticket sales and sponsorships cover the complete cost of holding the event.

Continued on Page 3

Dial Back Militarization of U.S. Society

By Rob Gabriele

In the almost 15 years since 9/11, our country has . . .

— Prosecuted a global “war on terror” with no deadlines, no exit strategy, an ever expanding pool of enemies, mostly created in the previous U.S. war in the Middle East, and an ever expanding list of countries invaded or bombed.

— Engaged in torture and assassination even of U.S. citizens without benefit of trial.

— Eroded the civil liberties and privacy protections of all American citizens; protections that are the foundation of a free and democratic society.

Continued on Page 5

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Reflection

Adria Scharf
RPEC Executive Director

A New Chapter On An Old Story

This spring Richmond marked the 150th anniversary of the end of the Civil War and the end of slavery. Many of us spent the first week of April downtown attending commemorative activities. The most moving for me was a gathering honoring African ancestors at the burial ground.

The way the City marked that week seemed different. It reflected a greater willingness to acknowledge and wrestle with the truth of the City's past as a hub of the national slave economy -- as a place where families were bought and sold, as a place where human beings were systematically denied their human rights. As my friend and colleague Ram Bhagat put it, "the dial turned" that week. We seemed to take a collective step forward.

That same week, a Richmond family that I know well found itself in a dire crisis. Living on food stamps with no other income, no transportation, and an adult member of the household incarcerated, the family, including two young teenagers, had found itself homeless. The timing crystalized, for me, a contradiction: the contradiction between our new narrative...and the lived reality of large segments of our community.

We've made some progress in how we collectively talk about the past. There's much, much more work to be done. But the dial has begun to turn, thanks to the hard work and effort of many. That is a beautiful thing that should be recognized

Yet, our willingness to recognize historic harm has not translated into benefits for the large segments of our community who remain "left behind" economically and socially, in part as a result of barriers and systems that have origins in that very same racist history.

More people are ready to talk about historic trauma, thank goodness. But are we ready as a community to talk about current trauma? Are we ready to not just talk about, but act, on the scale necessary to begin to actually make amends for the past?

Our City has an almost 40 percent child-poverty rate, almost entirely children of color. Fifteen percent of our City's population lives below half the poverty level; that means 15 percent of our City's people must struggle to survive from day to day.

The narrative has begun to change. The conditions for the 40 percent of children in poverty in our community have not. My hope is that our willingness to confront the past leads to a mobilization for redressing past harms, and preventing trauma today.

When we improve the community conditions and life prospects for families like the one that remains on my mind and in my heart, then we'll have truly opened a new chapter. That will be a good day indeed.

RPEC happenings

RPEC Auction — Continued from Page 1

That allows every single dollar raised through bidding to go directly to support RPEC's programs. We just don't have a substitute for this, so in addition to being a fun night to see fellow peace activists that you might see only once a year, the auction provides crucial support for RPEC's entire array of work for peace and justice in Richmond and beyond.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP THE AUCTION TO SUCCEED?

First, buy a ticket. . . better yet, arrange a table with seven of your friends. Get your tickets here: www.rpec.org/2015-dinner-auction.

Second, if you can't come, buy a ticket or two anyway and donate them back to RPEC. We give any donated tickets to our RPEC youth allowing them to attend (and help out).

Third, be generous in your bidding. See the silent auction as an opportunity for doing some of your holiday shopping, or as an opportunity to treat your family and friends by grabbing a vacation getaway, or one of the unique events and services in the live auction.

Last, donate an item for the auction or help us solicit items from businesses you know or friends with special talents.

Items are starting to roll in and here are some of the treats that await a committed bidder.

Three nights in a cottage in the beautiful Outer Banks

This has become an auction favorite. Donated by the Heckman family in memory of longtime RPEC activist Galen Heckman, enjoy three nights for up to seven people at a close-to-the-beach cottage in Duck.

2 days/1 night Stay at The Clearing

Donated by the Richmond Friends Meeting, The Clearing is 85 acres of natural forest an hour's drive from Richmond, owned by the Meeting. It includes a modern air-conditioned lodge with full kitchen, bathrooms, fireplace, and large deck, two sleeping cabins, 20+ campsites, roofed pavilion, and plenty of nature. This would be a unique setting for getaway for an extended family or group of friends of up to 20 people.

Discover Scuba

Donated by Richmond Dive and Travel, here's a chance to cross an item off your bucket list. This is a two-hour introductory class in scuba diving at a local swim and racquet club. Available for up to four people. Get three adventurous friends or family members and you'll be set for your next tropical vacation.

Lower James River Raft Trip

Donated by River Outfitters, two people can enjoy a full immersion experience on our beautiful river. It's time to finally do more than cross over the river on a bridge. Go on, get in it, the water's fine.

Many old favorites are also returning...including **a truckload of mulch delivered to your yard, culinary experiences from around the world** (including soul food, Italian, and--a new one--**Sudanese** meals).

More items will be coming, and will be highlighted in further articles and on the auction webpage. In the meantime, you can buy your tickets, and if you can help in soliciting items let the office know by emailing rpec@rpec.org or calling 232-1002.

— By Rob Gabriele



Shopping on the Boardwalk at Duck.



Rafting on the James River.

RYPPE Seeks Teen Conflict Resolution Leaders

Teens: Are you a rising 8th grader or older? Would you like to:

- * Learn to settle conflicts nonviolently?
- * Develop your leadership skills?
- * Help reduce violence in your school and community?
- * Earn community service hours?
- * Meet dedicated teens from the Richmond region?

The Richmond Youth Peace Project (RYPP) is now accepting applications for its FREE conflict resolution workshop for youth leaders.

The workshop will be Saturday and Sunday, October 3-4, from 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. each day at the Fan Free Clinic, 1010 N. Thompson Street, Richmond. Lunch and snacks will be provided, all free of charge.

Successfully completing this workshop will qualify you to become a member of the RYPPE leadership team. More than 200 local students have taken this workshop over the past ten years. Once you complete the training, you'll be eligible to co-lead workshops at local schools, congregations and community centers--under the mentorship of our experienced adult trainers.

You will also earn 15 hours of community service credit. And there will be more opportunities to earn additional community service credits once you become a member of the RYPPE leadership team.

Follow this link <http://goo.gl/forms/QjNYZZTxXt> or email rypp@rpec.org to apply.

200 New City Teachers To Get RPEC training

RPEC trainers will begin training more than 200 new Richmond Public Schools teachers in conflict resolution during their orientation program in August. This is RPEC's sixth year of this training program.

The busy RPEC trainers have recently completed workshops with Kinfolk, Camp Diva, and Richmond Co-Housing Group, as well as training 23 participants in our annual Conflict Resolution Training for Adults and Teachers. We have also completed the first Basic Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) with Female Veterans.

'Moral Injury' Joins PTSD among War Costs

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is known to affect many veterans of America's wars. To this syndrome is now added "moral injury," seen as a soldier's sense of violation of his moral identity.

A workshop on "moral injury" will be sponsored by RPEC on Saturday, October 24, from 10 a.m. to noon at the Richmond Friends Meeting. The workshop will be led by Lynn and Steve Newsom, directors of Quaker House near Fort Bragg, in Fayetteville, NC.

'Created Equal' Film Series Continuing

The Virginia Historical Society is partnering with the Richmond Peace Education Center to present *Created Equal*, a series of four films focused on themes of civil rights, human rights, and social justice in American history.

Please join us at the Virginia Historical Society, 428 North Boulevard, Richmond, for the last two films of the 2015 series.

Thursday, Sept. 10 — *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin* examines Rustin's 60-year career as an activist and organizer. Rustin organized the 1963 March on Washington, yet many in the civil rights movement were uneasy about his open homosexuality, forcing him to remain in the background.

Thursday, October 22 — *They Closed Our Schools* documents Prince Edward County's closure of

public schools from 1959 to 1964, denying education to more than 2,000 African American children

and a number of white children as well. The film is still in production, and we will be previewing a segment of the movie.

Both films

will be shown at 6:30 p.m., with light refreshments beforehand and audience discussion following each showing.

Created Equal is supported in part by Diversity Richmond's Guy Kinman Research Award.

This series is named in honor of Rev. Grady W. Powell, Sr., of Petersburg, who has served on the VHS board since 1996 and as honorary vice chair since 2011.

He was pastor of historic Gillfield Baptist Church, founded in 1788, for 36 years.



Dial Back Militarization of U.S. Society

Continued from Page 1

— Militarized police forces across the country with tragic results for community policing.

— Spent trillions on wars of choice that have resulted in death and injury for thousands of GI's and death and displacement for hundreds of thousands of civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Pakistan.

— Devoted most of its discretionary budget to war and militarism year after year at a time of deep economic suffering.

These activities have created a seemingly permanent National Security State, made us less safe, less free, and poorer.

We at RPEC believe it is time for peace-and-democracy-loving Americans to call on our leaders to change course and begin to undo the militarization of U.S. society.

President Obama has done little to change this trajectory inherited from the previous administration. However, in his last year and a half in office, the President can use executive orders to:

— allow criminal investigation of the officials who authorized the CIA's use of torture;

— shut the Guantanamo prison camp and send the remaining inmates home;

— end the military commissions and military trials;

— announce clear rules for drone use which include a prohibition on targeting U.S. citizens;

— enact meaningful restrictions on the electronic surveillance of U.S. citizens by enacting the recommendation of the high-level review commission that he empowered (he has watered down their recommenda-

tions and acted on only a few);

— limit military intervention overseas to only those actions approved by Congress;

— end the dispersal of military equipment to police forces.

Much more needs to be done to correct the distortions in our national life that have grown since 9/11, especially the redirection of resources in our national budget from military to civilian needs. But this will require the cooperation of Congress which is currently controlled by the most extreme fringe of our dysfunctional politics. However, if the President were to take the above seven actions before leaving office, he would leave his successor, and us, the American people, a country more in tune with our foundational democratic values.

Rob Gabriele is chair of RPEC's Global Peace Concerns Committee.

Professor Examines U.S. Secrecy

Continued from Page 1

what extent is it a problem that people don't know much about politics in democratic societies? That question presupposes access. And I got interested in what is not out there.

Your book compares excessive secrecy across presidential administrations from Reagan to Obama. What did you find?

Part of the initial impetus for the research was this word that kept following Bush/Cheney through history, that they had an "unprecedented" level of secrecy – and part of what I wanted to do was analyze that. They might have been more secretive in scale, but in scope they followed tracks laid by their predecessors — they weren't complete outliers.

You analyze different “sunshine” laws that originated in the late 70’s after Watergate. Our readers would be familiar with FOIA, the Freedom of Information Act. But what about FACA (Federal Advisory Committee Act)?

This is a very important law that doesn't get enough attention. Before FACA, when any executive branch employee met with private sector, all those meetings were behind closed doors. FACA says "Nope, you can't have those smoke-filled back rooms anymore." Those meetings now need to be open to the public, they need to be announced something like 14 days in advance, the transcripts need to be released, any documents you produce need to be released. These are open meetings.

For a while, through the 1970's, the Ford and then the Carter administrations adhered to it mostly. But then starting in the Reagan administration, they made efforts to design task forces to be immune to this law. The law describes “members” of these task forces, so when the Clinton administration wanted to do health-care reform, one way they got around the law was to say "No, no, no. . . these private-sector people are not members, they're consultants. We don't have to open meetings to the public."

[FACA] is important because it opens up the influence, the power politics that happens in Washington. It deserves more attention.

The Reagan/Bush administration, were the early innovators to circumvent these laws. Bush/Quayle were the best on open meeting laws, but

Continued on Page 6

U.S. Secrecy

Continued from Page 5

then on classification and state's secrets privilege, they weren't so great.

Clinton/Gore had some important and materially significant initiatives -- they pushed for declassification of millions of pages of classified documents. On other issues, like open meeting laws, Clinton/Gore don't look so good in retrospect.

Obama/Biden came in promising the sky, and in some respects they've made important strides, but in other respects they have fallen short and turned to some of the same tricks to avoid these laws.

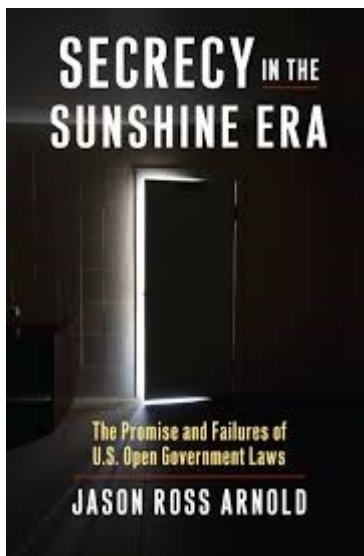
Do you have the sense that the forces that push executives to use these tools are almost institutionalized now, regardless of their intent when they walk in the door?

That's a great question. . . Those kinds of forces can be maybe limited but probably not eradicated. Obama, for example. . . one important thing he's done is to return the federal government back to a Clinton era standard for FOIA requests, basically a presumption of disclosure.

But what makes up the bulk of this is all of the decisions that officials have made for other reasons, for special interests -- for other kinds of more base political purposes.

You write about two categories of information, one we need to know and one we need NOT to know. What's the ideal line between those two and how far away are we from that ideal in the U.S.?

First we have to accept that there are certain things that the vast majority of us would agree are necessary secrets. The codes to get into the electric grid. Or the nuclear secrets that might fall into the hands of terrorist organizations. Ninety-nine



percent of us would understand why that would be secret. But there's so much that we find [where] the government may claim secrets that are not necessary. So what's the line there?

If a zero is this ideal balance and ten is scary excess secrecy, where would you put the U.S. now?

If "one" is no big deal and "ten" is oh-my-god-that's-bad, I'd say eight. But that varies across these different dimensions of administrations.

We often think about secrecy in the context of national security and Edward Snowden type leaks. What other areas of secrecy should citizens find concerning?

I would point to another area that doesn't get enough attention -- science information related to public health. . . sort of the life and death choices that we make. If readers read only one or two chapters in the book, I'd like them to read the secret science chapters. This is what made me the angriest -- all these stories where the government has data and it is concealed for illegitimate reasons. One example from the Bush administration involves a couple of Department of Agriculture scientists who found drug resistant bacteria were emanat-

ing from hog farms [in Iowa]. . . airborne, floating all around us. They were able to confirm the existence of this and their superiors forced them to not reveal that information because of the pork industry.

What are the most important reforms that could be made?

I suggested an internal agency auditing process across government -- not just one agency but all. I think that the open-meetings law needs to either be replaced or clarified -- here's what we mean by "members." But until we get closer to that ideal balance, there will always be a need for whistleblowers and leakers.

In twenty years, what direction do you think this sunshine and secrecy trend will have taken?

It really depends on the part in the book's conclusion about [the need for] a "sustained roar" of the citizenry -- if people continue to see this as a big issue. If it's not high on the agenda, there's no way they're going to turn back toward at least the spirit and the letter of these laws. But I think a lot of people are thinking more and more about what constitutes a necessary and an unnecessary secret. I think [similar questioning] is what led the country in the 1970's to make some meaningful reforms. I'm hoping that that's going to filter up through our institutions.

Professor Arnold is open to speaking about these topics to civic, faith and community groups. He can be contacted at jrarnold@vcu.edu.

Professor Arnold's recommendations for information about secrecy:
 — National Security Archives (www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/)
 — Sunlight Foundation (sunlightfoundation.com/)
 — Federation of American Scientists (fas.org/issues/government-secrecy/)

RPEC Summer Interns Recap Their Work For Peace

RPEC has been lucky to have Gracen Eiland and Melanie Cooke as interns this summer. To share their experiences, Gracen and Melanie interviewed one another, as follows:

Start with the basics – school, hometown, major, go!

[G] – I’m Gracen! I’ll be a senior at VCU, studying International Social Justice with a minor in French. I’m from Winchester, Virginia.

[M] – I’m Melanie, and I’m originally from Bel Air, Maryland. This fall, I’ll begin my senior year at the University of Richmond, where I study Psychology, Rhetoric and Communication Studies, and Spanish.

How long have you been involved with RPEC?

[G] – I’ve been involved with RPEC since August 2014. I served as a paid work study student during the school year and then continued as an intern this summer.

[M] – I was introduced to RPEC this past spring when Adria visited my War and Media rhetoric class to discuss the dominant ideology of patriotism and the Center’s role in challenging it. I immediately wanted to be a part of it.

Which RPEC programs have you worked on?

[M] -- I spend most of my time maintaining the Center’s communication outlets, including our website, Facebook, Instagram. Gracen and I also do a lot of community outreach to increase the Center’s presence in Richmond. We assisted in organizing our annual member dinner and the John McCutcheon Benefit Concert. Right now, I’m designing a curriculum about the cost of war to Virginians for our Global Peace Concerns committee.

[G] – Community outreach and event planning. I especially liked promoting and planning youth programs. I also enjoyed designing handouts for our spring forum on the crisis in Iraq. I somehow wound up as the go-to graphic designer for RPEC event flyers

Which RPEC programs have you most enjoyed?

[G] – My favorite experience with RPEC was when I had the opportunity to help the Richmond Youth Peace Project plan and organize an event against gun violence. The teenagers involved with RYPP are some of the most incredible and passionate people I have met and I feel really grateful to have been involved with their project.

[M] – I can’t stop gushing about the conflict resolution training I attended in the beginning of July – it was in-

credible! I’m so excited to help facilitate some of the youth conflict resolution workshops in the fall. I’ve also really enjoyed working with the Global Peace Concerns Committee: the dialogue about alternatives to militarism is what first brought me to the Peace Center, and I feel really lucky that I can contribute to this dialogue by helping to develop the “Cost of War” curriculum.

Summer Highlights:

Gracen:

“Planning and promoting youth programs.”

Melanie:

“Helping to develop the ‘Cost of War’ curriculum.”

What have you learned from RPEC?

[G] – Within my major of international social justice, I have found that I mainly only learn about injustice. RPEC has shown me the social justice that I have been searching for. RPEC has introduced me to organizations, youth, and community leaders actively pursuing peace, which has inspired me to continue working and studying. The Peace Center has taught me that sometimes

the most meaningful thing that you can do toward social justice is to create a space for dialogue and empower others to find their voice.

[M] – I’ve learned that while the conflict, crime, injustice, and hatred that we’re so often exposed to (and, sometimes, desensitized to) in the news does exist, there also exists a greater force of good, and it takes the form of an interwoven web of grassroots non-profits, businesses, and community members. Peace isn’t just an ideal here; it’s practiced, nurtured, and spread. You can not only see, but also be a part of the changes peace cultivates if you know where and how to look.

Where to next?

[G] – I will be studying abroad in the south of France for the fall semester. I’m looking into grad schools for social justice in the DC area.

[M] – I’m very interested in the learning, motivation, and behavior psychology programs at Stanford, UCLA, and UC-Berkeley.

What social justice activist inspires you?

[G] – Leymah Gbowee- a Liberian woman who helped end the civil war in her country through peaceful means.

[M] – Sophia Bush. In addition to working toward high-level, permeating change, she hops down the hierarchy to share stories, struggles, and words of encouragement with average Janes and Joes through social media.