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The 414s

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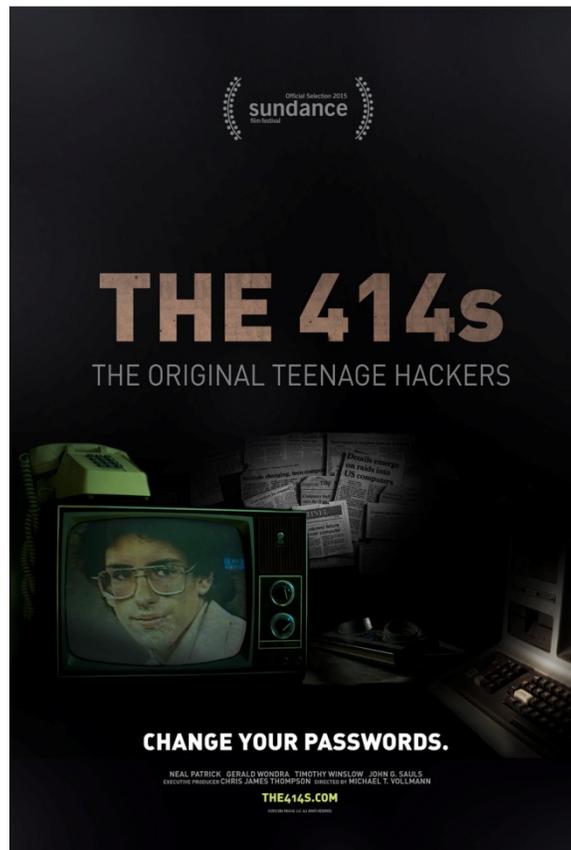
The 414s

Abstract

This is a film review of *The 414s: The Original Teenage Hackers* (2015), directed by Michael T. Vollmann.

Author Notes

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then on the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the *Journal of Religion and Film*. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration.



The 414s: The Original Teenage Hackers
(2015)
Directed by Michael T. Vollmann

The 414s is a short documentary about six young men (ranging in age from 16 to 22 years old) who became famous as computer hackers for breaking into high profile computing systems, including the Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Security Pacific Bank and the Los Alamos National Laboratory in 1983. Named after the Milwaukee area code (414) where they lived, they were inspired by the movie *War Games*, which in essence glamorized the “hacker.” Using an Apple II computer and Telnet, they accessed data easily using default passwords and making use of security weaknesses. They were eventually caught by the FBI and admitted to doing it, but saw their actions as just having a bit of fun or simple challenges. At the time, there were no laws

pertaining to hacking, and so the only charges laid against any of them was for making harassing phone calls.

The 414s would become hacker pioneers, and their actions would directly impact the creation of laws specifically against computer crimes in the United States. Although the movie *The 414s* does not specifically touch on religion, it does illustrate the first step in the burgeoning world of hackers and phreakers (phone hackers) and the grey realm of the World Wide Web which offered utopian possibilities to them. For example, in 1984 a hacker group called Legion of Doom was created by the hacker Lex Luthor. In 1986, Legion of Doom member Loyd Blankenship was arrested and published the Hacker's Manifesto, explaining to the world who and what a hacker was; they were the masters of a new world, offering refuge "from the day-to-day incompetencies" of the world. They had found a place where they belonged. They sought knowledge, existing "without skin color, without nationality, without religious bias" but they were considered criminals by society.

In a way, the 414s led the way to the rise of internet justice, and groups such as Anonymous continue to uphold this manifesto, fighting greed, corruption and inequality.