

15 MINUTES OF FAME

DRAMATIC AND COMICAL STORIES OF PEOPLE WHO BECAME FAMOUS FOR A SHORT TIME

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THE POPULAR PHRASE "15 MINUTES OF FAME" DESCRIBES THE FLEETING MEDIA ATTENTION TO SOMEONE WHO BECOMES FAMOUS FOR A BRIEF TIME, OFTEN FOR SOME ACT OF HEROISM, ONLY TO DISAPPEAR SOON AFTER FROM THE PUBLIC VIEW. SOMETIMES THEY JUST FIND THEMSELVES IN "THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME," OR PERHAPS IN "THE WRONG PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME." THE LIST OF THESE SHORT-TERM "HALL OF FAMERS" INCLUDES HEROES, CRIMINALS AND A GORILLA. THE ONLY COMMON DENOMINATOR IS THAT THEY ALL ENJOYED THEIR "15 MINUTES (OR HOURS, OR WEEKS) OF FAME."

“Quiet, quiet, quiet!” the man commanded impatiently. The frightened and flustered reporter listened obediently to the president. This was not what he had anticipated three minutes earlier as he prepared for the most important moment of his life.

Had anyone told him a year prior that he would one day converse with the President of the United States, he would have scoffed. What do I have to do with the president? Had he been told that the president would be Donald Trump, he would have had a good laugh. “Trump?! Never! He’ll never become president except in his dreams.”

The truth is, he never cared much about politics anyway. He would much rather be giving *shiurim* in a yeshiva. He was raised in a solid Jewish home with a warm atmosphere, and his best years were the ones he spent in yeshiva. Even when he embarked on a journalistic career he did not begin with politics.

For over a year he followed the most heated election campaign in US history. He attended almost all the presidential debates in person; he followed all the candidates’ campaign buses; spoke to voters in remote places from Iowa to North Carolina to Arizona. Slowly, he and his editor at Ami Magazine came to the realization that he had a knack for politics. He knew what questions to pose and, more importantly, when and to whom.

His new profession brought him in close contact with the most powerful and influential political figures. Among them was the future 45th president, Donald Trump. During his campaign, they had several friendly conversations and developed a notable relationship. The media magnate Trump always had a warm place in his heart for Torah-observant Jews—a legacy from his father Fred Trump, who personally helped many Jews.

On the evening of November 8, 2016, our reporter—Jake Turx (aka Avraham Yakov Turkeltaub)—found himself near the winner of the presidential election. Turx asked the president how he won the election against



Avraham Yakov Turkeltaub got his 15 minutes of fame after President Trump scolded him in public.



Turkeltaub, known by his nickname “Turx,” asks the president his question.

all odds. In a candid moment, Trump raised his hands and eyes upward and said, “Only He could manage that.” This instant of the president-elect indicating to an Orthodox Jewish reporter that G-d had chosen him was replayed on the major networks.

Turx was convinced that this was his 15 minutes of fame. How would he ever have another opportunity like that?

Then, after Trump’s inauguration, the White House granted Turx special permission to cover the president as part of the White House press corps. For the first time in the 250-year history of the United States, an Orthodox Jew sporting a beard, *peyos* and a large, black *yarmulke* sat among the front rows of journalists during the daily press conferences, delivering reports straight from the source.

Despite that, not many Americans paid attention to Turx. Then, one night, about a

month into the new presidency, President Trump’s eyes roamed the hall in search of a friendly reporter to take a question. His eyes fell on the young *chassid* from Lakewood, New Jersey.

Turx knew that the president was very sensitive to any intimation that his administration had anti-Semitic tendencies. Therefore, when Trump pointed his finger at Turx, the journalist had the perfect solution. He began his question stating he was aware that the president was not anti-Semitic and was proud of his Jewish grandchildren. That’s why he wanted to know what steps the White House was planning in response to the recent wave of bomb threats against Jewish schools and community centers across America.

Oops...

Turx was not prepared for the response. Even before he finished his question he could tell it was not well received. At the first mention of anti-Semitic attacks, the president responded defensively. “You can sit down now,” Trump ordered, cutting him off. “I understand the question.”

When the reporter attempted to clarify his question the president shouted at him and then launched into one of his favorite rants: how biased the media is. (It is.)

The general media gobbled it up. Here was an Orthodox Jew on the short end of a verbal counterattack with little substance. Tens of millions of Americans watched the president cutting in to the hapless reporter.

It is worth noting that Turx strongly defended the president in the aftermath and hinted that his relationship with the president had already been patched up. Along the way, Turx made a *kiddush Hashem* by turning down the opportunity to be interviewed on Friday night, a position treated with great respect by the media.

When Turx got up that morning he didn’t dream of the major media storm that awaited him. The extraordinary coverage he received transformed him for a short time into one of the most recognized Jewish faces in the world. Of course, fresh news quickly supplanted his story and, in Turx’s own words, “My 15 minutes of fame came to an end.”

Source of the Expression

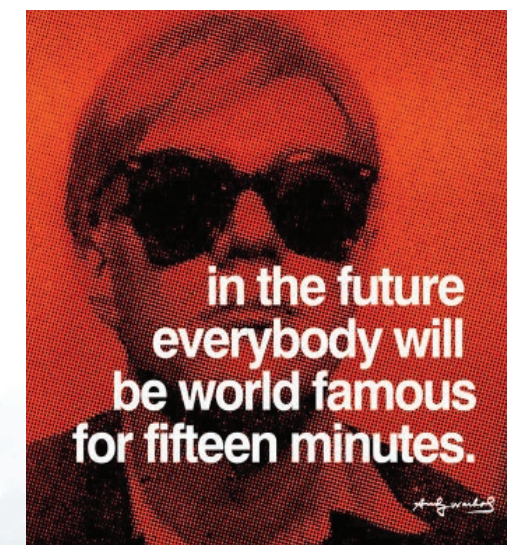
Oddly enough, the person who coined the term “15 minutes of fame” intended something very different than the way it is commonly used today.

In 1968, pop artist Andy Warhol presented an exhibition. In the accompanying catalog, he wrote, “In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes.” His point was that the growing prevalence of the media will give everyone a chance to become famous at some point.

In time, though, that phrase came to mean someone who enjoyed a brief moment of fame. There have been countless examples. The few offered here are widely varied. Some individuals attracted the attention of the public because of bravery or selflessness, while others were simply “in the right place at the right time”—or “in the wrong place at the wrong time.” Our list includes heroes, criminals and even a gorilla. What they have in common was a momentary encounter with the limelight.

Into the Water

The weather was freezing and a blizzard was approaching. Lenny Skutnik decided to leave work early. Little did he know what lay in store for him.



Andy Warhol, the pop artist credited with coining the expression “15 minutes of fame.”