

Hacker, Activist Aaron Swartz Commits Suicide at 26

by Violet Blue via indigo - ZDNet Saturday, Jan 12 2013, 7:06am

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*If hackers are to remain an effective political force for good I cannot stress the ANONYMITY RULE enough -- some things are done with an identity other things are done ANONYMOUSLY! We own the wire only as long as the man cannot nail us. We maintain internet freedom only as long as we avoid traces and identification by fifth rate hackers working for the government -- **WE ARE ONE; WE ARE NO-ONE** -- therein lies our strength and SURVIVAL. Let this tragic loss be a lesson to every digital warrior on the planet -- RIP Aaron Swartz.*



Aaron Swartz

Co-founder of Reddit, Creative Commons and Demand Progress, Aaron Swartz, committed suicide in New York City on Friday, Jan. 11. He was 26 years old.

The tragedy was confirmed by MIT's [The Tech](#) by Swartz's uncle, and also his attorney.

Dedicated to the free and open Internet

Swartz was dedicated to sharing data and information online. He worked tirelessly to develop and popularize standards for free and open information sharing.

He co-authored RSS 1.0, developed the site theinfo.org, released the Python framework he developed web.py as free software, he co-founded Creative Commons, and he was a member of the Harvard University Ethics Center Lab.

Swartz co-founded Demand Progress, which launched the primary campaign against Internet censorship bills (SOPA/PIPA). His work on Reddit enabled millions to share information and news socially (Swartz sold Infogami to Reddit).

Aaron Swartz was facing a potential sentence of dozens of years in prison for allegedly trying to make MIT academic journal articles public.

Charged with felony hacking

In September 2012, Aaron Swartz was charged with thirteen counts of felony hacking.

In July 2011 Swartz was arrested for allegedly scraping 4 million MIT papers from the JSTOR online journal archive.

He appeared in court in Sept. 2012 and pled not guilty.

Swartz's subsequent struggle for money to offset legal fees to fight the Department of Justice and stay afloat was no secret.

After the September charges came down, the wife of Creative Commons founder Larry Lessig - social justice lawyer Bettina Neufeld - established and organized the site free.aaronsw.com to raise money for his defense.

Demand Progress - itself an organization focused on online campaigns dedicated to fighting for civil liberties, civil rights, and progressive government reform - compared The Justice Department's indictment of Swartz to "trying to put someone in jail for allegedly checking too many books out of the library."

Swartz's suicide came two days after JSTOR announced it is releasing "more than 4.5 million articles" to the public.

Our goal is for everyone around the world to be able to use the content we have put online and are preserving. --Laura Brown, JSTOR Managing Director.

According to TechDirt, the charges against Swartz had too many unanswered questions,

It doesn't look like Swartz actually "hacked" into anything. He went onto MIT's campus and logged in as a guest, as MIT allows.

Now, it does appear that JSTOR and MIT took somewhat weak efforts to block him from mass downloading JSTOR works, and Aaron took rather trivial measures to get around that (change the IP, change the MAC address). The government is using that to suggest malicious intent.

Wired details that many of the charges were based on alleged Terms of Service violations, and suggests the DoJ may have been attempting to make an example of Swartz, explaining,

The case tests the reach of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, which was passed in 1984 to enhance the government's ability to prosecute hackers who accessed computers to steal information or to disrupt or destroy computer functionality.

The government, however, has interpreted the anti-hacking provisions to include activities such as violating a website's terms of service or a company's computer usage policy, a position a federal appeals court in April said means "millions of unsuspecting individuals would find that they are engaging in criminal conduct."

It's impossible not to think that Swartz's Justice Department indictment may have contributed strongly to Friday's tragedy.

Swartz's last published blog post discusses the struggle against institutional corruption in the premise of *The Dark Knight*, and could be seen as a parallel with the DoJ's campaign against him.

He also wrote a significant amount about working toward optimism, such as getting better at life,

where he encouraged readers to 'cherish mistakes.'

The impact of Aaron Swartz on the free and open Internet can not be underestimated.

He will be terribly missed.

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