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Wael Ghonim and Egypt's New Age Revolution

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Wael Ghonim, speaking with Harry Smith in an interview for "60 Minutes." (CBS)

The Facebook page was called "We are all Khalid Sayid." Soon hundreds, then thousands of others began sharing photos and video of abuse and mistreatment.

Within months, the number of followers on Facebook grew to half a million, and when he and other organizers posted the dates and locations of protests, people started showing up and posting Internet videos. Many of the organizers never met in person. Their primary interaction was online.

Smith: If there's no social network, does this revolution happen?

Ghonim: If there was no social networks, it would have never been sparked. Because the whole thing

before the revolution was the most critical thing. Without Facebook, without Twitter, without Google, without YouTube, this would have never happened

Smith: If you want to have a free country, if you want democracy, then the Internet is great, and all this information can be shared. But isn't just the opposite then true? If I want to continue to suppress people, the last thing I'm gonna give them is access to the Internet.

Ghonim: Block the whole Internet, you're gonna really frustrate people. One of the strategic mistakes of this regime was blocking Facebook. One of the reasons why they are no longer in power now is that they blocked Facebook. Why? Because they have told four million people that they are scared like hell from the revolution by blocking Facebook. They forced everyone who's just, you know, waiting to read the news on Facebook, they forced them to go to the street to be part of this. So really, like, if I want to thank one, thank anyone for all of this, I would thank our stupid regime.

Three days after the protests began in Tahrir Square, Ghonim disappeared. His friends and family feared he'd been kidnapped or even killed. Egyptian authorities had arrested him for 12 days. He was blindfolded, handcuffed and constantly interrogated.

Smith: Did they hit you?

Ghonim: Yeah, but it was not systematic. Like, it was individual based, and it was not from the officers. It was actually from the soldiers. And I forgive them, I have to say. I forgive them, because one thing is that they were convinced that I was harming the country. These are simple people, not educated. I cannot carry a conversation with them. So, you know, for him, I'm sort of like a traitor. I'm de-stabilizing the country. So when he hits me, he doesn't hit me because, you know, he's a bad guy. He's hitting me because he thinks he's a good guy. I'll tell you a funny story: At the end of the last day, you know, I removed my...blindfold. And I said, 'Hi,' and kissed every one of them. All of the soldiers. And, you know, it was good. I was sending them a message.

Smith: Why do you think they let you go?

Ghonim: Pressure. Ask Obama. Probably. There were a lot of factors to it. One is Google. Google did a lot of work to get me out. They did a lot, massive PR campaign.

After Ghonim was released, he appeared on a popular Egyptian television program, talking about those who had been killed in the protests. The next day, the crowds in Tahrir Square grew even larger. Their demands would not be denied. And Friday, 18 days after the protest started, Mubarak resigned.

Smith: President Obama came out several times during the revolution, had things to say. Did it help? Did it hurt?

Ghonim: You know, it was good that he supports the revolution. That's a good stand. But we don't really need him. And I don't think that....I wrote a tweet. I wrote, 'Dear Western governments. You have been supporting the regime that was oppressing us for 30 years. Please don't get involved now. We don't need you.'

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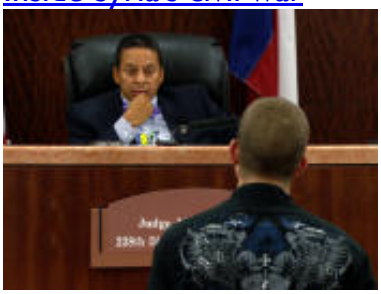
- 

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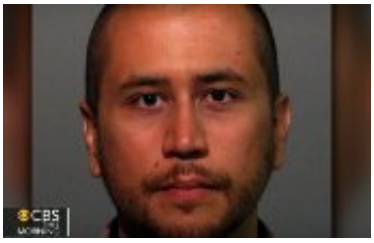

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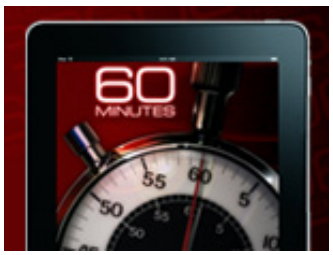

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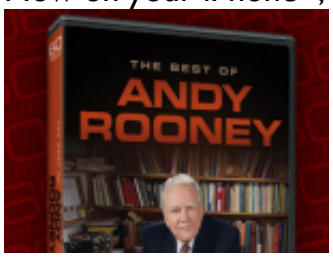

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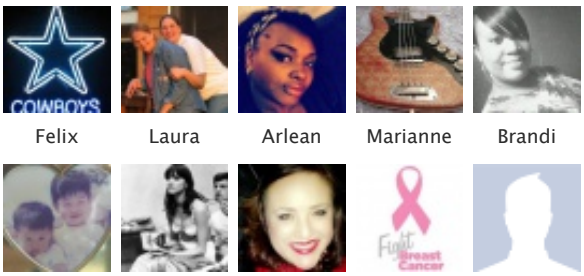

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