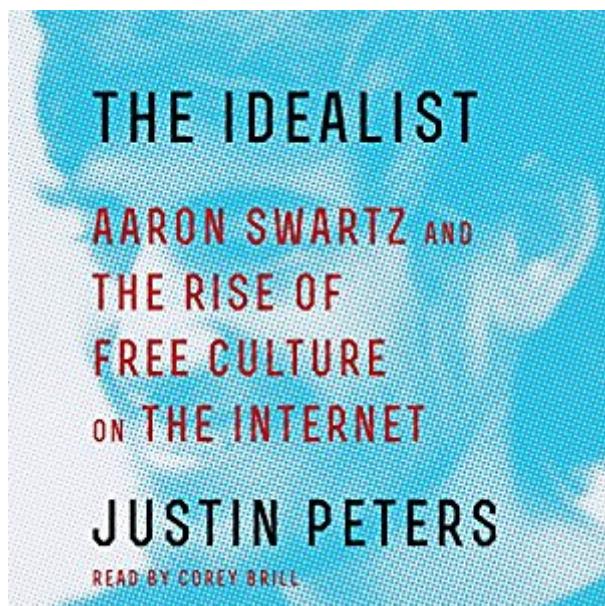


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# The Idealist: Aaron Swartz And The Rise Of Free Culture On The Internet



## **Synopsis**

A smart, lively history of the Internet free culture movement and its larger effects on society - and the life and shocking suicide of Aaron Swartz, a founding developer of Reddit and Creative Commons - from Slate correspondent Justin Peters. Aaron Swartz was a zealous young advocate for the free exchange of information and creative content online. He committed suicide in 2013 after being indicted by the government for illegally downloading millions of academic articles from a nonprofit online database. From the age of 15, when Swartz, a computer prodigy, worked with Lawrence Lessig to launch Creative Commons, to his years as a fighter for copyright reform and open information to his work leading the protests against the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) to his posthumous status as a cultural icon, Swartz's life was inextricably connected to the free culture movement. Now Justin Peters examines Swartz's life in the context of 200 years of struggle over the control of information. In vivid, accessible prose, *The Idealist* situates Swartz in the context of other "data moralists" past and present, from lexicographer Noah Webster to eBook pioneer Michael Hart to NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden. In the process the book explores the history of copyright statutes and the public domain; examines archivists' ongoing quest to build the "library of the future"; and charts the rise of open access, copyleft, and other ideologies that have come to challenge protectionist IP policies. Peters also breaks down the government's case against Swartz and explains how we reached the point where federally funded academic research came to be considered private property, and downloading that material in bulk came to be considered a federal crime. *The Idealist* is an important investigation of the fate of the digital commons in an increasingly corporatized Internet and an essential look at the impact of the free culture movement on our daily lives and on generations to come.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

When "On the media" interviewed the author I paused the podcast about half-way through and ordered the book--and even ordered it in print because I knew I wanted to be able to share it--something we can't do effectively with licensed content (eformat) As a librarian who is equal parts copyright geek and open access advocate this reads almost like a thriller. What never gets enough attention is the context of the American Enlightenment and its role, along that of James Madison, in the writing of Constitution and Bill of Rights but it was delightful to see the parallels between the brilliant, intense and socially awkward Webster and Swartz. I'm not sure if that was intentional or that a certain personality type is more likely to be a change-agent. If you're a copyright geek and an open access fan this might not contain a lot of new material but it's a great read. If you're only familiar with one part of the equation or, neither, it's a great read and a great introduction.

The compelling story of Aaron Swartz--the hacktivist who wanted to make public documents freely available as they should be. Justin is a great author who provides colorful detail regarding the circumstances of Aaron's death while being targeted by the US Government.

With *The Idealist*, Justin Peters manages to do the unthinkable: he transforms the history of American copyright into an intensely engaging and even, at times, entertaining - read that springs forth from the page. I, like many in the aftermath of Aaron Swartz's suicide, read the many online tributes and treatises on his life and untimely death, and what his radical actions in the name of making information freely and widely available represented, both to those who supported him in his quest and those who did not. (Peters' own excellent piece, written for *Slate* in 2013, from which this book developed, stood out as the most well-researched and well-written of all those that I read.) However, it was not until I read *The Idealist* that I fully understood the historical context that framed and influenced Swartz and his journey, nor that I fully grasped that even now, nearly three years to the day after his death, we as a country are no closer to addressing the many questions and institutional deficiencies that contributed to it. Brilliantly written and expertly researched, *The Idealist* is more than a biography, and more than a history. It does what all great nonfiction should: it challenges us to look at issues both central to our daily lives and greater than

ourselves, and consider their impact on those who came before and those who will come after us.

Very interesting to read about culture from a smart, funny writer. Morality, copyright, how people share now. Interesting.

a great story... the book came to me in excellent shape Thanks

proves that boring stuff like history and copywrite law can be interesting and even captivating

Perfectly ideal!

Justin is the Aaron Swartz of writing about Aaron Swartz

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