

RPECnews

The newsletter of the Richmond Peace Education Center

March-April 2015

The U.S. in The Middle East Truth, Fiction, and Endless War

By Rob Gabriele

Next year will be the 15th anniversary of 9/11. Since that time we have been continually at war in the Middle East with no end in sight. The original justification for this endless war was to prevent terrorists from mounting another attack on the U.S. and punishing the perpetrators of the 9/11 attack and their supporters.

In terms of goal one there has not been another successful attack in the U.S. since 9/11. But this is arguably more the result of the creation of a pervasive national security state here at home than wars abroad. As for goal two; the perpetrators of the 9/11 attack and their supporters have indeed been punished: Al Qaeda has withered and their Taliban supporters have been driven out of governing Afghanistan. But the “collateral damage” inflicted in achieving these goals has been very high indeed.

- We have seen our civil liberties and constitutional rights seriously eroded with the creation of a pervasive national security state that has no enforceable limit on its capacity to intrude on our rights of privacy as citizens.

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McCutcheon Reviving Joe Hill

On June 19, John McCutcheon will perform *Joe Hill's Last Will*, the first performance of this kind in Richmond. The show is scheduled for 7 p.m. at the VCU Singleton Center for the Performing Arts.

Joe Hill's Last Will is a one-man musical play that tells the life story of the iconic labor leader and songwriter, as he awaits execution in a Utah prison. Songwriter and labor historian Si Kahn created the play based largely on Hill's own words and music.

The scene is a simple jail cell, with a bed, a chair, and a window. McCutcheon, combining skilled acting, his rich voice and his guitar, portrays Joe Hill through a compelling script and great songs, bringing issues of labor, immigration, workers' rights, the death penalty and war from annals of 1915 to headlines of 2015.

Tickets are \$25, or \$10 for students. Blocks of four tickets can be purchased for \$90. Tickets are available at www.rpec.org. Proceeds benefit RPEC. For more information: rpec@rpec.org or 804-232-1002.

A Story of Hope, Undone by History

By Charles Robideau

Sandy Tolan tells a poignant story in his book, *The Lemon Tree*, which was the topic at two RPEC programs, the first on Feb. 18, 2014, and the second on March 24, when about 50 participants gathered at the Richmond Public Library for a discussion led by RPEC board member and conflict resolution leader Ram Bhagat.

Subtitled “An Arab, a Jew, and the Heart of the Middle East,” the book tells the true story of how a native Arab Palestinian, Bashir Khairi, and a Jewish immigrant from Bulgaria, Dalia Eshkenazi Landau, became friends even though Dalia's family was living in the house Bashir's family was forced to abandon in the 1948 war that established the independence of Israel. While the book – based on extensive interviews and research by Tolan – describes

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Save the Date: June 4

RPEC's Member Appreciation Dinner and Peacemaker Award Ceremony will be Thursday, June 4, at 5:30 p.m., at Ginter Park Presbyterian Church. This is a FREE event, a coming together of members, partners and supporters. Please join us.

This year, two Peacemaker of the Year Awards will be presented: to Professor John Moeser, cited for his long-time scholarship and advocacy of the needs of Richmond's needy and marginalized communities, and the Thrifty Quaker gift shop, for its support of many non-profit organizations.

RSVP to rpec@rpec.org.

RPECnews

is a publication of the
Richmond Peace Education Center
3500 Patterson Avenue
Richmond, VA 23221
Phone: (804) 232-1002
E-mail: rpec@rpec.org

RPEC Web Page:
www.rpec.org

<https://www.facebook.com/rpec.org>

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Executive Director: Adria Scharf

Asst. to the Director:
Paul Fleisher

Conflict Resolution Coordinator:

Santa Sorenson
Office Staff: Beth Holt

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Newsletter Committee

Editor: Charles Robideau

crobideau@gmail.com

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RPECnews is published 6 times per
year and has a circulation of
approximately 1,800. We welcome
article and calendar submissions.

Reflection

Adria Scharf
RPEC Executive Director

Youth: Creating Change the World Needs

I've been running into people around town who saw one of our "Generation Dream" youth performing arts productions in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. last month. "I was moved to tears by the youth poems about race," several people have told me.

"The youth really spoke to this moment in American history, the post-Ferguson moment, in a way that was important and that I'm not seeing other places," another attendee said. More than 625 people came to the shows. That's the largest attendance that we've ever seen, and it was great to have so many community members sharing in the experience.

The important thing was that the program gave more than 60 youths from across the region a platform to make their voices heard, a platform to speak out creatively and powerfully about critical community issues that affect their lives. A number of the youths' performances this year touched on police brutality, racial polarization, and the Black Lives Matter movement.

"America, this is not OK. Our lives matter, America. My brothers, they matter. I hate that this is still hurting us. . . . What will it take America?" asked Mysia Perry in her original spoken-word poem, "America." In another performance, "Strange Fruit 2015," Tasneem Abdul-Rahman plaintively sang about police shootings of Black men to the tune of Billie Holliday's "Strange Fruit," as images of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and protests appeared on a screen behind her. In other segments, youths shared poetry about themes of self love, surviving domestic violence, community violence, friendship, and other issues that touch their lives.

Apsaras Art dance troupe performed a dance called "Peace Gurus." Drums No Guns closed with an inspiring Finale of drumming and capoeira, with children joining them dancing onstage.

The youth performers represented and embodied the rich diversity of our region, drawing from a wide variety of cultural, economic and religious backgrounds, and from the city and the counties. The program gave young people an opportunity to honor Dr. King from their own perspectives and vantage points, through a variety of artistic forms, from poetry to speech to music and dance.

Don't worry. If you missed the show, you can still watch both performances here: <https://www.youtube.com/user/RichmondPeace>

Our region's young people need creative outlets. They need opportunities to make their voices heard, and opportunities to be part of making change happen. They have so much to say, and much to teach us, when we give them opportunities to share.

Your support makes this program, and all of RPEC's work, possible.

Endless War

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- In driving Al Qaeda and their Taliban supporters out of Afghanistan we installed a hand-picked person as president of Afghanistan who turned against us and hollowed out what little government and civil society existed in the country making it fertile ground for seemingly endless insurgency.
- We invaded Iraq, which had nothing to do with 9/11, destroyed the governing and civil institutions of the country, and watched as a government of sectarian thugs which we supported destroyed the country which has not been put back together and has become the breeding ground of far deadlier brands of extremism than existed on 9/11.

And still war goes on in the Middle East with no end in sight, no agreed upon goals for what victory would look like, and of course, no strategy to get us to that unknown victory. President Obama has asked Congress for an Authorization to Use Military Force to fight ISIS, the newest enemy to arise out of the ashes of U.S. endless war in Iraq, which would stretch into the next administration with still no strategy, goal, or vision of what “victory” would look like. And he says he doesn't really even need the authorization because a previous authorization passed in 2001 allows for any military action a president might choose without limitation and with no end date. Endless war is not a euphemism; it is our current historical reality.

The old saying is that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and hoping for a different result. After 15 years of war, Afghanistan is still unstable and ungovernable, Iraq has come apart at the seams, and a new enemy, more deadly, extreme, and nihilistic than Al Qaeda ever was, has arisen. And our government seems only able to double down hoping that this time more war will do the trick.

RPEC is not officially a pacifist organization (though many members are) and people inside RPEC as well as outside are convinced that ISIS must be confronted and defeated militarily. But if the 15 years of war have taught anything surely it must be that military action alone is not effective and is in fact counter effective without initiatives to address longstanding sectarian grievances and to build structures of civil society in a region that has always been organized along the lines of

clan, tribe, and sect. And now faced with ISIS, the most nihilistic extremist group to so far arise from the ashes of U.S. bungling in a region we do not understand, what passes for strategy in Washington is to wage more war and to train Iraqi troops to also wage more war.

The results of our wars in the Middle East should give us pause and our record of training troops is no better: our training of troops at the notorious School of the Americas led to a generation of genocide in Latin America; and after 15 years of training troops in Afghanistan and Iraq both are in a shambles.

How have we arrived here? Because the problems of the Middle East are cultural and political and not amenable to a military solution alone. It is impossible to kill enough “bad guys”; and the U.S does not have a good record of creating or supporting. . . .or even recognizing “good guys”.

Iraq and Syria are both failed states, created by Britain and France after WWI to meet their own imperial needs (ironically this was the last gasp of European imperialism). Formerly six different provinces of the Ottoman Empire for the last half millennium, there is no natural glue holding them together. We should admit this “fact on the ground” and let it guide our actions.

There is already a model of an emerging nation state in the Middle East that has the potential to work. It is the autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq and Syria that is already building a civil society among a people with shared ethnicity and heritage. Could this be a model for an autonomous Sunni region or even a future Sunni state that will heal the alienation among so many Sunnis that at least partially allows for the arising of ISIS?

The most important thing in moving toward a solution in the Middle East is to acknowledge the cultural and political dimensions of the problems and to seek solutions from among the people. And for the conflict with ISIS this means the Sunnis. There will be no solution without the Sunnis. “Victory” over ISIS will not come from U.S. warplanes or troops, it won't come from the Shi'ite government of Iraq, and it won't come from U.S. “trained” troops.

On April 16 from 7:30-9:00 RPEC will sponsor a community forum at VCU on these issues featuring Raed Jarrar, a native Iraqi who witnessed the U.S. destruction of his country. He is now a senior staff person for the American Friends Service Committee. He will be joined by Larry Syverson of Chesterfield County, father of three sons who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Forum is free and open to the public. Please come with your questions for discussion and hopefully education.

RPEC happenings

It's Time To Register For Youth Peace Summit

The eleventh annual Richmond Youth Peace Summit is scheduled for Saturday, April 25, 2015. The Summit will be held at St. Paul's Baptist Church--Southside Campus, 700 E. Belt Blvd., Richmond, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with arrival by 9:45.

This FREE event is open to youths ages 12-19. Lunch will be provided.

The summit promotes teen leadership, nonviolent conflict resolution, social justice and positive self-expression. Participants will have the opportunity to select from a wide variety of actively engaging 90-minute workshops on topics of interest to teens, including conflict resolution, anger management, drumming,

spoken-word, relationships, gun violence prevention, yoga, zumba and much more.

The summit will feature a midday performance by talented local youth and a morning panel discussion. Participants will also earn credit for six community service hours.

Participants can register online at <http://goo.gl/forms/s5uwHjiOpW> (preferred method) or by emailing rypp@rpec.org poetry, building healthy. For more information, visit www.rpec.org, or call 232-1002. Advance registration is required.

Generation Dream 2015 Scores a Huge Success

Generation Dream, the Richmond Youth Peace Project's annual commemoration of the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was held on Friday February 6, at the Richmond Public Library and again on Saturday, February 28, at the Henrico Theater. This year's shows played to packed houses, with a total audience of well over 600. You can see performances from our talented young musicians, singers, dancers, actors and spoken-word artists on the RPEC YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/RichmondPeace/>

Peace Essay Contest Deadline Is April 20

RPEC's annual Peace Essay contest is accepting entries from students grades K-12 through April 20, 2015. The theme for the contest is "*Inspiration for a Better World*," based on a quotation from the Dalai Lama. The prompt asks students to write about what inspires them and gives them energy to make our community and our world better.

The contest is open to any elementary, middle, or high school student in Virginia. A top prize of \$100 is awarded in each of four grade divisions: K-3, 4-5, middle, and high school. Additional cash prizes are also offered in each division.

This year's prompt, contest rules and entry form are posted on the Peace Center's website, www.rpec.org For more information, email rpec@rpec.org.

RPEC Starts Strategic Planning

The RPEC board and staff are beginning an important strategic planning process that will review and clarify RPEC's focus and mission, working with Sarah Milston of Spark Mill. The process will include interviews with community partners, board input, and program participant input. Look for more updates soon. The full report will be completed this summer.

RPEC To Lead Sessions at Henderson Middle School

RPEC will begin providing after-school programming at Henderson Middle School in April as part of Henderson's "Next Up" after-school program this spring.

RPEC's "Keep the Peace: Conflict Resolution Leadership Training" after-school program will give Henderson students tools to settle conflicts both in and out of school, and will prepare them to lead conflict resolution workshops.

2-Day CR Training Offered For Adults and Educators

Don't miss the opportunity to experience RPEC's basic two-day training in conflict resolution! This training is the foundation for all of RPEC's conflict resolution programs and a first step for those interested in becoming certified RPEC conflict resolution trainers. Educators taking the training will earn a minimum of 15 points toward recertification of their Virginia teaching certificate.

Training dates are Tuesday and Wednesday, July 7 and 8, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on both days, in the Fan Free Clinic, 1010 North Thompson Street, Richmond. The training will be led by RPEC trainers Santa Sorenson and Ram Bhagat.

Pre-payment is required. Tuition is \$175. Partial scholarships are provided if needed. Email pec@rpec.org to pre-register. Please mail your check in advance to RPEC, 3500 Patterson Avenue, Richmond, VA 23221 with T4T in the memo line.

Forum To Explore US Wars in Mideast

The Richmond Peace Education Center in collaboration with two VCU Social Justice classes will host "The US in the Middle East: Truth, Fiction, and Endless War," a public forum, on April 16th at 7:30 p.m.

The forum features Raed Jarrar, an Iraqi American who is currently a senior staff member for the American Friends Service Committee. Jarrar has lived in several Middle Eastern countries and will speak on ISIS, the war in Iraq and foreign involvement. He witnessed the destruction in his country that resulted from the US invasion and will suggest peaceful solutions in Iraq and Syria.

The forum will take place at the VCU Academic Learning Commons, 1000 Floyd Avenue, Room 1107.



Raed Jarrar

Also offering insight will be Larry Syverson, a resident of Chesterfield County. Syverson is the father of four sons, three of whom have served multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has been a steadfast critic of both wars since their beginning.

Empty Boots Memorialize Virginia's War Dead

On Tuesday, April 14, VCU students will help the Richmond Peace Education Center display Eyes Wide Open-Virginia, an exhibit that memorializes Virginia military servicewomen and men who have died during deployment in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the large number of civilians killed in these wars.

The exhibit displays a pair of boots for each military death, a total of more than 200 boots, with a name tag for each pair.

The exhibit will be presented in Monroe Park, adjacent to the VCU campus, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eyes Wide Open has been presented throughout Virginia over the past eight years.



Initiatives of Change Conference Promotes Community Healing

RPEC is supporting the Initiatives of Change Healing History 2015 conference scheduled for April 6 through April 9.

The conference's objective is summarized by Rob Corcoran of Richmond, the national director of Initiatives of Change, an international organization that includes Richmond's Hope in the Cities.

"We continue to need honest conversations in this country about how to connect our increasingly diverse communities across differences of race, class, religion and politics," Corcoran states. "Initiatives of Change nurtures healthy, inclusive communities that offer hope, reconciliation and transformation. This task demands the best of everyone."

April 2015 marks 150 years since Emancipation and the end of the American Civil War. Despite great strides toward racial healing, the wounds of history and systemic racism and discrimination along ethnic or religious lines continue to hinder efforts to build healthy, inclusive communities.

The conference includes three free public forums:

—Tuesday, April 7, 8:00 p.m. - Library of Virginia: "Living in the Aftermath of Slavery & Apartheid: Reflections from the U.S. and South Africa."

—Wednesday, April 8, 12:00 - 2:00 p.m. - The Depot, VCU: "Overcoming bias in the criminal justice system."

—Wednesday, April 8, 8:00 p.m. - The Depot, VCU: "Understanding Implicit Bias."

As of this printing, the conference has sold out. Contact Hope in the Cities for more information.

The Lemon Tree

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what Palestinians call the “Nakba” (the catastrophe), the forced expulsion of some 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and villages, it offers the hope that despite this event, Palestinians and Israelis may eventually become friends, as did Bashir and Dalia.

Unfortunately, that was not the last word on the conflict, or the last written about it by Tolan, a prolific writer and reporter on the Palestinian issue.

“The Lemon Tree” was published in 2006, based on research that Tolan began in 1998. In 2011, at a time when Palestinians were seeking recognition by the United Nations, Tolan published an article, “It’s the Occupation, Stupid – The State to Which the U.N. May Grant Membership Is Disappearing.”

Just back from a summer of living in the West Bank – one of his many trips to the area – Tolan reported that Israel is “winning the battle, at least the one that counts the most, the one for control over every square foot of ground. Inch by inch, meter by meter, Israel’s expansion project in the West Bank and Jerusalem is, in fact, gaining momentum, ensuring that the “nation” that the U.N. might grant membership will be each day a little smaller, a little less viable, a little less there.”

“On my many drives from West Bank city to West Bank city,” he wrote, “from Ramallah to Jenin, Abu Dis to Jericho, Bethlehem to Hebron, I’d play a little game:

Could I travel for an entire minute without seeing physical evidence of the Occupation? Occasionally – say, when riding through a narrow passage between hills – it was possible. But not often. Nearly every panoramic vista, every turn of the highway revealed a Jewish settlement, an Israeli army checkpoint, a military watchtower, a looming concrete wall, a barbed-wire fence with signs announcing another restricted area, or a cluster of army jeeps stopping cars and inspecting young men for their documents.”

Tolan noted that the “peace process” that emerged from



Sandy Tolan

the Oslo Accords of 1993 “not only failed to prevent such expansion, it effectively sanctioned it,” allowing the number of Israeli settlers on the West Bank to nearly triple to more than 300,000, not including more than 200,000 settlers in East Jerusalem.

“Almost always overlooked in assessments of this ruinous ‘no-state solution’ is the human toll it

takes on the occupied. More than on any of my dozen journeys there, I came away from this trip to Palestine with a sense of the psychic damage the military occupation has inflicted on every Palestinian. None, no matter how warm-hearted or resilient, escape its effects.”

Martin Buber’s Zionist Fear

In May, 1948, as Jewish armed forces were fighting against Arab armies in a war for independence, a crisis of conscience beset Martin Buber, Judaism’s leading philosopher, theologian and public intellectual. A Zionist since he enrolled in the World Zionist Organization in 1899 – two years after Theodore Herzl issued his Zionist manifesto – Buber had for years urged the growing Jewish community in Palestine to seek a peaceful, non-political relationship with the native Palestinians. Now that Zionists had won military domination over Palestinians, what was Buber to do?

“Fifty years ago, when I joined the Zionist movement for the rebirth of Israel, my heart was whole; today it is torn,” Buber wrote on May 27, 1948, less than two weeks after Israel’s Proclamation of Independence. “The war being waged for a political structure risks becoming a war for national survival at any moment. Thus against my will I participate in it with my own being, and my

heart trembles like that of any other Israeli. I cannot, however, even be joyful in anticipating victory, for I fear lest the significance of Jewish victory be the downfall of Zionism.”

The Zionism that Buber cherished was “the powerful consciousness of the task of maintaining truth and justice in the total life of the nation, internally and externally, and thus becoming an example and a light to humanity.” Opposing this noble vision, he wrote, was “the natural desire, all too natural, to be ‘like the nations.’”

He added: “The ancient Hebrews did not succeed in becoming a normal nation. Today the Jews are succeeding at it to a terrifying degree.”

Now, as Israel nears its 67th Independence Day, the forces that Buber found “terrifying” have not just increased; they have been transformed. Israel is now one of the world’s leading nuclear powers, with one of the world’s strongest military forces, and the new nation struggles to establish a peaceful relationship with the Palestinians who share the land claimed by Zionists.

— Charles Robideau

Consumers Corner

John Gallini and Alisha Gallini

Sources for Local Food

We have written frequently about food and our preference for food that is local, produced by farmers who minimize chemical additives to their fruits and vegetables and provide free range for their animals. In this article we will update sources for this type of food.

Grocery Stores

There are several grocery stores that provide year-round access to local and organic foods. These are some that we are aware of.

Ellwood-Thompson has been serving Richmond in Carytown since 1989 — their mission: "to feed the heart and soul of our community through a strong commitment to local and organic foods." One of the ways E-T has demonstrated its commitment to the Richmond community is through its "'5% days'" where organizations like RPEC receive a share of the day's proceeds. <http://ellwoodthompsons.com/>

Little House Green Grocery is a full service neighborhood green grocery. We provide local and organic food which upholds the values of the grocery as well as its farmers and producers. It is the mission of Little House Green Grocery to be a neighborhood food hub, with classes on growing and cooking great food, as well as hosting other events which highlight the bounty of the region. <http://littlehousegreengrocery.com/>

Good Foods Grocery has stores in Stony Point and Gayton Road shopping centers. The Mission of Good Foods Grocery is to honor God by supporting our customers at their different levels of nutritional maturity, by providing exceptional and memorable customer service, and by selling products that are as natural, wholesome, and uplifting to nutritional well-being as possible. <http://www.goodfoodsgrocery.com/>

Of course many of the major chain grocery stores feature organic produce and some will occasionally have local produce.

Farmers Markets and CSAs

Farmers Markets abound in the Richmond area and all will be operating on a regular schedule as summer begins. There are a number of lists available. The list compiled by Local Harvest seems to be up-to-date. Go to: <http://www.localharvest.org/farmers-markets/>

A number of the farms that sell produce at farmers markets also operate as a Community Supported Agriculture farm. Local Harvest also has an up-to-date list of 19 local CSAs. Go to: <http://www.localharvest.org/csa/>

We have been members of both Origins Farm and Agriberry for a number of years.

Food Cooperatives

The Richmond Food Co-op will be a member-owned full-service grocery store focused on local, sustainable and affordable food. Made up of a community of engaged and active people working together, the Co-op is poised to create a brighter food future for Richmond. The Co-op began meeting as a Steering Committee in the fall of 2012. By the winter the initial board was formed and the membership drive kicked off once the co-op incorporated in January 2013. The Co-op currently has 650 member/owners and plans to open when it reaches 1000. The board recently grew to its full capacity of nine members, and we are on track to move forward with our next stages of development, including identifying a property, running a member loan campaign, and securing financing in the fall of 2015. You can join the Richmond Food Co-op online at <http://richmondfoodcoop.com/>

Online Farm-to-Table Grocery Store

Another source of local food is Relay Foods. They are an online farm-to-table option that started operation in 2008 in Charlottesville. They expanded to Richmond in 2011 and currently serve areas in Maryland, DC and North Carolina as well. Their business model is simple. They buy food from farmers and store it in a local warehouse to sort and put on trucks for delivery to local pick-up sites. Customers order online and pick up at their local site. Alisha has ordered from Relay three times so far, and found the quality of the produce and the customer service to be excellent. Check out their website at relayfoods.com.