



Talk:
COLD WAR CURVATURE: Measuring and Modeling Gravity in Postwar American Physics

JAN
24
WED

4:00 – 5:30 PM
McCune Conference Room, 6020 HSSB

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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 FBI kept him under surveillance for decades. His most enduring scientific legacy, the general theory of relativity – physicists’ reigning explanation of 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? By focusing on examples of research on general relativity from the 1950s and 1960s, this lecture will examine some of the ways in which research on Einstein’s theory was embedded in, and at times engulfed by, the tumult of world politics.

David Kaiser is Germeshausen Professor of the History of Science and Professor of Physics at MIT. His books include *Drawing Theories Apart: The Dispersion of Feynman Diagrams in Postwar Physics* (2005), which received the Pfizer Prize from the History of Science Society for best book in the field; and *How the Hippies Saved Physics: Science, Counterculture, and the Quantum Revival* (2011), which was named “Book of the Year” by *Physics World* magazine. He is currently writing two books about gravity: a physics textbook with his colleague Alan Guth on gravitation and cosmology, and a history of research on general relativity over the twentieth century.

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