Invidious Comparisons

January 14, 2011

The *New York Times* ran a truly despicable story on its front page today. The article, by Scott Shane, argues that Pfc. Bradley Manning is not being treated so badly. But what moves this piece from the category of apologetics to contemptible is its opening paragraphs that try to contrast the plush circumstances of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange with the grim conditions under which Manning is being held:

> "Julian Assange, the flamboyant founder of WikiLeaks, is living on a supporter's 600-acre estate outside London, where he has negotiated $1.7 million in book deals and regularly issues defiant statements about the antisecrecy group's plans.
>
> "Meanwhile, the young soldier accused of leaking the secret documents that brought WikiLeaks and Mr. Assange to fame and notoriety is locked in a tiny cell at the Quantico Marine Corps Base in Virginia."

The implication here is that Assange is nothing but a sleazy opportunist, benefiting from Manning's misfortune. But Assange is hardly in clover. Sweden is trying to extradict him, with no assurance that he won't then be turned over to the United States, where public officials are terming him a terrorist and calling for his assassination.

But let's see, are there any other people who might have been trying to cash in on Manning's heroism? Well, what about the editors and writers of the *New York Times*? Are they going to decline their Pulitzer prizes that might result from the publication of documents that it is alleged came from Manning? WiliLeaks donated $100,000 to help Manning's defense. How much – from all the added sales and internet hits that the *Times* garnered from its WiliLeaks stories – did the *Times* donate to Manning? It seems the *Times*' sole contribution to Manning has been articles saying he's being treated just fine, thank you.

And while Assange can't leave the country he's currently in, have *Times* editors had to surrender their passports? Is the Justice Department feverishly preparing a case to charge them with espionage or terrorism?

But, yes, it's true, Assange has been able to issue "defiant statements." It's a real shame that the *New York Times*' editors have no way to issue statements of their own.