



EXCLUSIVE: Julian Assange's Father and Brother Interview

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Taylor Hudak (TH): Award winning publisher and journalist Julian Assange faces a possible 175 year prison sentence in the United States for publishing information in the public interest through WikiLeaks.

TH: The journalism that won Julian Assange numerous awards is the same journalism that has him in a prison today.

TH: Despite a UK judge blocking the US extradition request, Assange is still in Belmarsh prison awaiting a court date for the US appeal.

Gabriel Shipton (GS): It's just heartbreaking to see your loved one just locked in a prison cell indefinitely without any sort of, you know, any sort of sentence or time, a time when they can be released.

TH: But with the new US administration, Assange's brother, Gabriel Shipton and father John Shipton are hopeful that the prosecution of Julian Assange will end. John and Gabriel are touring the United States, speaking to supporters and encouraging the Biden administration to support the First Amendment and especially the free press. It's called the Home Run For Julian Tour. And the Shiptions are on a mission to bring their family member, Julian Assange, home.

GS: John and I are traveling across the US. We're doing a total of, I think, 17 stops.

TH: John and Gabriel are taking the Free Assange message to the cities of Denver, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Washington, DC and others, including Columbus, Ohio. This is the most consequential press freedom case of the modern era. The continued prosecution of Julian Assange is America's betrayal of what it claims to value most: its First Amendment.

TH: Hi, everyone. I'm Taylor Hudak with acTVism Munich. And today we just wrapped up the Home Run For Julian event in Columbus, Ohio, outside the state house. Joining me today is Julian Assange's father, John Shipton, and Julian Assange's brother, Gabriel Shipton, who

are touring the United States to bring awareness to this case which threatens free speech and free press around the world. I want to thank both of you for joining me today.

John Shipton (JS): A pleasure. A real pleasure.

TH: John, I will start with you. Can you tell me what motivated you to tour the United States?

JS: Back in the Christmas time Gabriel and I were chatting as to what to do next. We'd just done a tour of northern New South Wales and Southern Victoria, Southern Queensland. And we were thinking, what is the best thing to do? It was president elect Biden's period, where he was gathering together his team, and so we thought that it would be an appropriate time to go to the United States and see if - before things firmed in one direction or another - to see if we could influence the direction it would go. So we came to the United States. We stayed here for three weeks. We had some communication with the Biden team, pre the inauguration. And then upon that, decided to come back after Gabriel managed to organize who to see and a series of events.

TH: Gabriel, can you tell me what your experience has been thus far in the US?

GS: It's been incredible, really. I've got to say this: wherever we go, I'm always amazed at the turnout, amazed at the support. You know, we're meeting very powerful figures every day, popular personalities all the time, who are coming on board to support Julian. We started in Miami probably almost two weeks ago now. And the media has been building. We had to increase the capacity three times for that event. The Washington D.C. event yesterday was a capacity event. So it's just the outpouring of support for Julian and people who are wanting to just express their interest in the democratic rights and the free press rights and the First Amendment rights, it's just very - it's inspiring.

TH: So, John, what has it been like to see this overwhelming amount of support for your son?

JS: Well, it's worldwide. The first one to point out it was a global problem was James Goodale who was - back in the Pentagon Papers days - the solicitor, or lawyer, I think you call it in America, lawyer for The New York Times. He firmly pointed out that Julian's persecution amounted to a global problem for the West in every country. Comments by journalists and the preparation of analysis by journalists and publications would be intimidated and oppressed if it just turned out to be correct. Nobody wants to know. No journalist wants to face the sort of persecution that Julian has had for publishing leaks on national security matters or doing analysis on national security matters. No journalist wants to be oppressed and intimidated, persecuted and psychologically tortured and arbitrarily detained for 13 years. So the quality of comment and the courage required to make that comment is consequently declined.

JS: When Julian is free it gives us an opportunity to understand that it's our strength that brought about Julian's freedom.

TH: While this is an international issue, of course, why should Americans in particular care about this case?

GS: This is the first time the Espionage Act has ever been used against the publisher. So I think we saw in the beginning of February, those 24 press freedom and human rights organizations. They sent a letter to the DOJ saying that this is a - this case is very concerning for press freedoms in this country. So what this case means is that press freedoms all around, the ability for people to report, to find out about what their government is doing and their names has just been constricted, reduced and things that go on. And a lot of what's going on is happening behind closed doors. So, you know, it's important for the people in the US to stand up for their democratic rights and their freedom, because without actually knowing what's been done in their names, they're not truly free.

TH: And what about you, John? Why should Americans who maybe aren't so knowledgeable on this case be paying attention and be very concerned?

JS: It's a good question. The answer is, of course, general and not specific to each American, but to Americans. They have a vibrant culture here, which in the 60s and 70s and 80s produced a way of being and a way of living that most of the Western world adopted. So that's the culture of, you know, casual dressing, open plan living and the design of houses, the style of housing, the style dressing, the style of the dress rule all generated out of the United States in that period. And this only came about because the quality in the United States of vibrant discussion, firming between groups of people and academics and the general life of the United States is one where people converse with each other to get to an understanding. There can be no freedom at all anywhere without knowledge. And these conversations that people have depend upon knowledge. If there's a conversation without knowledge, then we just bathe ourselves in further ignorance. And you can see that emerging in the United States now as people break up into groups. And they're furious with each other and refuse to have discussions with each other and refuse to embark upon understanding that point of view of each other. So consequently, 200 cities over the last 18 months had riots and people burning shops and cars and so on. This is not not a good circumstance. So that's one reason why the conversation between people ought to be knowledgeable. Actually, in a country like the United States, in my view, where the dynamism and the exuberance is continuous, it's vital for the people to have knowledgeable conversations with each other. It's a very difficult country to govern otherwise.

TH: I think it's very important to talk about the broader press implications here, but it's also important for people to realize that Julian Assange is a human being. You are his brother, Gabriel. What has it been like to see your brother go through this experience and be prosecuted by the United States for publishing, of all things?

GS: I think I can - at times, you know, I guess I can talk about when I went to see him in 2019. He was just - he'd been in the prison in Belmarsh for not so long. He was in the health ward there. He was on suicide watch. And at that time when I went to see him - that was very, very hard. I had never seen Julian in a state like that before, even during all of his time in the embassy. And it was really heartbreaking to see someone who I've looked up to, who I have so much respect for and has been so supportive to me to be in that sort of state where I thought that, you know, I might never see him again. So I think in that way, there are those

moments when it's really hard. But there's also a lot of - I feel a lot of, you know, I'm very proud of the work that Julian's done as well. And I think it's sort of so unique and one of a kind that I feel a deep sense of - I am just very proud of my brother, basically.

TH: Absolutely. WikiLeaks has really shaped the way we talk about the media. And, John, you must be very proud of your son's accomplishments and contributions to journalism.

JS: Yes, of course. For sure. What I particularly like in Julian's contribution is the composition that he came up with: a wiki that is available to everybody. Anybody could go look at what was their area of curiosity and make analysis and as a consequence, become more knowledgeable. To repeat myself, there's no freedom without knowledge. And this, as a wiki, enabled a worldwide forum wherever there is a computer that can go online and look at some of the WikiLeaks publications. Could go online, look at the publication and with their friends and by themselves forming a view founded upon actual documents. This is vital. This is magical -because at that time when it first started, there were 60 million people who could go online and do analysis. And now, of course, there's many more, many, many more. And so this feature enables us to become knowledgeable contributors to the polity, to assist and insist upon participation in shaping policy and formulating policies that governments and states and corporations enact.

TH: While we're on the subject of WikiLeaks as an entity. Gabriel, can you speak about how WikiLeaks has been censored over the years?

GS: It suffered a financial and extralegal financial blockade in 2010 after it published the Iraq war logs, the Afghan war logs, the Guantanamo Bay files. So there was an attempt at censoring through a financial blockade. You know, Visa, MasterCard stopped processing donations. PayPal - PayPal, was closed down. A lot of Julians bank accounts were closed down. They also got - their DNS server was taken off. They were taken down from their Dynadot DNS services. So there's a lot of ways that it's been censored over the years, but it's still going. So you really saw the Internet and the capability of the Internet to be an immense tool that would make us all more free through knowledge. Whereas a lot of the other technologists these days who were sort of developed around that same time, the things that they created are now tools of surveillance and control.

TH: So both of you are here in the United States, you are going to be touring the entire country. Gabriel, can you tell me what you are seeking to accomplish while you're here?

GS: I think - there are support groups right across the U.S. So we're coming to sort of coalesce those groups. Give them - just help support them. I mean, they've been out here doing stuff; some of them for years and years and years. I mean, in Boston, they've been doing one every second week for years. And, you know, just to come and support them, help how we can with their directions, connect them to the other groups so that they can coordinate together and really have a push and focus about this sort of opportune time that we have now with this new administration, this new DOJ.

GS: Merrick Garland is speaking to The New York Times and The Washington Post and CNN today, you know, about the DOJ and how they've been using subpoenas against journalists to find out sources and things like that. So, you know, what we've been asking

people to do is to get up in the comments of The New York Post and The Washington - sorry, that's The New York Times and The Washington Post and just let them know that you care about, you know, what's happening to Julian Assange and the Espionage Act has been used against a publisher and that they should be bringing that up with Merrick Garland as well.

TH: So I would like to hear from both of you on this, but what is your message to Americans and especially those who may not be too familiar with this case?

GS: I think as we go around the country, we are asking people to just act locally, talk to their neighbors and friends, tell them and help educate people about Julian's case. You know, put together local petitions to take to their Congress people as constituents of a localized area. Form groups, form Facebook groups to do all these sort of localized sort of grassroots style things. That's what we're sort of encouraging people to do as we move across. For those people who are new or are interested in the case, we point them towards the letter from the 24 press freedom human rights groups and just try and explain why Julian's case is not just about Julian, but it's really about their freedoms and their democratic rights.

TH: And John, what is your final message to the viewers right now?

JS: Well, join us. It's a noble task. There's no downside, it's all upside. So to begin repairing that first act, bring Julian home to his family.

TH: Well, I want to thank both of you for joining me today, and I wish you the best of luck on your travels throughout the United States. Thank you.

GS: Thank you.

JS: Thank you.

TH: Of course. And I want to thank you guys for watching. If you are in the United States, please attend one of the Home Run For Julian events. You heard it from both Julian Assange's father, John Shipton, and Julian Assange's brother, Gabriel Shipton, that they would love to see you at one of these events. So please be sure to be there. I want to thank you guys again for watching. I'm independent journalist Taylor Hudak, and I'll see you next time.

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