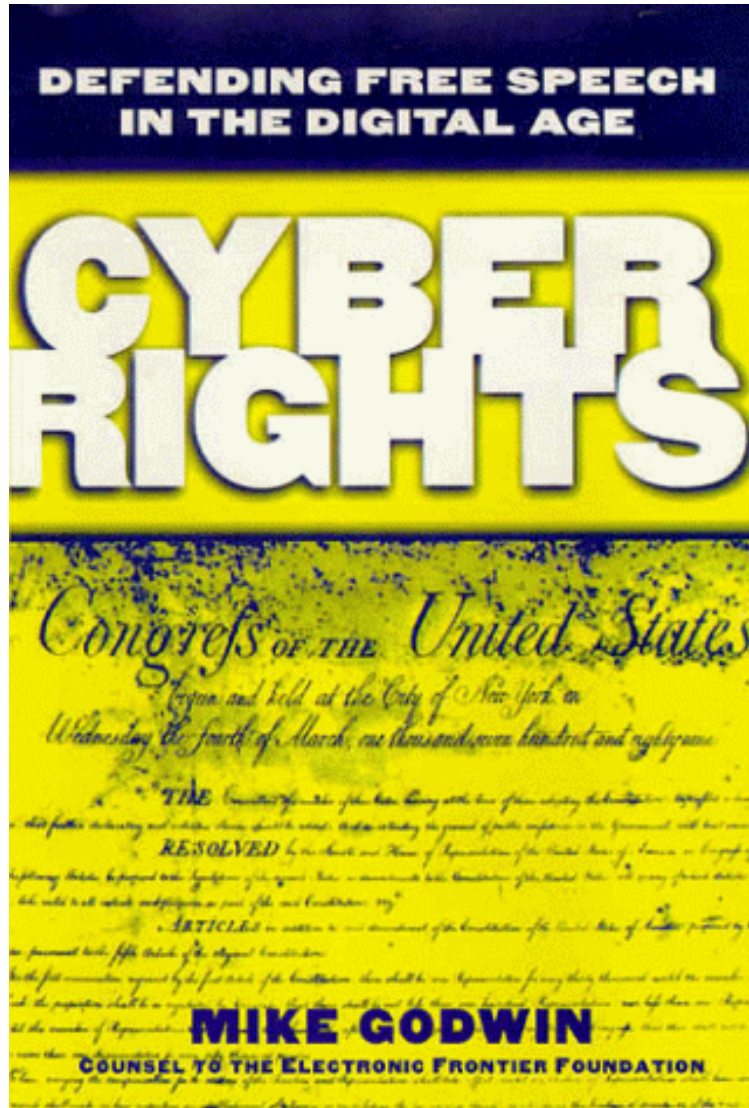


Cyber Rights : Defending Free Speech in the Digital Age

Mike Godwin

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Mike Godwin : Cyber Rights : Defending Free Speech in the Digital Age before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cyber Rights : Defending Free Speech in the Digital Age:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A coherent, passionate take on the subjectBy A CustomerWhat I liked was Godwin's willingness to invest some of his own passionate belief into his accounts of the principles and cases he discusses. This is also the first book I've seen that builds a coherent, positive theory of free speech on the Net rather than just a defensive one. I found the discussions of memes and virtual communities absolutely central to the book.5 of 8 people found the following review helpful. A personal tale from the Digital Freedom FrontBy Glen Engel-

CoxI started off a review of a Bruce Sterling novel with a statement of full disclosure, so I must do the same here-- even more so. Mike is a long-time friend from when I lived in Austin, Texas. He knew me, as they say, when. After my disastrous first year at the University of Texas, he helped me identify the classes to take that would awaken my interest (including Shakespeare at Winedale). Mike grilled me on my reading critically, forcing me to be able to talk about books on a level besides enjoyment. He was also the organizer of the Dull Men's Club, a regular meeting group for argument and drinking that often became similar to the Austin BBS Users Reading Group. Yes, I think it safe to say that he was, and still is, a friend. As he explains his history in this book, Mike was in the right place at the right time interested in the right things. Mike's interest in electronic communication and constitutional law and his journalistic background all brought him to the attention of Mitch Kapor, who made his money with Lotus when they were known for a spreadsheet called 1-2-3. Kapor was forming a think tank to work on his pet project, the rights of people on the electronic frontier. This group eventually became the Electronic Freedom Foundation (EFF) and Mike Godwin was hired as its first employee to be its legal counsel. Nearly ten years later, the world has changed. The EFF has been part of some historic court battles and media frenzy and Godwin was there at each step of the way. In *Cyber Rights*, he explains these issues by giving you his personal history and his involvement. I can't think of too many other people who could have written a book like this (although Bruce Sterling's *The Hacker Crackdown* comes close; Bruce, however, was never so intimately involved in his non-fiction). Mike's background as a journalist keeps this from being a snooze, even when the legal hair-splits start looking like a bad day at Supercuts. If anything, some people may be turned off by his relative informality. I thought it actually helped, by showing that these are not dry issues that only lawyers and civil libertarians can love. Mike is passionate that the future of our society lies in the battles we are fighting today regarding what we can and can not do on the Internet. What freedom are we talking about? Those guaranteed to you in the First Amendment, specifically freedom of the press, where the Internet is showing itself to be a new medium, just as radio and TV were earlier. In radio and TV, this freedom was abridged because of the issues of access to a limited spectrum. The Internet, however, is almost limitless, even more so than newspapers and publishers, who heretofore have enjoyed the full benefit of First Amendment protection. The issues that come up in these debates include: libel, pornography, privacy, marketing, and copyright. The Internet has changed the ground rules on all of these, yet most legislation and court cases have tried to link the Internet to older traditional media (likely due to our legal practice of using case law precedents), whereas Godwin feels that a new media, a new press, requires different interpretations. I liked this book so much that I spent part of last semester designing a composition unit around the book and a writing assignment that would use Godwin's issues as a baseline to discover how things have changed since he finished the book at the end of 1997. I did not realize when I designed the unit that I would get a chance to put it immediately into practice, but circumstances have enabled me to teach two months of a freshman composition course this next semester on "Writing in a Technological Age and we'll be tackling Godwin's issues in February (in March, we'll be looking at Geoff Ryman's Internet novel, 253). I went by the bookstore earlier this week and noticed that I'm not the only teacher who is requiring this book; a professor in the School for International Studies is also using it as a text. Okay, you're likely not one of my students, so you aren't required to read this book, so why should you? If you use the Internet for business or pleasure, the topics discussed herein are directly applicable to your continued use of this resource. Godwin explains in simple terms why you should be concerned, what the difficult issues are, and what things are being overblown by Chicken Littles. If you've been following these issues closely, this is a good summary; if you don't know what I'm talking about at all, this is your introduction. 5 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A reread of old news By A Customer Godwin's book is basically a rehash of previously published work. Pages 171-176, for example, were originally published in an Internet World column, though he acknowledges that nowhere. In fact, the entire book consists of such reread material spliced together, sometimes seamlessly, sometimes not. Many readers who haven't followed the free speech wars won't recognize this; they may simply wonder why the book is occasionally disjointed for no apparent reason. The other significant flaw in the book is that it stops with the CDA decision, in June 1997. For a book published in late 1998, it could have covered later material, especially since most of the book was cut-and-paste rather than new writing. It's a reasonable introduction to the censorship wars on the internet for readers which are completely unfamiliar with the history; but as for me, I'm pleased that I checked this book out from the library rather than purchasing it. -- Michael Sims

In a provocative analysis of the complex issues of free speech and the right to privacy in the new world of technology, a legal expert examines the implications of the First Amendment in terms of sexual harassment, copyright, libel, and other concerns. 25,000 first printing.

.com *Cyber Rights* is an exceptionally rational and compelling account of the most explosive and controversial issues surrounding freedom in cyberspace. Author Mike Godwin is the well-known outspoken activist for online civil liberties and counsel to the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF). He's been directly involved in many of the news-making cases and offers cogent analysis of very thorny situations, such as: Time magazine's infamous "Cyberporn" issue, which featured a flawed study and which many believe was at least a partial cause for passage of the

Communications Decency Act of 1996 (later overturned); the case of Jake Baker, a college kid who distributed his stories about rape and torture in newsgroups, which resulted in his computer being confiscated by police; the Church of Scientology's line in the sand regarding intellectual property and the backlash against Scientology in online debates; the libel conflicts experienced by Net journalists Matt Drudge and Brock Meeks; and Philip Zimmerman's (the programmer who developed the encryption tool Pretty Good Privacy [PGP]) fight with the Clinton administration to allow the use of encryption software. Godwin is a natural teacher, carefully describing each event and explaining the issues surrounding it. Unlike many writers, he shows that he thoroughly understands the arguments for restricting speech. He then methodically takes the arguments apart, covering what is normally boring legal theory and explaining it in a lively manner so that readers are drawn into the story. This book differs from other books on the topic in two ways: it's entertaining and it's a personal account. It's obvious that Godwin enjoys telling his stories, and he passes his enthusiasm on to readers. Readers also get a sense of Godwin's personal involvement as he describes his role in exposing the erroneous study that was the basis of Time magazine's "cyberporn" scare. In his chapter on the court decision that overturned the Communications Decency Act of 1996, it's clear that Godwin's work for the EFF is not just his job, but his passion. --Elizabeth Lewis

From Publishers Weekly

With an unusually broad view of free speech, lawyer and advocate Godwin, counsel to the Electronic Frontier Foundation, brings his opinions to bear on a slate of Net-related First Amendment cases and policy issues. Citing examples ranging from the landmark Compuserve ruling, in which the court found that an Internet service provider was akin to a bookstore and not a publisher in its culpability for disseminating offensive speech, to the LaMacchia incident, a software piracy case that was ultimately dismissed, Godwin argues for less government intervention, displaying a Panglossian view of the Net's potential. In doing so, he frames nicely some of the issues raised by the encounter of the 200-year-old Bill of Rights and the cutting-edge Internet. But through much of his book Godwin sounds defensive, and his polemics often trump nuanced analysis. By the time he gets to discussing the notorious Time magazine expose on cyberporn, criticizing the magazine for buying into hype, his arguments have become predictable?or flimsy, as when he implies that the Net poses no new risks with its dissemination of dangerous information, such as bomb-making instructions, because libraries have carried such information for years. Godwin's book is a thoughtful examination of an important subject, but its thoughts seem too often filtered through rose-colored screens. Editor, Tracy Smith; agent, General Median. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From School Library Journal

YA?Teens growing up with the Net aren't likely to find a better roadmap to the issues affecting their First Amendment future there than this book. Godwin is a pioneering advocate for First Amendment rights in cyberspace and, while this book is an impassioned argument for free speech, he effectively articulates "all sides" in order to make the issues clear. More than this, *Cyber Rights* reveals the Net to be a community with a human face. Recognizing that many people see cyberspace as marginal, unreal, and lawless, the author counters that image with history, fact, and principled argument. He consistently grounds his consideration of legal issues in human realities, relating his own experience, how virtual communities work (and are still developing), and how people have responded to similar challenges in the past. A fine storyteller, Godwin spins compelling narratives of cases involving issues such as censorship, libel, privacy, and copyright. Troubling "cyberporn" cases are described in all their legal and ethical complexity, and the author shows how the media and the public sometimes have been misled about the facts. He offers useful information about how these processes work and what individual citizens can do to guide them in positive directions. As new legal cases inevitably overtake the ones in this book, *Cyber Rights* will remain useful for its clear explication of the legal and historical issues underlying those cases?and for the light it sheds on humans in cyberspace.?Christine C. Menefee, Fairfax County Public Library, VA

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