

The Red Pill: The Strange Art of Men's Rights Activism (Part One)

Hey everybody, today I'm gonna talk about The Red Pill. Released in 2016, the documentary centers on a self declared feminist, Casey Jay, who enters the world of men's rights activism and slowly but surely gets convinced that the movement is a good one. It's hard to say the importance that The Red Pill has to men's rights activism at large, hard to say the purpose the film has within that community or how widely its been embraced. If I had to make an educated guess, though, I would say that the movie serves two primary functions. First, it legitimizes and mainstreams the movement to some extent. I mean, if Casey Jay, feminist extraordinaire, is able to change her ways and see the MRA light, then maybe they're not just a kinda silly fringe group after all. Second, the movie can function well as an entry point into meninism. It makes so many claims and includes so many MRA talking points that the whole thing feels like a 101 course in that stuff.

Men's rights activism is a relatively new phenomenon, and this movie is only two years old. There's no telling if either will stand the test of time. But here, in this video, I want to assume one thing: that this film, and the movement it seems to represent, are important. Our culture has generated this movie, after all. It's created the circumstances under which it could be created and absorbed as a legible political perspective. And because of that, it only makes sense to look closely at the film--to talk about what it's trying to do, what ideas it wants to inspire, and what aesthetic composition it aims for. So, that's this video: The Red Pill: The Art of Men's Rights Activism.

One disclaimer. This movie goes to some pretty dark, pretty emotionally charged places. And so my video is gonna do that, too. I'll be speaking about sexual assault, child abuse, suicide,

intimate partner violence, and other such things. So, you know, just know what you're gettin' into, here.

With that out of the way, let's get started. By and large, The Red Pill wants to support one main thesis: That the oppression men endure in America is on par with or greater than the oppression that women endure. And because of that, it's ludicrous to think that our modern day society privileges or empowers men over women. There are more nuances to it than that, of course. But it's my hope that we can get at these nuances and access the film's broader motivations by taking its thesis on its own terms. The movie brings up a lot of points, ranging from male circumcision to the negative media portrayal of men. But in this first video part, I just wanna zoom in and do a close examination of the first major argument in the film.

That various social scripts and economic conditions often result in men occupying roles that are harmful to them.

This position is made clear by Warren Farrell, author of "The Myth of Male Power" (male work is more valued, female lives are more valued.) The red pill takes this sentiment and expands on it, generally trying to get the idea across that even as men are more enabled to produce under capitalism, that doesn't always lead to good things for 'em. The general idea is that the men who do hard labor in America are often seen disposable or interchangeable.

And, on first blush, this argument seems deeply uncontroversial. After all, men do make up the vast majority of soldiers in America. Construction workers, truck drivers, commercial fisherman, all the dangerous jobs are mostly filled by men. The film spends a lot of time hammering this point home, too. It goes into great detail, showing statistics of casualties in American wars and acting like those stats might be surprise for some people. And yeah, you

know, okay, men, especially poor men, the sorts of people who are forced to take dangerous jobs, are being systematically oppressed. I don't think a lot of people would disagree with that.

But here, I want to show you a scene, one brought to us by none other than Cassie Jaye. The scene, a snippet of Cassie's video diary, expresses this really interesting idea toward the beginning. (men are given medals, they're convinced to be slaves to their work). Jeez, what a statement. Cassie is essentially sending up two institutions at once. She starts with nationalism, claiming that young boys are wrongly inundated with ideas of romance, heroism, and patriotism, that ultimately convince them to sacrifice their lives. She then extends this critique to capitalism, implying that just as soldiers are deluged with propaganda, so too are workers. They're convinced, by a system that doesn't care about them, that their labor isn't just necessary, but also noble and heroic. And that's pretty bold, right there, there's a lot of meat on those two sentences. But as interesting as they are, Cassie finishes her statement with this. I'm just gonna play the whole thing, even though it's a bit long.

I have a few issues with what's going on here. To start, I'm not sold on the idea that because men occupy the most dangerous jobs, their quality of life is de facto worse. She says she wouldn't want to take on the responsibilities or obligations of maleness, and there, it seems like she's comparing herself, a white, well to do artist without children, to poor, working class men, and saying, "I'd rather be me than be one of those guys." While I am happy that Jaye seemingly lives a pleasant, unburdened life, it's a bit strange that she seems to extend that sentiment to all womanhood. More now than ever before, women also have to work in order to sustain their families. And while this is by no means objective, I think the conditions under which women enter capitalism are substantially worse than those that men face. Women are more likely to be

single mothers. Over 12% of women live in poverty while the number is under 10% for men. And when it comes to extreme poverty the differential is 6.1 percent of women versus 4.4 percent of men, that's a difference of roughly two million people.

You might notice that I'm sorta playing small ball with the red pill, here. You know, "You say that men have it bad, well, check out how bad women have it." But, see, it's that kind of reductive discourse that the film demands. And that's because, in this scene, Cassie Jaye implicates a pretty strange notion: That the only metric we can use to understand oppression is quality of life. This entire section of the movie seems to center on that idea, claiming that because some men have bad, dangerous jobs, that they are necessarily less liberated than women who don't have those jobs. But, here's the thing, quality of life is not the be all and end all when it comes to discussing oppression. In fact, there are other metrics that are just as important. Where does the wealth in a society concentrate? Who can decide what gets made and how it gets made? Who holds most of the political power, that is, who's putting our laws on the books? What decisions are individuals able to make and how are those decisions impacted by a wider network of power? Neither The Red Pill nor Cassie Jaye seem to care about these questions, and because of that, their read of American culture becomes very simplistic.

Let me be a bit more concrete: Women don't just not want the dangerous jobs that men have. Rather, they have been historically barred from those positions, and they continue to face undue persecution in male dominated fields. Let's just take one example that the film seems to care a lot about, the military. It should be obvious to anyone watching this movie that its war casualty stats don't exist in a vacuum. 99 percent of the people who died in World War II were men, but that's not a coincidence, right. Women didn't have the choice or the obligation to serve

their country at that time: They were prevented from doing so by a male-run government. And echoes of this historical discrimination still exist in our culture. After all, it was only in the last five years that women were allowed to enter combat, and female presence in the military is still a contentious issue. Mike Pence, a man who might one day be president, has gone on record saying that women should not be allowed to serve.

More than just discrimination, though, woman-soldiers face a host of issues that are much less pronounced among their male counterparts. While sexual assault is a large problem throughout the military, women report very high numbers. 80 percent of servicewomen have been sexually harassed and upwards of 25 percent have been assaulted.

So, this is the point I'm getting at here. If women could enter the military under more equitable conditions, would they, on aggregate, have a higher quality of life? I don't know the answer to that. I'm not a future magician and neither is Cassie Jaye. Every social shift has upsides and downsides, and I'm not gonna pretend like I'm an expert on the subject. But, regardless of what that answer might be, the historical barring of women from service and the continued systematic oppressions that women in the army face are just that, oppressions. They don't become liberative because serving in the military isn't fun. To put this another way: Getting to vote for our leaders may not always be good for us. Enfranchised people have to be aware of their political climate. They have to burden their minds with complicated issues and make really tough choices, sometimes. A lot of people might be happier if they didn't get to vote. But when American law had it so women couldn't vote and men could, that wasn't a favor for women. Even if it somehow made them happier, it was still oppressive, still a right they should have had and didn't have.

But what strikes me most about Cassie Jaye's monologue isn't that it's unconvincing, not that it's a reductive point in a reductive film, but that it doesn't make any sense, like, in an emotional way. Let me read to you, again, what Jaye says at the beginning of this scene. "Men are given medals and statues and written about in the history books to justify them dying or being slaves to work or being used to progress society." Now, if I told you that quote, without any context, what would you think the takeaway might be? From my perspective, it's easy. Society is flawed, and there are some pretty major ways we have to fix it. Maybe we shouldn't allow the government to glamorize war in the way it does. Maybe we shouldn't be enlisting eighteen year old children to fight our international conflicts. Maybe we should take some pain to make sure that people doing labor are not physically or economically abused.

Here's Jaye's takeaway, though: men have it worse than women do. And she just stops there, never provides any more insight into the root of the problems or acts as though there could be a solution. See, Jaye starts with a criticism of society, substitutes that for a criticism of feminism, and then never really comes back to that society angle. And, in theory, that could be fine. There's nothing inherently wrong with criticizing the left or criticizing feminism. The only problem is that the progressive movements that the film takes issue with are just really not the enemy, here. In fact, those movements advocate pretty good solutions to at least some of the problems this movie brings up.

Let's just take two examples. First, male suicidality. Paul Elam says at one point that men are four times more likely to kill themselves than are women. He throws that out there without any added information. To him, it's just another way that men have it worse which can be used to prove feminism stupid. But why do men kill themselves more? Well, the consensus

seems to be that male suicide rates are higher because men choose more lethal methods, most commonly, guns. Suicide is generally a very spontaneous act--If a convenient method isn't available, a lot of people won't do it at all. Because of that, it's reasonable to think that if we limited the number of guns in people's homes, they would commit suicide less. And the statistics seem to bare out on this one. In nations where gun control was tightened, like Israel and Australia, suicide rates dropped precipitously. In connecticut, when gun laws were made stricter, there was a fifteen percent decrease in firearm related suicide and little increase in other forms. And when Missouri loosened their gun laws, firearm suicides increased by sixteen percent. I'm not saying here that if we did a better job regulating guns, there would no suicide problem. But I think the question has to be asked: Which movement causes more American men to die by their own hands, the NRA or the left and feminism? It seems like the answer is the former, so why does the movie target the latter? Why does Paul Elam say this ("america loses more men") and then claim that this guy is the best president since Abraham Lincoln? It just doesn't add up.

Let's move on to my second example because it's way out there. At one point Paul Elam says this. Let's think about the argument here. Elam is claiming that people are mentally strained by the act of ruling the nation, and since the vast majority of people making the laws are men, that's a pretty substantial amount of hard labor, right there. But if we look closely at this position for even a second, we can see how well it fits within the quote unquote feminist agenda. On one hand, we have men, and those men are forced into serving the nation because of the burden to produce or whatever. On the other, we have feminists, and they're saying "we wanna be in government! We should encourage more women to be in government and we should vote for

them!” Any way you slice it, this problem can be solved with the most common sense, sorta left leaning solution out there: more representation, more kinds of people running the country.

But of course, Paul Elam doesn’t say that. And when he’s talking about male suicide, of course he doesn’t bring up gun control. And why is that? Well I think the answer is simple. The Red Pill and its participants do not want its audience to follow the film’s political suggestions to their logical conclusions. Because if they did, they would see a very different story from the one this film tells us, a story where the left and feminism aren’t concealing the truth of male oppression, see that in many cases, mras ought to align with these movements.

So what I’ve done here is drawn out a sort of map that we can use to understand this first set of arguments. First, the film presents a bunch of statistics that refer to a valid problem. Men, especially poor men, are oppressed by the conditions of their labor. Second, it employs a narrative that disregards female problems and paints the world of oppression as though it has no history or complexity. Men have it worse than women do. Third, it presents this point in such a way that it can make the people who agree with the movie feel like their problems are not cared about by the mainstream. Men are disposable, nobody’s talking about it, and the world of feminist politics seeks to hide these problems. And what’s nuts is that at this point, I’ve only talked about the first thirty minutes of the red pill. There’s a lot more complexity and nuance left to come, a lot of questions left unanswered, so I hope you’ll join me next time. Part two of what will no doubt be my most successful videos ever.