



Episode 832: Do Men Really Have All the Power? Paul Elam on the Men's Movement

Guest: Paul Elam

WOODS: I heard from you because of the interview I did with Cassie Jaye, and I thought, All right, Cassie Jaye was an interesting person to talk to, being a documentary filmmaker and somebody who was unlikely to be sympathetic to you who gave you guys, I thought, a fair hearing. Well, then I thought, Why not go directly to the horse's mouth here? Let's talk directly to Paul Elam. Why not, right? We're fearless here on the show. Why not do that?

Let me have you tell me -- I'm going to ask you about A Voice for Men in a minute, but tell me more broadly how you would describe the men's rights movement, particularly to people who are unfamiliar with it or even hostile, because when I posted an episode on this I was getting, "Men's rights movement? Haha, why don't you have a billionaires' rights movement?" and stuff like that. And by the way, as it turns out I also believe in billionaires' rights. But go ahead.

ELAM: Oh yeah, as a matter of fact, I do too. Generally speaking, the men's movement -- which is what I like to call it, much more so than men's rights. There is a larger men's movement that involves a lot of different factions, a lot of different groups of people doing different things. But generally the men's movement is a response to the current landscape of sexual politics, and it involves everything from what's going on in our family courts to what's going on in institutions of higher education to what's happening with our boys, even to relationship issues between men and women and the current zeitgeist. So when you talk about the men's movement, you're talking about a lot of different groups of people. A Voice for Men happens to be a conduit for a lot of those different perspectives in the sense of a publication.

WOODS: All right, so how long have you been involved in this, and how old would you say this movement is?

ELAM: This movement's over 100 years old. The first records we have of it are books written by a man named E. Belford Bax. He was actually a socialist from England, who wrote a book called *The Fraud of Feminism* in 1913. And you could read that book today, and it would probably outline almost all of the same arguments that men's movement advocates are making today about their reaction to gender politics, to the state of affairs for men and boys, and, importantly, to our notions of power, where we think power is.

You mentioned that people say, "Oh, men's rights advocates? Why not billionaires' rights?" There is an ongoing assumption in this culture that men have all the power, and challenging that definitely elicits a lot of hostility in people. But of course, when people begin to listen to the arguments about it, they do make sense. And part of what we do is furthering that argument that our notion of power is a little bit convoluted in this culture right now to begin with. Any man that's ever been in a family court trying to get access to his children from a hostile ex would have a very different picture of what power is than somebody who hasn't been through that.

WOODS: I do want to get to that in a minute, but let's imagine a devil's advocate scenario in which somebody comes at you with: let's look at men as a percentage of CEOs, or let's look at men's income or men in positions of leadership, whether political or otherwise, and it's overwhelmingly tipped toward men. So how is it that you can say that men are not in fact really running the show?

ELAM: Okay, good. That's a really good point to bring up. If we want to look at it through an occupational lens, through position and power, we look at politics, we look at CEOs for Fortune 1000 companies, which I think right now are less than 5% women. If we're going to look at it through that lens, shouldn't we also -- or rather, looking at through what's called the glass ceiling -- shouldn't we also look at it through the glass cellar? The vast preponderance of people in very dangerous professions, very brutal work, harsh and dangerous, are also men. The people who crawl down into our sewers are almost all men. The people that get on our crab boats and fishing boats in order to provide for their families are almost all men. The people that die in our wars are almost all men.

o it seems a little disingenuous to me that if we're going to point at professions and say, okay, these are dominated by men, that we not also take a look across the board at all professions and realize that the most powerless ones in our culture are also dominated by men and in much, much greater numbers. You're talking about less than 1% of men, by far, of men in really powerful positions in politics, as Fortune 500 CEOs. But when we're talking about men who have very brutal life-ending occupations, we're talking about millions and millions. Do these guys have power? I don't think so.

WOODS: All right, let's talk about what family court is like. When I talked to Cassie Jaye, I was saying that I know at least some critics would say this is all anecdotal. You're dealing with particularly outrageous cases. But surely there's some way to aggregate the numbers and reach some kind of conclusion about what these courts are like, I would think.

ELAM: Well, we know that in 84% of contested custody cases that men lose. That seems like a pretty lopsided statistic to me. We know from the tender years doctrine, which came along as a response to patriarchy way back in the late 1800s, early 1900s, that the default setting for family courts was to assume that mothers were more fit custodians of their children. That is an institutional bias that is right there under our nose.

We see it all the time. We see it in the results of custody disputes. We see it in the numbers of men who are incarcerated for being unable to afford alimony or child support. I don't think it's anecdotal. What's anecdotal is the numbers of men who

commit suicide, the ones who end up living on the street, living in their cars, having to live with relatives in order to meet their child support payments. Those I would look at as anecdotal points, the worst end scenario of the family court system. But overall, men -- I was told when I divorced that, "You might as well bring your wallet in there" -- and forgive my directness, but this is what my attorney said. He said, "You have a penis. You're at a disadvantage."

WOODS: All right, well, none of this sounds surprising to me because of everything I've read and people I've talked to. But what do you think about the -- what can you tell me about the child support system in general? Is there anything wrong with it in theory, or is it just being implemented in practice the wrong way? I mean, it seems in general not a bad idea for the dad to kick in for his kids, but obviously something's going wrong with it.

ELAM: Well, I think the whole assumption that a child is a piece of property that needs to be given to one of the parents as primary caretaker is flawed. We know from the research, for instance, that Warren Farrell has done on the needs of children, which family courts are allegedly about, that the need both parents, that once they get under 35% of their time at home having a father in their lives, that they begin to suffer in every psychosocial way we measure the health of their lives: with truancy, with criminality, with teen pregnancy, drug abuse, mental health issues. Once you go under 35% of the time being spent with the father, those numbers go up drastically.

And so rather than pick and choose, you know, who's going to be the better parent, and then cut the other parent out and make them write a check -- and I would say the same thing applies to mothers too. And women are experiencing this at times when fathers get really great lawyers, and they go in and overcome the court bias and they win the case and then the mother gets cut out. That's horrible for the child too. A lot of men's rights organizations, and some of them that would not call themselves men's rights organizations, are actively working on getting default shared custody established in family courts, where the parents just have to suck it up and share custody of the child, share responsibilities for them. If we do that, then we can eliminate a lot of child support and address the needs of the child. Right now all the family courts do is tear children to pieces.

WOODS: What kind of reforms are you advocating? Anything specific? What do you want to see happen?

ELAM: I'd like to see an end to no-fault divorce, for one.

WOODS: All right, let's stop right there. Elaborate on that.

ELAM: Sure.

WOODS: Tell us exactly what that -- I mean, most people know what that is, but just in case -- exactly what that is and what the problem with it is.

ELAM: Well, the first state back in the 1960s, Ronald Reagan, governor of California, signed no-fault divorce into law. And it basically establishes that you can get out of a

marriage without reason, without cause, at any point, and without consequence. And marriage being a contract, you can violate your end of the contract with no reason whatsoever, with no proof of breach on the other side. And you can take the house and you can take the children and you can have the man's income taken for child support and for alimony.

Consequently, the divorce rate skyrocketed after that. And the thinking behind it was that there were a lot of women trapped in abusive marriages that couldn't prove that they were in abusive marriages, and this was the way to get them out of that marriage, that they didn't have to prove that there was abuse going on. And there is I suppose some rationale for that because there are some marriages that are abusive.

But what it still established was a guideline that gave a woman in particular financial incentive once the man -- the average divorce happens about seven years. That also happens to be once the first child enters school and when the man starts reaching toward his peak in income. And that provides a financial incentive for women to take the physical property that has been gathered in the marriage and the man's income and custody of the children and to cut him out of the family altogether, consequently hurting the children. And that's what we have, is a rampant divorce rate that is tearing our families apart. And I just think that we would be a lot better off if there needed to be cause in a marriage to dissolve it without consequence to the person filing.

WOODS: So that's step one. What other things would you like to see? Can you reform the way the family courts operate? Wouldn't you have to go into the statutes for that?

ELAM: Well, I think there's things you can do that get the lawyers out of the way. I mean, a really big part of the problem is that divorce is very profitable for the legal profession. One of the ways that you can intervene in that is to have a standard of shared custody that, when parents have to divorce, that they be responsible for the physical care of the children, which is, again, exactly what the children need. That removes a lot of the financial incentive, because if you're sharing custody, if each parent has the child 50% of the time or as close to it as they can get, then you don't need child support. What you simply do is share expenses for taking care of that child and you raise them. And that means it requires parents to live in a reasonable proximity to each other, which would cause an inconvenience for some parents, but I suppose my position on that is, Oh well, too bad, suck it up, and take care of your children. That's what you agreed to when you had them.

WOODS: All right, let me ask you -- I think I know the answer, having looked at AVoiceForMen.com -- what your opinion, as dispassionate as you can possibly be about it, is of feminism. Because I hear -- There are all different kinds of feminism. I hear all different varieties peddled all over the place. Some different kinds of feminism seem completely at odds with each other. Cassie Jaye calls herself a feminist, yet she made *The Red Pill* documentary, so obviously there's a diversity of opinion there. How do you assess this?

ELAM: Well, it is a complicated question. I think one of the greatest sleights of hand in the feminist movement right now is called "feminisms," or saying or claiming that there are many different types of feminism, from environmental feminism -- whatever that is -- to gender feminism. I'm not buying any of it. All you do is get into a wild

goose chase, a game of whack-a-mole, when you're trying to pin down feminist ideologues on what they believe and what they stand for.

What I tend to look at is what I would call governance feminism. I look at what's happening in our family courts, I look at what's happening in our laws, what's happening in our institutions of higher learning, where authority on feminism's behalf is, oh, acting out, I would say, an agenda against men. That's the feminism that counts. It's the feminism that sponsored the Violence Against Women Act, which is a huge, absolute pork project of corrupt legislation. That's where feminism matters. It matters in the UN when we have relief efforts for places like Haiti, where they wouldn't even give men food. They would only give it to women.

These are the areas -- where the "Dear Colleague" letter from the Obama administration -- all of these areas where feminism shows its power in our culture. So whatever feminists want to call feminism, I refer them back to the feminism that actually matters. I mean, it doesn't matter what individuals think out there or what they believe they are. What matters is what happens in our governance, what happens in our culture that actually ends up harming people.

WOODS: All right, let me go back and ask you -- I actually don't know what the "Dear Colleague" letter is, so I suspect some listeners probably also don't know what that is.

ELAM: Okay, in April of 2011, Obama's Department of Education, the civil rights office in the Department of Education issued a letter to universities across the United States, instructing them that the standards of evidence on sexual assault allegations in colleges had to be reduced from clear and convincing, which was the longtime standard in colleges and universities, down to preponderance of the evidence. And it brought with it a bunch of other rules too, such as the individual accused could not face their accuser, they could not have an attorney in any proceedings that the university brought for disciplinary action, and they could not bring their own evidence in many cases. And this was done under threat of the end of federal funding, of the federal government removing their funding from universities that didn't comply.

And so what it did is it in effect set up a system of star chambers in colleges and universities, where the weight of allegation alone was enough to destroy a young man's academic career. And there are an abundance of cases right now. If you visit the website BoysAndMenInEducation.com, a man named Jonathan Taylor has a database there of all the cases that are ongoing right now where young men's lives have been destroyed by accusation alone.

One case, and this is admittedly anecdotal, but it was out of the University of Montana. A young man there was accused by a woman of sexual assault two years after the fact. The police locally did an investigation of it and found that not only was there no warrant to the claim, but they found that the woman had lied and issued a warrant for her arrest for a false police report. The university didn't care. They had their conviction. He was ousted from college. His academic future was ended. And he now today drives a truck, where he once had an aspiring college career.

This sort of circumstance, this sort of event has been repeated over and over again through our colleges and universities. You don't see much coverage of it in the

press. *The Wall Street Journal* has covered some of it. But it is a horrific problem going on for young men in college, that once a crooked finger is pointed at them, they end up with absolutely no way to defend themselves, and quite often their futures are destroyed without any evidence or corroboration that they've actually done anything wrong. And I do believe that President Trump is in the process right now of rescinding that order.

WOODS: And how about the Violence Against Women Act? We hear an awful lot about this. And again, it's like with a lot of legislation. It has such a benign name -- is there anybody in favor of violence against women? -- that it I'm sure conceals what's really going on. So tell me what that's all about.

ELAM: Well, you're right. It's like the Patriot Act. Who could stand against that? And certainly no one, not me, nobody I know is in support of violence against women. That doesn't mean the Violence Against Women Act even has any efficacy toward that end. I mean, there's big questions about that, whether or not it does.

But what it is is essentially a gendered law in a society that is supposed to be about equal treatment under the law. It only recognizes female victims and male perpetrators, despite the fact that all the valid evidence that we have -- and I mean from CDC to Harvard -- Martin Fiebert did an annotated bibliography of over 400 studies with a sampling of 371,000 people in surveys that establishes that intimate partner violence has what we call gender symmetry.

It's roughly equal between men and women, and we end up, as people might have seen in *The Red Pill* movie, with 2,000 federally funded shelters for women in the United States -- again, that's not a problem. I don't think we should necessarily consider the federal government a solution to all social problems, but certainly I don't have issue with shelters being funded for victims of domestic violence. But none of these shelters service men. They turn them away. They even turn away women with children that are over 12 years old if they're male.

And what this ends up with is a lot of men who are victims of domestic violence have nowhere to go. They end up facing the horrible decision of whether to stay in the relationship because they're the only barrier between the children and an abusive mother, which means that they will continue to be abused themselves, or to leave the children alone, because the chances of a man being able to off with the kids are very slim. This is not a decision that anybody should have to make.

And the Violence Against Women Act pushes the narrative, the Duluth Model -- which is, again, one that asserts that all domestic violence is an expression of men's domination in the home. It's an extension of patriarchy -- and that the only way to handle it is to identify men as perpetrators and women as victims. That's over \$600 million in a year in funding. We can do better than this.

WOODS: All right, I want to shift gears here and talk about some of the, let's just say negative press that you've gotten over the years. And you're talking to somebody who's also gotten negative press -- not as much as you have. But I've been dismissed and condemned on the basis of a sentence I wrote 20 years ago. I mean, it's just crazy. There's no honest attempt to assess the balance of my work. It's, well, when he was in

college he said such and -- It's just ridiculous nonsense. Or one of my great intellectual heroes is Murray Rothbard. I've seen entire articles where his entire output was apparently one sentence about lesbians in the Progressive Era. This is a guy who wrote 25 books, was a major academic. So I don't necessarily assume when I hear or read one sentence that I know everything there is to know about somebody.

At the same time, I have to be honest with you and say that some of those one sentences that I have read of yours are somewhat blood curdling, and I want to give you an opportunity to say something about them. So for example -- this is from a site - - I won't dignify them, but it's a site that tracks you very closely. And it says -- you probably know what I'm talking about.

ELAM: [laughing] Yes, I do.

WOODS: It says, "Should I be called to sit on a jury for a rape trial, I vow publicly to vote not guilty even in the face of overwhelming evidence that the charges are true." What context could that fit in that that wouldn't be a crazy thing to say?

ELAM: Well, I think if you value due process and if you understand things like rape shield laws, about what is going on in our courts with this area of criminal justice, then the only morally responsible decision you can make is nullification. There are a lot -- and again, this is not something you're going to see a lot, but all you have to do is Google "critique of rape shield laws," and you will find from like Harvard Law, there is an abundance of critique and concern across the board from legal scholars about the undermining effect of rape shield laws on due process.

WOODS: I don't know what these laws are about.

ELAM: Well, rape shield laws are, again, they were something like the Violence Against Women Act and perhaps even the "Dear Colleague" letter. They were something that was designed with good intention, that they didn't want a woman's sexual history to become a part of a trial proceeding out of fear that it would bias the jury against her. That on the surface makes perfect sense to me. However, it doesn't play out -- like a lot of things on paper, it doesn't play out in real life.

You may be familiar with, years ago, the Marv Albert case. Marv Albert was the commentator, basketball commentator mainly, very popular one. Had a huge career. He was convicted of sexual assault from a woman, and during his trial, it was presented as evidence that there were bruises and bite marks on the woman. It also happened to come to pass at trial that his defense team had another acquaintance of the woman, a former boyfriend, who was ready to testify, as Marv Albert had himself, that that sort of sex play was typical and normal for their relationships, that this was something that she enjoyed. And you know, again, I'm not here to pass judgment on anybody's sexual proclivities, but this seems to be evidence that should be weighed in a court of law. The judge would not allow it.

He would not allow the testimony that what the woman was presenting as evidence of abuse was actually something she had a history with, and there were other people that, again -- not just other men, but other women -- that were ready to testify that

she had a long history of vindictive actions, of clinging on to relationships, acting like a borderline personality, clinging on to relationships, and then becoming vindictive when the man broke it off. All these things were components of evidence that were not allowed into his trial, and he was convicted.

What I'm saying is that with the advent of rape shield laws -- and again, this isn't just me reading through something and deciding I'm against it. There are many, many legal scholars that have written opinions that show grievous concern for the lack of due process, for the undermining of due process that happens in rape shield laws, effectively saying you can't know whether or not you're getting the truth. And if you can't know you're getting the truth, if you can't know that you're able to see all the evidence, how can you vote guilty? Isn't that part of our standard: guilt beyond a reasonable doubt?

WOODS: But at the same time, it seems like the alternative is people would just have carte blanche to go commit rape, because if Paul Elam's on the jury they're going to get away with it.

ELAM: No, the alternative is to rescind the rape shield laws and to bring the standard of evidence back to the courtroom.

WOODS: Now, what about the argument against you that you started a website, a registry website, Register-Her, and that on this site there was a co-mingling of people who really were brutal, violent women, and people who simply expressed feminist opinions, and that this was a way of making people's names and reputations toxic?

ELAM: Well, I don't think that putting them on the same website -- I mean, there was clear delineation between categories there, and the only feminists that we listed on those sites were those ones who had done things like advocate for the extermination of men down to 10 to 15% of the population, who advocated that an accusation of rape should automatically equal a conviction -- these real, extreme ideas that would be considered extremely hateful were it any other group, that if we advocated that the population of blacks or Jews or women were to be reduced to 10 or 15% so they could be manageable, there would be, I think, righteous outrage about that.

And that's been the point of a lot of my work for a long time. A lot of the satire that I've written that I've been criticized for is that if we take something and reverse the roles, all of a sudden we see it differently.

We did take care -- there was no personal information given, no work information, no location information, and we took care to point out that this was not -- we weren't saying that the individuals there -- and this was with every listing -- were to be equated with the pedophiles and murderers and other people that we had on the site.

But we did point out and used evidence from news clippings and articles that they had written directly advocating for men's extermination, for men's castration, and other things, and put them on this site. I would stand by it to this day. If you're going to advocate for forced sterilization by the government of men, I'm going to have an opinion about it, and that's that.

WOODS: Well, obviously you have a very direct and confrontational style, and everybody has his own style, and some work for some people and some don't. But in looking back on the catalog of things that you can be legitimately quoted as having said, is there anything that makes you say, You know, maybe if I had been not such a firebrand, maybe if I had been more restrained in my language, I might have gotten farther?

ELAM: No, as a matter of fact, quite the opposite. I think if you were to speak with Cassie Jaye, who -- I mean, *The Red Pill* movie is the first attempt of its kind to document that actual platform of the men's movement, what's actually going on, the attempts to silence us, and what have you. She would be the first to tell you that without the provocative work, it would have never happened.

And I'm a bit of a student of social movements. If you look back at the women's movement, they were burning buildings in the first wave of feminism, seeking the women's vote. They were plotting murders. The gay rights movement started with the Stonewall riots in New York. The American civil rights movement, as most everybody knows, in its beginnings, in its first bold pushes forward ended up with burning buildings and blood in the streets. I think if we manage to start a dialogue about the issues that are affecting men and boys without violence, which we've done, we have beat the odds on how any other social movement in history has come to pass.

So I look back, if I have any regrets at all, I regret that I live in a society that it took this kind of provocation to even start a dialogue. But the fact is that the people whose shoulders that I'm standing on, people like Warren Farrell, Belford Bax, and others, who gave us the button-downed latte-sipping version of these issues, a plea for discussion, have been ignored for a hundred years. Warren Farrell wrote a fantastic bestseller in *The Myth of Male Power*. It resulted in no change whatsoever. It resulted in no real public dialogue.

That's the nature of humanity, though, that when we have a group of people that are facing special circumstances -- and I believe with all my heart that men and boys are. I mean, we haven't even begun to touch on the issues here -- then we need a dialogue about it that the society at large does not want to have. And that presents a set of dynamics that requires something more than a book or a polite discussion, which people often attempt in a patronizing way and move on to no actual discussion of the issues.

The book now, I've been traveling all over the United States. I just got back from the UK. I'm going to Australia for a screening of *The Red Pill* movie there. There's a lot of resentment and hostility to it. And so yeah, I understand that I was pushing the edge of the envelope with a lot of my work. I feel like that was necessary. I don't really even think it's -- It's really a function of my personality. I would rather have a discussion like I'm having with you any day of the week, but the fact is that a discussion like you and I are having has never resulted in anything substantive in terms of bringing attention to the issues that we're talking about, and there are a plethora of those issues.

WOODS: What were your thoughts on the Women's March we just observed?

ELAM: [laughing] I'm going to try very hard not to be snarky here.

WOODS: Almost impossible in light of the signs that I saw them holding. My favorite was the one about, "If only as a woman I could someday have the same rights as a gun." What, so that you'd have to be registered to move around? You wouldn't be allowed in public places? What? That makes no sense.

ELAM: Maybe she would have the same rights as a bomb so she could blow up the White House. It just baffles me how the hypocrisy of these events -- and don't get me wrong. I'm all for everybody's human rights. I'm for eliminating 98% of government and getting them out of all of our lives. But the fact of the matter is that we had half a million women marching who really didn't know why they were there and who showed that in these speeches, in these signs that were absolutely insane.

There are no rights that women don't have that men have, and as a matter of fact, there are rights that women have that men do not have. It's just the reverse situation. And I can sit here and name them for you. There are plenty of rights that women have that are taken from men routinely, and this is not a part of the discussion. We still have a culture, half of which will look at those women in those marches and say they were doing the right thing.

WOODS: Well, the website is AVoiceForMen.com. People can check it out and decide for themselves what to think. How about that for a novel idea? And our guest has been Paul Elam. Thanks so much for your time.

ELAM: I've been happy to be here. Thanks for having me, Tom.