

“I DID NOT CONSENT TO”

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“I Did Not Consent To” is excerpted from *Prairie Fires*, a book Fred had been working on since 2016 and left on his computer when he died June 2, 2021. In the process of reading *Prairie Fires*, the editors were struck by how many times Fred used the word “consent” in a certain 12-page passage (ninety-seven times) until this word picked up steam in a kind of incantatory rhythmic procession as if it were creating its own logic, a logic of both screed and poetry. The reader will notice Fred’s adopting James Baldwin’s tactic of “accepting responsibility” for events Fred never consented to, thus proposing that our complicity licenses us agency to change the system. The book length *Prairie Fires* will be issued by IFSF Publishing in 2023.

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Published by IF SF Publishing
San Francisco, California

www.ifsfpublishing.com

What we must learn above all is consent.
Many say yes, and yet there is no consent.

—Bertholt Brecht, “He Who Says No, He
Who Says Yes,” 1929-1930

And though tyranny, because it needs no consent, may successfully rule over foreign peoples, it can stay in power only if it destroys first of all the national institutions of its own people.

—Hannah Arendt, “Imperialism,” *The Burden of Our Time*, 1951

Call it what you will, but you cannot call what we have in this system, *consent*. Votes are not consent: they are choices between things and people that the *people* did not select or even deliberate upon, let alone propose. There is no space for the people. America is the land of being forced always to vote, as the expression succinctly puts it, to vote for the lesser of evils, which is to say, we are forced always, and sadly, to vote for “evil.” We the voters have helped build a great edifice of evil, and even criminality. And what happens when votes tallied on things the people did not even choose or propose are not even accurate? This is a very low state indeed. But first we must deal with this *consent* problem. What we have is surely not consent.

They do not pour vast fortunes into manufacturing the consent of the governed because it’s fun for them. They don’t buy up narrative control in the form of media outlets, think tanks, NGOs, political influence and advertising in

collaboration with opaque government agencies because they've got nothing better to do. They work so hard to manufacture consent because they need it. Seeing Trump as most dangerous, Bush as cuddly, all those who went along with Bush and backed Obama. Trump is bad, but Bush actually created and Obama consolidated the horror Trump slid in on. This is an example of manufactured reality, not consent. Its consequences are severe.

Contrary to the claim of a few writers and intellectuals, consent cannot be made up or fabricated or manufactured. If it is, it – obviously — is not consent! It is propaganda organization, force, violence, and domination by the lie. And that is what we have in America: a society of the lie, and no longer a society of consent. **Governing consent has been replaced by the governing lie.**

We learn in school that democracy and a republic are based on consent of the governed. But this is backwards. Or we are taught that what we have is what was consented to. If I look at my life, and I certainly do not think I am alone, there seem few if any areas where I gave consent to policies, structures, processes, or persons that govern conditions and things. I find myself settling always for something ugly, distasteful, even criminal, or some rancid combination of all three, some disgusting portrait that, to use another succinct expression, is like *putting lipstick on a pig*. And I am asked to put that lipstick on it every day.

Where, I must ask, is accurate and real representation? I am hardly alone in asking this. Most people, I am certain, ask this. I never consented to this fundamental and ordinary fraud called so-called elections and this abject state of non-representation, but I am responsible for my part in accepting it.

What came long before me I could not have consented to, but I am responsible for it nonetheless: the most egregious of two original sins, for the harm it did to the whole society going forward, is *chattel slavery*, transformed into full bore mass political slavery by the Confederacy in the South, financed and managed in New York City and New Haven and Washington. I also did not consent to this evil mutating and advancing to shed its visible elements - chains and neck collars and selling people on stages to be carted off. I never consented to the idea that five negroes, unable to vote and chattel, equaled three voting whites. I did not consent to this principle being updated without overt chains, collars, or even race, to the whole country, such that some would have no power but be counted in allocation to those with it. I did not consent to the fact that the outcome of a bloody civil war and the deaths and sacrifices of a huge proportion of the society could be overturned and the Confederacy to reign again.

One may wonder how this abomination transpired. In fact, the high court conducted a trick, in the 19th century, to hand the Bill of Rights over to political and economic cartels. I did not consent to these being called corporations, and to the caste society built of new plantations that this steadily created. I did not and never will consent to a caste system with its two cartel managers, seeking to climb their way upwards in an ever-renewing invisible empire. But I am responsible for my part in all that chattel slavery created and that it was modernized.

But this was only the first original sin. I did not consent to the second, genocide of the original inhabitants of this continent, of all they knew, learned and did, the gaining of white land by theft of land lived on, labored on, and loved for eons, to this inherently exterminationist destruction of

democratic and stewardship principles, those principles of the first peoples of knowing, nourishing, cultivating, protecting, and preserving this dear world, as the first peoples put it, up to the *seventh generation*. What the rivers of native blood and famine and degradation assured was that all those here did not form an inherent and secure plurality born of admiration for difference, for its very necessity; but the desire to eliminate, cancel, remove, and destroy it, and so destroy the world.

I never consented to this. But I am responsible for my part in accepting what this led to.

This garden paradise settlers were in awe of, and further, but far less mentioned, the democratic forms of governing by councils among the first peoples, was the result of the centuries of lessons, work, loves, handling conflicts, lives, and effort. That they were treated to abomination and total destruction, indeed the very push for annihilation, has infused the very possibility of our caste system.

These *two* grave original sins are bound up in the merciless, savage, barbaric *absence* of consent. What consent did slaves or first peoples have in all this? Ask our veterans, who “scalped” the Vietnamese, about the meaning of genocide. Ask those in country after country where large numbers of people are uprooted and eliminated as obstacles to expansion. Ask those ruling the economy why so many tens of millions are reduced to the level of serfs merely to survive.

I never consented to a third sin, not original, but conceived in the fiendish minds of a ruling caste, to merge removal and enslavement and so produce that strut of rule, *modernization*. Ask our workers and our impoverished and our soldiers forced to bow every day in misery to the new combined degradation of enslavement and genocide. Ask certain people what it means

to hold second, third even fourth-class status in every area.

How do you think *that* feels? This is surely not consent, and could never be. How many untouchables there must be? Does it merely move from one group to the next, in an endless correction, as the dead bodies pile on and on?

I did not consent to $\frac{3}{5}$ ths of a person for *anyone*, for it to be imposed on *anyone*. I did not consent to the turn to supremacies of *every kind*, this infection of society by “full spectrum dominance,” shorthand for violence, deception, thoughtlessness, expansion, and no refuge or protection for anyone.

For those in the military and government sworn to uphold the Constitution, the decimation of consent is a strange thing indeed to defend, much less makes sense of. Where is the common sense in this? How *could* one defend this? How does such a thing conform to any founding tradition of the councils of the people?

It is alien. It is foreign and hostile to everything human and real. It is the Confederacy and Indian removal policies merged in empire. Under such a convergence, we all have become $\frac{3}{5}$ ths of a person first, and hardly just those here, but abroad - overthrown, subjugated, and erased as obstacles to a glittering planetary lie.

I did not consent to this convergence of what Martin Luther King called, assuring his murder, the *triplet evils of racism, materialism and militarism*, but I am responsible for my part in it.

I did not consent to an implacable, unbending, immovable tyranny of political and economic cartels and their caste society, working day and night in every nook and cranny

to assure public life cannot arise among the people to rival, challenge and end these outrageous crimes.

But I am responsible for my part in it.

I did not consent to hiding and obscuring the result: the destruction of all that matters, in events, deeds, words, or people, any and all people, any and all events, any and all deeds, any and all *words*. In black lives, deeds, and words, in white and yellow and pink lives, deeds, and words. I did not consent to being told every day of my life, from childhood and early schooling on, that I and others do not matter enough to, in adulthood, govern all our conditions, being told such things were not my concern, accepting a buffet table of prospects born of a glittering lie throughout a world. I did not consent to this empire Mark Twain called long ago, *the United States of Lyncherdom*.

But I am responsible for my part in it.

This is my concern; that I was taught from birth there was no difference in how people in this republic were treated, that we as a country did not have major work to do to make democracy and a republic real, or that our history was anything other than a whitewashed, ivory, disgusting farce of rascals, rascallions, and ruin.

From the whites of our eyes to the White House - white, white, and more white, to every horizon. It is soothing music for fools and madmen, and I have in no uncertain terms been a fool and been driven, like many, mad.

I did not consent to the rule of race, money, gender, or party.

I did not consent to the undermining of the plural rights of all who inhabit this continent.

But I am responsible for my part in it.

To say there is consent - manufactured or otherwise - is to completely ignore the *political*. This is the use of power against the people, all of us who undergird and infuse with our lives all systems, to undo, divide, and destroy self-government and the inalienable right to *have* rights, to have and enjoy *political* freedom that comes only from our governing of our conditions.

To say there was consent to this is cruel, absurd, and a lie. It is to demean and disappear those countless ones who fought to protect the republic, yet could not overturn the implacable power supremacy garnered by the parties and cartels.

Throughout all this, however, the truth is that the tradition of supremacies cannot stand anywhere as tall as its eternal opponent. For the largest, most meaningful, pure, and righteous tradition is one that began with our founding compacts and their ever renewed and expanded meaning. I did not consent to violation of this tradition, to twisting its meaning to persecution, oppression, and murder. But I am responsible surely for my part in how this rank distortion is permitted to endure and mutates by the year, burying the people's long struggle for freedom and self-government.

I did not consent to the crushing of the revolutionary spirit of the people in whole or in part, nor to the suspension of their rights in whole or in part.

Who did? Who would?

“Deal,” Malcolm X said, but we did not. Instead, we allowed him to be murdered.

I did not consent to this dictatorship in all its countless forms, from the electoral sewers and all our degraded and crushed imaginations, at home and abroad up to secret forces left and right, cartels, oligarchs, in society and its craven and submissive culture. By standing armies of soldiers and bureaucrats seeping into every corner and out across the world like a vast oil slick choking all life and smothering our souls.

But I am responsible for my part in it.

It has been said one departs one’s soul before one *can* lie. I did not consent to the traffic in such departures, to endless soul-snatching and loss, to our souls wrecked and drained, leaving mere shells of humans trapped in a superficial realm making murder and oppression possible.

I would never consent to such a ridiculous proposition, and did not. The word entertainment’s root is to mean to hold between us.

I did not consent to this obscene transformation of a word and its meaning, but I am responsible for my part in it.

I did not consent to the theft of our past and future.

I never would and never will.

Who has? *Who?*

How could you? How could I?

What of undoing germ lines and poisoning water, air, and food, creating elements like plutonium and worse, *brazenly*

calling such unnatural things natural and the result of anything but human making? This is neither human nor science, it is an abomination.

What of ever-new gadgets that prove ever more ruinous than their predecessors, turning people from their own senses, away from the world? Gadgets embedded now in biology and minds, in algorithms and automatic processes running society, with plants and animals and life itself mutating, airplanes plunging into the ocean, ice caps melting.

Can and will even God have mercy on us?

None of these are not accidents. These are part and parcel of a system of supremacies I never consent to.

But I am responsible for my part in it.

The people have been enslaved. **We live on vast, modern plantations.** A novel caste system stands in place to protect this and keep us fighting each other and never recognizing that this perpetual lesser-of-two-evils game is producing evil still. We are not children nor are we in high school. If we have lost our thinking, imagining, and freedom, it is our responsibility, and this is surely not consent. It is, however, obedience.

The processes and forms that do this are not intelligent: they are stupid, they are artificial, their target is undoing self-government. The scabrous writer Hunter S. Thompson put it simply: “The trouble with voting for the lesser of two evils is the two parties set it up this way.”

I did not consent to rigged elections and endless war, yet some part of the society seems dedicated to hiding these. Or to black box voting, black box government, black box existence

replacing all mattering, to our new and endless black-box fate.

I did not consent to what Ike, on leaving the presidency, god bless his journey, called “the disastrous rise of misplaced power.” Everywhere we are cursed by this, by lies and statistics forming an implacable fairytale of consent and legitimacy whose function is reassurance in the glittering lie.

It is a fiction. A web of fictions. We are beaten and starved into submission to this lie we are told we consented to.

We do not, we never did.

Who would? *Who?*

I did not, I never did. But I am responsible for my part in it.

What about you?

I did not and never will consent to an empire not of the liberty promised to all in fact, but of rackets, tortures, invasions, assassinations, overthrows, wars, punishment, impoverishment, the endless blowback of a rigged house only fools would call government of, by, and for the people.

We must face our darkest moments.

I did not consent to the elimination of great Americans - Medgar Evers, JFK, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., RFK, Fred Hampton, Ruben Salazar, Thomas Merton, and who knows how many other agitators for political freedom.

Then there have been here, hardly only abroad, the jailed and murdered journalists. What of Gary Webb who showed crack

cocaine brought to the inner city to crush black power? He was run out of society and managed to shoot himself in the head....*twice?*

This is the fate we all face. To be murdered and to be called a *suicide*. Expose government and corporate crimes and you will face *extreme sanction*.

These are just a few of the dead resulting from the merger of slavery and genocide, rendered $\frac{3}{5}$ ths a person and then eliminated.

I did not consent to the endless number of men, women, and children destroyed by this convergence of horror.

But I am responsible for my part in accepting this.

What about you?

I did not consent to Kent State or Orangeburg. To the massacre of whole black districts in the 19th and 20th centuries, to the overturning of Reconstruction, to Jim Crow, to Joe McCarthy and Roy Cohn, to the legions crushing decent people trying again and again to reform our unreformable systems, the people as a whole voting *for reform again and again and never getting it*.

I did not consent to Waco or Ruby Ridge or the incineration of M.O.V.E.

Rodney King, I Definitely Understand You.

I did not and never would consent to the relentless use of spies and agents and parties undoing the people's power, rights, space, time, and assembly.

How did this ever come to be accepted? I cannot accept it.

Who can?

Who *would*?

Lincoln was murdered for his effort to build a path to a fully self-governing union of the people, to realize the *meaning* of Union. This was dishonored, deeply. This was overthrown. This was murdered. This is a crime unremedied.

How could one *not* weep?

I did not consent to misplaced power rising again and again to show who is boss, while so many do not say a word, fighting only for their own positions.

Who would consent to this?

Who could?

Almost no one!

It *stinks*.

All this, for the most part, hatched in secrecy, that eternal companion to war, corruption, despotism, and ruin. Civil war and national war and global war, each circling back to the beginning and working its logic to a bloody exterminated end.

Where are our histories of such betrayals taught in school, to strengthen a people, not just to eliminate and cancel wrongdoers but to seek rightful self-government for all?

Whose side are the schools and institutions *on*?

I did not and will never consent to the poisoning and murder of those who sought to lead us to full self-government in political freedom. To false fronts, fakery, and predatory forces disappearing facts, reality, and accountability.

I did not consent to the upending of and total assault upon *reality*.

I did not and would never consent to elimination of a free press and all it requires, to being tricked, manipulated, infiltrated, and neutered.

But I am responsible for my part in it.

I *certainly* did not consent to non-constitutional entities controlling power and opinion, to suits disappearing and maneuvering to enslave, expropriate, and grab what they can, updating *such ancient horror* for new conditions.

I did not consent to this endless stream of gravediggers and counter-revolutionaries.

I did not, cannot, and *never* will consent to this contempt for the people as a majestic, plural body; secure and free in governing themselves, knowing what's up, what's down, and what will go up or down.

I *certainly* did not consent to the ongoing denial of crimes, to the moral injury of a country, a people, a world.

I did not consent to the ruin of our planet, climate, and the life of creatures everywhere.

I did not consent to the disregard for every freedom movement in our history, of first peoples, whites, workers, blacks,

endless immigrant groups, women, gays, straights, and trans, turning all that matters into a web of Disneyland rides.

Why are precious things not our main focus every day?

I did not consent to the gravest crime underlying it all: the destruction of that axiom of Lincoln at Gettysburg: self government of, by, and for the people.

I who live in this world with others who are different from me, who must shoulder the burden of our time, who are necessary for me to be who I am.

I did not consent to specters and ectoplasms, marching robots, ghouls and thieves and suits relishing freedom's ruin and calling this democracy and a republic, which it is not.

I did not consent to this rule of the jackals!

Primo Levi, that chronicler of the first mass laboratories of the camps, learned something crucial from the totalitarian push for a new man:

“We must be cautious about delegating to others our judgment and our will.”

We must be vigilant! We must learn, as our founders did, from what has happened before us, from what we never consented to.

I did not consent to the lesser of two evils, the evil of smothering decency and freedom of a people in lies and image-making.

Evil begins, the poet Joseph Brodsky said, when one person

starts to think they are superior to another. That's how the two parties keep this going.

Senator Bob LaFollette said to compromise is to lose all one has.

Thaddeus Stevens promised freedom and forty acres and a mule to every slave. That would by now mean virtually everyone.

Malcolm X said the Mason Dixon line had been moved north to the Canadian border. And one could probably say by now it has been pushed far beyond.

I will not collaborate or be enlisted as perpetrator and supporter of this great lie of consent. This issue is not why do we obey, but why do we support!

Thank you, Hannah Arendt, for that clarification.

Be gone and stay far, far away, whoever you are, you ghouls and executors of injustice and anti-democracy, of endless hate and fear, of eternal misery and expropriation. Out, demons out!

I did not consent to handing the Declaration of Independence to supremacies of every kind, to degradation of the Constitution's opening premise - that we agree to have this government only under the conditions it serves *the welfare of the people*, with all rights embedded in that compact to protect that welfare of, by, and for the people *themselves*.

I did not consent to so many promises unkept and unfulfilled; to a government over all lives in America being governed by unkept promises that we cannot consent to.

When one looks at such a wide array of events and phenomena, it is not hard to figure out what happened. We have to

throw out all of political science, that contradiction in terms, and so-called human psychology too, to see again.

We demand redress, repair, and return, now!

There was no consent to any of this.

And so, *there is no legitimacy.*

Paine, early on, proposed a Constitution and a union of republics, to foster the spirit in the use for a legal structure for self-government of all the people, rather than the perennial few or even many. One which rested not on consent, but on *actual* and *accurate* representation, of, by, and for the people. It was moreover a call for representation, as the revolution has been described.

If our constitutional democratic republic is to mean something, given that consent is a fiction, we must start over and rethink everything, with each other, in some evolving development of actual lived and living relationships.

The ills of our system form a jungle of perils that demand remedy, response, and repair. But because the system is based on hiding all truth and fact, the attempt to deal, for example, with the price of progress, the attempt to face history cannot occur. **Nothing real is allowed to enter *at the level of politics.*** The planet is heating up and American cartels are in the lead. The genetic re-ordering of life on earth is underway and American cartels are in the lead. The advance in nuclear destruction is underway and American cartels are in the lead. In every area where insane developments, where rank insanity will harm us for decades, perhaps terminally, some Americans are in the lead. But it is not all of us.

Our democracy is not undone by manufactured consent, as some say, but by lack of consent. This fact is *hidden* by the most modern and possibly *most total propaganda system* so far devised. Propaganda is the ultimate racket. Propaganda is not precisely force, but it is certainly a lie and so a violation. Its very premise is to violate truth, not, as the original meaning might have been thought to be, and broadcast it. Propaganda is not mere propagation, one of the most consequential fairy-tales of our era.

We did not consent to this.

We have arrived at the anticipated time when we would be tyrannized by rank criminals and cheats. The sign of the breadth and sophistication of this is that one cannot manufacture consent, yet the ruling caste and its so-called critics not only believe they can, they keep at it; dissidents chronicling it, perpetrators and others supporting it, lying to the people about everything actually experienced and felt. One can only manufacture the fiction of consent. Fake consent is NO consent. There is NO consent to the system. The government and economy now work, in their infernal machinery, to hide the absence of consent to prevent knowing and doing from ever coming back together. They do so systematically, hiding every erosion of legitimacy along with every path back to re-discovery of core political principles. We are dying under such rubble, for the body politic, the people, have been robbed of their Constitution and as well the Declaration of Independence, the Mayflower Compact, the Magna Carta - all of it. If anything has been manufactured, it is theft and replacement of foundations with dominion.

This has been constructed in our name, and this we are responsible for. We are not all guilty of its crimes, but we are

responsible for our country, for the truths about us, for knowing who and what we are and have become. We are responsible for allowing fake legitimacy and fake consent to stand, and to poison the entire planet. Compared to this, mere empire is small beer.

It cannot and will not and must not stand. Misplaced power is leading to unprecedented disaster, war, and annihilation, not merely of free, self-government as a potential, but of masses of people and their very homes on earth. Every degree of climate temperature increase is a sign of corruption, fraud, and lack of representation, of cartelization of power and extinction in violence. Cartel rule is out of control and constitutes our system now, a self-perpetuating regime whose aim is to extract, expropriate, and eviscerate. It has neither legitimacy nor consent. It is the ruin of a democratic republic and the peace necessary for it. We have the inalienable, eternal right to both.

For evil deeds to be achieved again and again, James Baldwin argued, *the government must have consented to it*. There is the real consent, for the people were no part of it. The government is responsible for the curse.

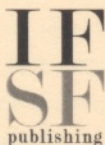
Baldwin's insight extends ever outward: if there was assassination, most likely, there was government consent. Baldwin understood how to lighten this, to illuminate, increase it with a sense of responsibility, of complicity. He understood what MLK called *the infected boil that*, in being covered, worsened. The only hope was appearance.

And so I say, no more.

Fred Dewey was a writer, artist, publisher, educator, and civic activist. He was the co-founder of the Neighborhood Councils Movement in Los Angeles, and directed the Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center in Los Angeles from 1996 to 2010, editing and publishing over twenty books, including artists as diverse as Ammiel Alcalay, Simone Forti, Jean-Luc Godard, Daniel Berrigan, Abdellatif Laabi, Jack Hirschman, Christopher Draeger, Ed Ruscha, and Diane di Prima.

In the mid-1990s, Dewey founded The Hannah Arendt Working Group in Los Angeles, and in 2010 began leading free public seminars on Arendt's work in Berlin, Paris, London, Oslo, Amsterdam, and Los Angeles.

The Fred Rogers Dewey Legacy Project (FRDLP) was founded in 2021 to continue encouraging the cross-cultural dialogs, insightful political thinking, and the kind of grassroots community activism Fred championed.



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