



## We are Legion: The Story of the Hacktivists Discussion Guide

Director: Brian Knappenberger

Year: 2012

Time: 93 min

### You might know this director from:

Ice Warriors: USA Sled Hockey (2014)

The Internet's Own Boy: The Story of Aaron Swartz (2014)

## FILM SUMMARY

The right to protest and speak out against injustice is an intrinsic facet of democracy. When that freedom is curtailed, both activists and ordinary citizens reach a breaking point and hit the streets, create art, write letters, and engage in dialogue in order to stand up for the greater good and expose wrongdoings. With the advent of the Internet and a digital world where much of our lives are conducted, this exposure of injustice is also taking place online. Thus, the concept of hacktivism is born.

**WE ARE LEGION** is a tale of the advent of Anonymous, a radical online community of hacktivists working together to stamp out injustices across the virtual world. From trickster beginnings on 4chan through to the fight against Scientology in the form of Chanology, and on to the more recent metamorphoses as electronic activism collective enabling revolutionaries to continue their campaigns online. Anonymous has captured the public's eye, and when they do appear out in the open donning Guy Fawkes masks, they capture our imagination too. Yet, who, or what, is Anonymous exactly?

By allowing members of Anonymous to tell their tale, director Knappenberger injects a human element into the often robotic world of the Internet. While certain members reveal their identity and others remain faceless, the resulting whirlwind of cyber-speed footage informs us of the invaluable work of hacktivists on a global scale, and sheds light on the trouble that ensues when many diverse factions work beneath a collective banner. Defining what exactly do they stand for and whether or not there should be a line drawn between serious "hacktivism" and the prankster tendencies from which they were born is no easy task for this webbed collective made up of old and new members from around the globe. **WE ARE LEGION** is an ode to the many ups, downs, victories, and defeats of the mysterious organization that has had a tremendous impact on the world.

## FILM THEMES

Concealed behind iconic masks, the secretive members of Anonymous expose the world's wrongdoings to the light of day, revealing both the positive and negative aspects of working as a collective.

### THE INTERNET'S FIRST ARMY

Having only been a fixture in our lives for a few decades, the Internet is a relatively new concept. We have never before had to navigate the uncharted territory of the online community, and the rulebook of virtual practices is being written as we go along. One of the linchpins of a contemporary democratic society, however, is the freedom of speech, the opportunity to protest wrongdoing, whether online or in the physical world. Although it began as a network of computer-savvy individuals out to wreak as much mischievous havoc as possible, the Anonymous collective soon embraced political motivations, and took up the battle axe of justice in an effort to right virtual wrongs.

### HACKTIVISM

Hacktivism states the primary motivating force behind their work as the promotion of freedom of expression and support this by taking a stand against censorship, corruption, and government control of its citizens. As a form of virtual protest, hacktivists use their technological skills to demonstrate and speak out, organizing electronic sit-ins, temporarily shutting down corporations by virtually blockading users from accessing their services, and providing the public with news the mainstream media just isn't covering. Hacktivists see it as their duty to protect online freedom of expression in these highly combustible times.

### A COLLECTIVE COMMUNITY

Anonymous is a global movement, a series of virtual relationships conducted almost entirely online, a group of separate individuals coming together with a mostly shared goal. Geographically spread across the world, Anonymous members meet online in their shared ethos, with a low tolerance for evil, lies, and power structures that suppress the weak and continue to empower those already on top. Working in isolation, hackers find their community in one another, some anarchists, others just having a go at making a positive change in the world with the skills they possess, becoming part of something bigger than themselves.

### LACK OF LEADERSHIP

In order to maintain complete honesty, to go out on an idealistic limb, and express one's true thoughts and beliefs, anonymity provides a protective veil against the harsh forces of censorship. For this reason, the Anonymous collective adopts a faceless, nameless stance to its campaigns, making leadership impossible. Working as a hierarchy-free collective, all members join on equal footing. But without a clear direction, splintered factions of the greater whole form, and not everyone working beneath the Anonymous banner upholds the same values, sometimes leading to actions not all Anonymous members can back. In the words of cyber security analyst Joshua Cormon, "Whoever fights monsters should see to it they don't themselves become one."

**"It's important that we know what our governments do, and if they don't tell us somebody has to."**

Anonymous user Homocarnula

**"The ability for Anonymous to be everything and anything is its power."**

Gregg Housh

**"We have members throughout society at all strata of it worldwide. We have no leadership."**

Anonymous member



## FILM FACTS:

- WE ARE LEGION had its U.S. premiere at the 2012 Slamdance Film Festival, premiered in Canada at Hot Docs International Documentary Festival, and first played in Europe at Planete+ Doc Film Festival in Poland.
- In order to create WE ARE LEGION, director Knappenberger started out by writing a script and undertaking countless hours of research on the group Anonymous. He then went on to interview members involved with the group, in order to allow them to tell the story in their own words. The filmmaking team spent just over 2 months editing the film, and the film was self-financed. Some of the members of Anonymous were willing to reveal their identity during the filming process, while other interviews were conducted over Skype, and to this day the director does not know their true identity.
- In 2015, Anonymous's "Million Mask March" took place on every continent in over 675 cities.
- John Dragonetti composed the soundtrack for WE ARE LEGION, as well as Knappenberger's 2014 documentary "The Internet's Own Boy."
- Director Knappenberger stated that he believes documentary film has the capacity "to afflict the comfortable, and to comfort the afflicted. It puts you in a position where you can speak out and speak truth to these institutions, and broaden access to information. Democracy only works with a well-informed public."
- In 2000, there were 400 million Internet users globally. As of 2015, 3.2 billion people globally had access to the Internet, with the majority of those users living in the developed world, with 78 users per 100 members of the general population. In Africa, only 1 in 5 people use the Internet, while 2 in 5 have online access in Asia.
- AnonHQ is an online news organization run by individuals from the Anonymous collective, working with the goal of bringing "the people of the world important, modern daily news regarding topics from around the globe."
- The so-called "Streisand effect," whereby attempts to censor a piece of information consequently publicize it more widely, was named after actress Barbra Streisand, who tried to suppress images of her home in Malibu, California, in 2003, instead causing the photographs to become hugely popular.
- The mask adopted by Anonymous is the Guy Fawkes mask, which featured in David Lloyd's 1982 graphic novel "V for Vendetta." Guy Fawkes was the most infamous member of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, a failed attempt by protesters to blow up the House of Lords in London.
- Vimeo released an on-demand rental service in November 2013. In order to preview the new service, they selected six films to feature. WE ARE LEGION was hand-picked by Vimeo staff members as one of those six featured films.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Check** out the [Jobs page](#) on the The Internet collective website if the work of Anonymous appeal to you. They are always looking for ways to strengthen and expand their mission.
2. **Show** your support. Cyber-activism comes in many formats, and there are many ways to show your support to various active campaigns online. Check out the cyber-activism page on [Greenpeace](#) for example.
3. **Join** the international network to support the continued fight of the [Electronic Frontier Foundation](#) (EFF) that defends civil liberties in the digital world.
4. **Join** [Stop Watching Us](#), "a coalition of more than 100 public advocacy organizations and companies from across the political spectrum," in their fight against national surveillance.

## We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

**Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.**