

Web embraces JetBlue flight attendant in NY ruckus

August 12 2010, By JAKE COYLE , AP Entertainment Writer



This screen grab taken from MySpace shows Steven Slater. Slater, a flight attendant for JetBlue Airways Corp., looked pleased and relieved after cursing out a passenger on an airplane public-address system, grabbing some beer from the galley and using an emergency slide to hop off, another passenger said Tuesday, Aug. 10, 2010. Steven Slater lost his temper after a passenger accidentally hit him on the head with luggage on the ground at Kennedy Airport on Monday, police said. (AP Photo) NO SALES

(AP) -- A folk hero in digital times, JetBlue flight attendant Steven Slater has been thoroughly embraced by the Web.

Not only have news stories about his [meltdown](#) on a plane from Pittsburgh to New York City been exceptionally popular on the Internet,

but he's been feted in all manner of online tribute. Even JetBlue Airways Corp. wryly noted on its blog post Wednesday that many people reacted: "Like, the entire Internet."

Slater has consistently ranked as one of the most popular topics on [Twitter](#) and has birthed a small cottage industry of Facebook pages, with titles such as "Free Steven Slater" and "I Support Steven Slater."

One group, dubbed the "Steven Slater Legal Defense Fund," is seeking to raise money for the airline veteran. More than 650 people are members of the group, which was founded by Gary Baumgardner, a pilot who pledges transparency in donating all the collections to Slater. He said he had raised more than \$1,500 as of early Wednesday.

Slater, 38, is accused of cursing out a passenger over the intercom after his plane landed Monday at John F. Kennedy International Airport, grabbing some beer and exiting on the plane's emergency slide. He was arrested and jailed before being freed on bail. A defense attorney says Slater didn't put anyone in danger.

The website Free Steve Slater has been launched in support of Slater. It introduces itself: "Steve! This page is for you! Get in touch and let us know what you want to do with it!"

One of the trends on Twitter has been to imagine T-shirts dedicated to Slater's audacious escape. Film critic Roger Ebert was among those churning out ideas, including: "Front: 'I may be under arrest...' Back: 'But I got two free beers out of it.'"

Actual T-shirts were already for sale online, though with the more simple "Free Steven Slater" printed on them. On eBay, luggage tags reading "Steve Slater: An American hero" were for sale, as was a painting of Slater holding a prison number, which was going for \$355 as

of Wednesday afternoon.

Other designs took the easy bait of parodying flight manuals. One that quickly went viral - designed in a lark by Aurich Lawson, creative director of the technology news website Ars Technica - is labeled the "proper technique for exiting aircraft" and shows a generic figure descending an inflatable slide with two beers in hand.

"Watching people root for him ... is half the fun," Lawson said in an e-mail. "The reaction makes the event larger than life, kind of catapulting it into myth status overnight."

Response in song has been common, too. On Wednesday's "Late Night," Jimmy Fallon said Slater "inspired me," and the host then performed a country-style "The Ballad of Steven Slater." The oft-repeated chorus goes: "You gotta get two beers and jump."

Similar odes were popping up on YouTube, including one from Jonathan Mann, whose project of writing a song every day has already brought him online fame. His song about the flight attendant, also titled "The Ballad of Steven Slater," takes a folk approach with mature language.

Mann sings: "Steve Slater I wrote this song for you/ Because you said what we've been dying to say/ I'm sick of feeling powerless/ To affect any kind of meaningful change."

On Tuesday, Slater was led into a state court in the New York borough of Queens to be arraigned on charges of criminal mischief, reckless endangerment and trespassing, counts that carry a maximum penalty of seven years in prison.

After posting bail, he told reporters: "It seems like something here has resonated with a few people. And that's kinda neat."

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Citation: Web embraces JetBlue flight attendant in NY ruckus (2010, August 12) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-08-web-embraces-jetblue-flight-ny.html>

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