
Who owns the internet?

Aaron Swartz (1986-2013)

- ❖ Internet prodigy and activist
- ❖ Co-creator of Reddit at age 14
- ❖ Developer of RSS and Creative Commons
- ❖ Open access advocate and digital freedom fighter



Aaron Swartz core belief

- ❖ Information should be free and accessible to all
- ❖ Knowledge as a public good, not a commodity
- ❖ The internet as a commons, not private property
- ❖ "Information is power. But like all power, there are those who want to keep it for themselves."

The JStor incident

- ❖ Downloaded millions of academic articles from JSTOR at MIT
- ❖ Charged with federal computer crimes, facing up to 35 years in prison
- ❖ Prosecuted aggressively despite JSTOR declining to press charges
- ❖ Swartz died by suicide in 2013, age 26

Locke, Marx, Swartz

- ❖ **Locke:** Labor creates property rights → users should own their data
- ❖ **Marx:** Platform owners exploit user labor → collective ownership needed
- ❖ **Swartz:** Information as commons → open access for all
- ❖ The "enough and as good" proviso violated by monopolies

Current battles over Internet Ownership

- ❖ Net neutrality debates
- ❖ Right to repair
- ❖ Data privacy regulations (GDPR, etc.)
- ❖ Antitrust actions against Big Tech
- ❖ AI training on copyrighted/user content