



Fox Rothschild Podcast

The Presumption of Innocence

Episode 46: America's Incarceration Industry: Exposing Private Prisons

Featuring Matt Adams of Fox Rothschild and Shane Bauer

Adams: Hi, everyone, and welcome to "The Presumption of Innocence," a podcast brought to you by the White-Collar Criminal Defense & Regulatory Compliance practice at Fox Rothschild.

Shane Bauer is an American journalist and author best known for his in-depth, and some say immersive, investigative reporting, particularly on issues related to criminal justice, human rights and the Middle East.

He's been heralded as one of the leading investigative journalists of his generation. And his commitment to on-the-ground reporting has earned him lots of respect in the field of journalism. And I would argue, contributed widely to major policy changes in the U.S.

Shane's Middle East reporting in 2009 garnered significant headlines when he was hiking near the Iraq-Iran border with two friends, fellow journalists Sarah Shourd and Joshua Fattal. He was arrested by Iranian authorities and accused of espionage. They were imprisoned for over two years in a prison in Iran before being released after extensive international pressure and diplomatic efforts.

The experience profoundly impacted him and led to the writing of a memoir titled *A Sliver of Light: Three Americans Imprisoned in Iran*, and he co-authored it with his friends who he was arrested with. Later on, Shane was recognized for his investigative journalism, particularly his work as a reporter for *Mother Jones*.

And perhaps his most notable undercover investigation, and what we're here to talk to him about today, involved him actually going to work in a prison, a private prison in Louisiana, which resulted in a groundbreaking expose on the conditions and practices within not just that prison, but the U.S. private prison system as a whole. And Shane won a ton of awards for his reporting and it was summarized in his book, *American Prison: A Reporter's Undercover Journey into the Business of Punishment*. The winner of the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award, one of President Barack Obama's favorite books of 2008 and a host of other accolades.

Shane, welcome to "The Presumption of Innocence." It's tremendous to have you.

Bauer: Thanks for having me. Glad to be here.

Adams: So Shane, I've got to start at the beginning, right? You're hiking in the Kurdistan region of Iraq in 2009 with your then-girlfriend and your friend. And lo and behold, you're picked up by Iranian

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authorities. What went through your mind then? And how has that shaped your dedication to this project, *American Prison: A Reporter's Undercover Journey into the Business of Punishment*.

Bauer: Well, I guess what went through my mind at the time, I mean, I was very surprised. We didn't know that we were near the border. And I wasn't actually reporting at the time. We were just, I was living in Damascus, we took a trip to Kurdistan for a week. We're, you know, about to head back to Damascus.

But I had been reporting in the Middle East for a while, had been in some hairy situations. And, you know, when, so when it first happened, I thought, okay, this is bad, but it's gonna blow over, you know, in a few days. And then, you know, two years passed. And we never knew, you know, what was going to happen, when we were going to get out, if we were going to get out.

And eventually, you know, obviously we did. And when I came back to the United States, it was 2011. I got back to California, where I live, and there happened to be at that time, a huge, statewide hunger strike happening inside the prisons. Tens of thousands of prisoners were hunger striking to protest the use of long-term solitary confinement. And that led to sort of my first investigation after getting out of prison, you know, just into the, the use of long-term solitary in the United States.

I was corresponding with people that have been in for, you know, dozens of years in solitary. And, you know, I'd been in solitary confinement myself, obviously. So it's something I really related to. And after that, you know, I had intended, actually, to go back to the Middle East, but I sort of got pulled deeper and deeper into the American prison system. And was kind of working on criminal justice for several years at *Mother Jones*. And I was interested in sort of the private prison system. Had poked around a bit, but it's, you know, kind of hard to get, sort of, something of substance out of these prisons.

Partially because they're private, so a lot of the tools that we use as investigative journalists, like public records requests and things like that, don't necessarily apply, you know, because these are private companies.

Adams: Set the stage for our audience for a second: What exactly is a private prison? Now, I, I know from my criminal practice the private enterprise that has injected itself into the U.S. and prison infrastructure. But talk to us about what you learned about prevalence of these private prisons in the United States.

Bauer: Yeah, so these prisons are, you know, basically like, other prisons. You know, there are, we have state prisons, we have federal prisons. And the private prisons, at the time I did that investigation if I remember correctly, I think they made up about 7% of our prisons-- or prison population, maybe.

And these are basically, you know, prisons run by private companies contracted to the state. So, they in theory perform the same functions as public prisons. But they're also, these companies are traded on the, you know, stock exchange. And the way they make money is, you know, through stocks, but also they get through state contracts as sort of per diem rate. So they are essentially renting out

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beds. So the, the people who started these companies ran them sort of like a hotel business in a sense. You know, they're,

They're a money-making enterprise. They're, they're a money-making machine, like the company selling widgets or the company on the corner selling you a cup of coffee.

Bauer: Absolutely. And the reason that states use them is because, also in theory, they are saving money. Because the private company is, is putting costs and sort of doing things more efficiently than the state does.

And this is sort of where the problems come in. Because in order to save money in a prison, I mean. You know, you've been in public prisons. Public prisons in the United States are also abysmal places. They're pretty stripped down already. And so, private prison, they're cutting more, basically. They're cutting either, or a combination of things. Uh, wages of guards. They're cutting programs. They're cutting staff, just the number of people that are in the prisons. And so, you know, they save money by essentially providing worse conditions.

Adams: So here you are having been in an Iranian prison, which I can't imagine is the Ritz-Carlton by any stretch. And you decide to dedicate this whole chunk of your journalism to studying this American experience. And before I go further, that Iranian experience, right, being in an Iranian prison. Did you suffer abuse and, torture and things like that while you were there?

Bauer: Fortunately I was not physically tortured. But I spent four months in solitary confinement. Which, you know, by most standards, including the UN, is considered a form of torture. And that for somebody who's been through it, there's no doubt about that. But you know. And then we were sort of isolated from the outside world. You know, we, we made three phone calls in those two years. So, you know, had very little sort of idea of what was going on. But other people --you know, I was in a prison. It was sort of a political prison, a political ward within the central prison of Iran and was in there with a lot of pro-democracy activists. And many of them were physically tortured.

Adams: My God, I can't imagine what that was like. So here you are against that backdrop. You come home and you jump back into prison, both literally and metaphorically. And you decide with your then-employer *Mother Jones* that you're going to go undercover, right?

Bauer: Right.

Adams: And I can't imagine what those conversations were like. And in your book, I was fascinated as sort of reading the early pages where you discuss those deliberations within your employer. Because there's got to be a whole heck of a lot of risk in dropping in the middle of a prison. You're not trained as a prison guard or a corrections officer, you're a journalist. And you know, you've seen the world and you've been inside a prison, but were you equipped to go in there and take on the role of safeguarding the lives of those people who are in your care?

Bauer: Well, I don't know that I was. But I was just as equipped as everyone else who was working there because --



Adams: Right, it sounds like it.

Bauer: I mean, there was one guy who I worked with who it was his first job. You know, he was out of high school. He was a prison guard. I basically, you know, sort of applied on the corporate website. And I didn't really, I don't think me or my editors thought that it was actually going to work. But I was like, what the hell just it's going to take an afternoon to fill out an application. And then I got a bunch of calls and I'm like, oh, okay and I talked to them. Then we had started having more serious conversations. I'm like, okay. And, you know, interview offers.

So, they said, okay, important thing is don't lie. Which, you know, is, tricky.

Adams: So you used your real name.

Bauer: Yeah, I used my real name. I didn't lie in the application. I told them my employer and I don't think they read it, honestly. I mean, they didn't ask me anything about it. This is a \$9-an-hour job.

Adams: And at this point -- \$9 dollars an hour -- and at this point, you had been a political prisoner in Iran, so it's not like your name wouldn't yield a couple of pages of Google results, right?

Bauer: Yeah. Yeah. If they would have Googled me, I don't think they would have hired me. But I'm pretty sure they did not. You know, and I mean, I did several interviews, but the one for Louisiana, it was like, they were trying to sell me the job in a way.

The interview was sort of them trying to convince me to take the job. They were so desperate for staff, you know. Nobody, even in this small town, Winn, Louisiana, very beaten down for a town. They couldn't get enough people to work there, for nine bucks an hour. And so when I got, I took the job, I moved there. And then I went through training, you know, with, all the other cadets it was four weeks of training. And --

Adams: Four weeks of training to, to work in a correctional facility.

Bauer: Yeah, and four weeks is, I think, it did consist of four weeks technically, but a lot of those days were us literally sitting in a classroom doing nothing. Because the prison was understaffed so the people who were supposed to train us had to be working.

So, you know, we'd watch some videotapes, we'd get lessons over and over again about being manipulated by inmates, this kind of stuff. And one lesson that stood out was, you know, we were asked, this is one of the first days of training, asked, what do you do if you see two inmates fighting?

And, you know, somebody says, break them up or, that kind of thing. And and he says, no, you do not get in the middle of it. He said, what your job is to tell them just to verbally tell them, stop fighting. Because essentially what we're doing is protecting liability of the company. So if that goes to court, the company or the prison can say, we ordered them to stop fighting and they did not stop fighting.



We're supposed to do the bare minimum, essentially, because if we get in the middle of a fight, we could get hurt and then we could sue the company. So, you know, we're sort of there just as space fillers, in a sense. Mall cops, basically.

Adams: I was struck by the level of detail that you put in your book. I couldn't put the book down when I started reading it because it was appalling, some of the, the conditions, some of what you witnessed in the prison setting. And here you are, a journalist, no background in prisonology or criminology or anything like that. And you're basically there to witness what's going on so you can expose it.

Bauer: Yeah.

Adams: I mean, what was the most appalling, eye-opening experience that you had when you were there? I know, I mean, there's hundreds of pages of your book that are dedicated to those experiences.

Bauer: Yeah.

Adams: But what did you see? What did you hear?

Bauer: Well, a couple of things come to mind. One is just the health care situation. So to give an example, when I was still in training, you know, one of the first times I went into the prison, I met a man who had no legs. And he told me that he lost his legs to gangrene in the prison. And, what happened, and which I later confirmed through court documents because he did sue the prison, was that he had diabetes. He's complaining of severe pain in his legs. And they would basically send him to the infirmary, give him a couple Motrin, send him back to his cell. And that was all they would do. And it got so bad that he couldn't lay down, so he would try to sleep sitting up in a chair. And the prisoners are in basically big dormitories of more than 40 inmates. And other prisoners started to think that he had something contagious. And they basically told the guards that if they don't get rid of this guy, they're going to, you know, beat him up.

And so the issue here underneath -- and then, you know, eventually he, the situation was got so dire, they eventually sent him out and it was too late and he had to have his legs amputated. And the issue here is that, in the contract of this prison company with the state of Louisiana, the company is responsible to pay, you know, the medical expenses if they send a prisoner out to a hospital. So, if you're making 30 some bucks a day on a prisoner, there's very little incentive to take them to hospital, or you're going to be spending thousands of dollars. And I'd see this problem over and over again, where there's, you know, a huge reluctance to, send somebody out, you know, because they have to pay for it.

And another situation that comes to mind that was particularly disturbing was, you know, I worked a couple of times in the solitary confinement unit where prisoners are sent for punishment. So, my job was to sit in front of the cell. And, it was the worst job there, you know. You're sitting in front of a cell. This person does not want you staring at them all day. And they do whatever they can do to make your life miserable. And there was a guy who was there, he had been on suicide watch. They

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put people in these cells if they say they're suicidal. You know, he'd been threatening to jump off his bunk and break his neck and all kinds of things. And they're required to report if somebody makes such a threat, so I did. And hours later, you know, a psychologist comes and...

This man later, after I left the prison, I was contacted by a woman in Louisiana who is his mother. And, she told me that he had committed suicide. And, went, she gave me a lot of the materials that he had, writings. I got a lot of documentation. And he had essentially been, for months, trying to get into, a mental health group for some psychological support and they would not let him in. They would just send him to solitary confinement. And he committed suicide. And the report of his death said that when he died, he weighed 71 pounds. And, he hanged himself and he was still alive and they sent him to a hospital and he died in the hospital.

Now, I then did a public records request for the prison and asked, you know, how many suicides have you had this year? And they said zero. And, the company would, in training and in the public, they boast that they have a lower suicide rate than public prisons. Now I can see why that is, because basically what happened is they sent this guy out and he died in the hospital, so they considered him discharged. So they're basically taking him off the books, and --

Adams: Playing semantic games with human lives.

Bauer: Yeah. And this is the thing is, if you're just looking at records, which is sort of how a lot of investigative journalism works, it's all about the documents. The documents themselves are lying. And these people are dying emaciated and, they're just disappearing.

Adams: Shane, one thing that struck me about your book is throughout these horrific and detailed accounts of these experiences that you had as an undercover corrections officer in a private prison in Louisiana. You inject some history into the pages about really America's original sin: slavery. And the takeaway that I received from that, which I think was the purpose in that is that, in a lot of respects the American prison system just took over for involuntary servitude with this notion of using prison labor as a cheap way to accomplish some tasks. And what did you learn in your reporting about that sort of replacement for involuntary servitude that can be traced back to the early uses of prisons for punishment? Because at one point in your book, I think it's really profound, you say we went from, you know, basically the death penalty for menial crimes to a idea of prison labor. And we can't ignore the dramatic impact that prisons have on communities of color. And the analogy that you draw there is that where we left off with the 13th Amendment, just kind of got picked up with these prison infrastructure.

Would did you learn about the not-so- discreet, perhaps overt motivations that the prison system has to just fill its doors so that we can get cheap labor.

Bauer: Yeah. So when I set out to write this book, you know, I first wrote an article for *Mother Jones* about my time undercover. And then when I wrote the book, I wanted to work in some history and essentially to look at the history of the American prison system and the role of profits throughout the years. I'm not suggesting in the book that profit is necessarily the driving motive of why we



imprison people. But what I saw is that, profit and racism have-- you really see when you look at the history of the prison system how those go completely hand-in-hand.

And, it's important to understand that prisons are an American invention. You know, the prison and the idea of punishing someone by putting them in a cell started here. Jails have existed upwards, probably as old as civilization, as a place where you hold people when they're waiting to go to trial. But, prison was sort of considered a reform. A way that we can stop using capital corporal punishment.

And from the very first prisons, the literal first prison was a for-profit venture. States would make money off of the prisons. And then later you saw sort of private companies or private contractors stepping in and using prisoners as labor. And then -- especially in the South -- and then after the Civil War ended, that really picked up. And the use of prisons in general picked up a lot after slavery.

So basically what happened is, contractors would contract the population of the prison system in a state. So, in Louisiana there was a man, I think his name was Samuel Lawrence James, who would use prison labor to build levees and work on his personal plantation that he lived on, which had had slaves on it. Slavery ends and then he sort of replaces those slaves with prisoners.

And you know, I have some quotes in the book just going back through the historical record. I remember one quote by a guy who says, you know, that this system was even better than slavery because with slavery -- this is a former slave owner talking -- you know, you owned the slaves, they were your property. You had to at some level, take care of them. It's your investment. But with prisoners, he said, one dies get another. You know, you're basically leasing a number of people. So if one dies, the state gives you another one. So, the conditions, the death rate was much higher for these, convict laborers than it was for slaves, even.

And then the next sort of chapter in this was states started to sort of become jealous of the profits that these private contractors were making. So the states took over these plantations in the South and ran them as state prisons. So a lot of, today, the prisons in the South are former slave plantations.

And then, interestingly, the founder of the company that I was writing about, was then called Corrections Corporation of America is now called Core Civic, his name's Terrell Don Hutto. He worked on a plantation prison in Texas. This is a plantation the size of Manhattan. He was the warden there and he was this bridge, in a sense, from that world to the private prison world. He went from that plantation to others in Arkansas, and he was trying to make them profitable.

And that became much more difficult as, in the 1980s, prison populations really skyrocketed and states were faced with a problem of not having enough beds and not even being able to build prisons fast enough. So that's when the private prison sector came in and said, hey, we'll build prisons for you. We'll do it cheaper.



Adams: And you can't help but be skeptical of the policies of tough on crime, harsh punishment that were in the then-contemporary dialogue, the then-contemporary political dialogue. War on drugs. Mandatory minimums. All of that was a byproduct of that same era. So--

Bauer: Yeah.

Adams: On the one hand, we have, we have the one development of this prison moneymaking machine. And on the other hand, we have public policy shifting to putting more people in prisons. So, we're fueling the moneymaking machine.

Bauer: Yeah, I mean, it's the whole reason it exists. It probably wouldn't exist if it wasn't for those policies. Because those policies led to just a massive prison population increased multitudes over a decade or two.

And this is, you know, what I always say to people: That the issue is, you know, we can look at private prisons and how bad they are, but the issue underneath that is that we have too many people in prison. That is why this system exists. There's no way to really, in my view, to reform the private prisons' system because, you know, their rate of profit is not that high. And if the states really step in and regulate them the way they're supposed to and say, hey, you have to have these programs, you have to do this. They're not cheaper anymore. But you're not going to get rid of that problem until we have less people in prison. That's what it comes down to. There's no way really around that. We have the highest prison population in the entire world by far.

Adams: In your book, I'll just quote some statistics. Right here at the very beginning, you write, quote, "in 2017, we had 2.2 million people in prisons and jails, a 500% increase over the last 40 years. We now have almost 5% of the world's population and nearly a quarter of its prisoners."

That is striking.

Bauer: Yeah,

Adams: 5% of the world's population and a quarter of it's in prison. We talk about mass incarceration, well, that's the numbers right there.

Bauer: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I think, you know, this is this invisible problem that we have in this country. But I really do believe that's... I mean, who knows how the future is going to go. We don't necessarily know that things are going to get better, but if they do, you know, I think that we'll look back on this time period as this great tragedy. I mean, it's just, there's no precedent in the history of the world for what we're doing right now with our prisons.

Adams: So, against the premise of that concept that we have a mass incarceration problem in the United States, how do we fix it? Against the backdrop of all your research, your undercover reporting, what you saw, what you heard, what you felt. Which is, you know, throughout the pages of your book. How do we fix that mass incarceration problem?



Bauer: Well, I mean, that's a big question. But the first thing I'll say is that it's, the prisons are the last stage in a long chain. So, it's not something, like I said before, that we're going to work our way out of by reforming prisons themselves. The issue is how all these people are getting put in prison.

So, you know, that has to do with policing. That has to do with mandatory minimum sentencing. That has to do with who is in prison today. One thing that could be done is to start releasing people from prison. There's been really small steps in places where people are getting released who had been charged with marijuana possession, for example. But, you know, this is a tiny percentage of the population. You know, the fact is that most people are in prison for violent crime and that is an issue that we do have to look at: how long we're putting people in prison for violent crimes.

You know, does it make sense? You know, most people committing violent crimes or committing them in their teenage years to early twenties. Does it make sense to have men in that are in their 50s, 60, 70s, 80s, in prison, who stabbed somebody or whatever they did when they were 20 years old. We have to be grappling with the question of, how we are dealing with people who are committing violent crime, why people are committing violent crime. These are major social issues that we have to be dealing with.

Adams: And not exactly at the top of a political menu of issues to tackle when you talk about people committing violent crime. I think we have, I think, as a society started to shift over towards the motivation piece with this concept that mental health is so -- reducing the stigma around mental health. And we want to try to talk more about that as a root cause for certain crime.

But frankly, there's not a lot of sympathy garnered for people that have committed violent crime. And, you know, I think, in my view, the best way to engender a real solution to the mass incarceration problem is to look at it from that perspective of preventing crime altogether, because then--

Bauer: Absolutely, absolutely.

Adams: There's nobody that's going to politically disagree with you then. Right?

Bauer: Yeah.

Adams: You want to take a person who stabbed somebody or, or killed somebody or did something horrific and remove them from jail, you know, you're going to face backlash.

Bauer: Yeah, that's true. I mean, it is an uphill battle. But it also is, I mean... you can look at other countries, Europe and elsewhere in the world that also deal with violent crime and they're not putting people away for decades. And then the question of preventing people from crime. That is the core issue. But that issue has to do with economics, you know, there's a lot there. I mean, poverty, I mean, these are major problems to solve. And those problems do need to be solved. There is no easy sort of solution to this problem.



Adams: Before we take a look at sort of the state of private prisons today, what kind of backlash did you face from the private prison infrastructure for basically playing them and going in undercover and outing all the parade of horrors that goes on inside these institutions?

Bauer: Well, I was eventually busted while I was there. My colleague at *Mother Jones* came down to do some video work and he was arrested while trying to get some images of the prison. And he spent the night in jail and they basically figured it out. So, when he got out we, we took off immediately.

I never went back. And it came out in the local paper, then I think the *Washington Post* that, you know, I had been working there as a journalist. So, I basically, was writing this piece while they knew what was happening. So they were sending letters to *Mother Jones*, threatening lawsuits if we published. And they even hired the lawyer of this billionaire political donor who was also suing the magazine at the time.

You know, so they would basically make threats. But fortunately, the good part of going there with a publication instead of doing this on my own is that we had lawyers. And even before I went there, we spent a lot of time making sure that I wasn't doing anything illegal. And I wasn't. And we were confident of that. So, you know, we just sort of pushed forward and the piece went through extensive legal reviews.

But then when it came out, the company sent around this one-pager on me to media outlets, you know, trying to discredit me. But the fact is they, when I was there, were offering me a promotion. They even recorded this. I know. So it's like, they didn't really have a lot of ground to stand on to say that I wasn't doing my job because I was. I was doing it better than other people were. So--

Adams: You're a pretty damn good prison guard.

Bauer: Right. No, I, you know, it was a, you know, I'll say in the prison was a dilemma for me. Because having been a former prisoner, you know, it's, to be locking people up is not... it feels strange. I didn't enjoy that. And I did feel some sympathy with prisoners. But, I was really diligent about doing the job the way it was supposed to be done. Which made me stand out, honestly, in a way that was not always ideal, you know, because I'm making other guards look bad. You have to be careful not to be too much of a goody two-shoes, you know. But they noticed and were offering me promotions within a couple of months of working there. Didn't take much honestly.

Adams: To me, they always say that the cover up is worse than the crime. And one of the things that struck me, among many, is the private prison industries' active resistance to accountability. Like, for example, actively lobbying to have their records remain sealed, unlike a public prison that was subject to public records requests and things like that.

And the industry unabashedly is lobbying to be treated like a private company that wouldn't have the type of public accountability you would ordinarily see from a government subdivision. And what's the state of that today? Is the industry still resisting?



Bauer: Yeah, I mean, there's sort of a back and forth with each new administration and this issue. After I published that article, I was invited to give a talk to the Department of Justice about private prisons. And I did. And then they shortly after it came out with their own report about the private prison industry. And then, President Obama announced that the federal government was going to discontinue the use of private prisons. So, that essentially means that, not that private prisons will be banned nationwide, but that the federal system would stop using them once the contracts ended.

You know, and as soon as that announcement was made, the stock of this company completely tanked. So they were freaking out. Then I actually was at a journalism conference in South Africa giving a talk about this project. And while I was talking was when the election results were coming, it was 2016, of the presidential election. And while I was giving the talk, it was announced that Donald Trump had won the presidency.

And I ended my talk, my slideshow with a graph of the stock, you know, as sort of this big bang at the end, you know, of this stock just tanking. And I looked it up. I heard that Trump won. I looked up on my phone and it was the exact opposite. That stock price went up higher than any company in the stock market that day. I'm assuming because you know, Trump in his campaign was, you know, talking about cracking down immigration.

And the industry has been trying to move, and has been moving, into immigration as a focus, immigrant detention. Actually, the prison that I worked at, Winn, is now an immigrant detention facility. They make a lot more money that way. There's less scrutiny. So, you know, they're trying to sort of shift. They're starting to feel pressure, I think, about, you know, the private prisons. So they're sort of pivoting into immigrant detention with the assumption that it is only going to grow because that's what's happening.

So, you know, Biden pushed back again in the federal system. But, they're, like I said, again, they're, they're shifting out of that. They're shifting into immigrant detention.

Adams: So these private prisons that once housed convicted defendants now are sort of getting out of the business, but there is this new cottage industry. Is that fair?

Bauer: Yeah, well, I guess I won't-- I shouldn't say they're getting out of the business. They're not. They are trying to stay in. But they are expanding into immigrant detention. And, you know, if states start to ban the use of private prisons, they can then sort of do like they did in Louisiana. I mean, Louisiana has not banned the use of private prisons, but they just converted the prison they're working in into an immigrant detention facility.

Adams: And if contemporary reports on the state of our immigration system in this country are accurate, it sounds like they'll have plenty of business for the foreseeable future.

Bauer: Absolutely.



Adams: Well, Shane, I can't thank you enough for joining us today on "The Presumption of Innocence." It's been a really fascinating dialogue. I'll leave you with one question: What are you working on next?

I don't want you to out yourself if there's going to be another undercover operation.

Bauer: No, it's not undercover. I'm finishing a book right now about Syria. So I did go back to the Middle East quite a bit and I'm writing about Americans in the Syrian war. So this involves, it's been a yearslong project. It involves the CIA, the military and individuals who joined various groups in the war.

So it's sort of telling the story of the war through the lens of Americans, basically. It's an insane story, I will say.

Adams: Well, I can't wait to read it. Keep up the good work. Shedding light on some of these issues is no easy task. But in order to make a for a more perfect union, as is often stated, and certainly in our founding documents of this country, is the perpetual goal. I think we need people like you out there shining the light in these dark recesses where things like this are going on. So, thanks so much for joining us today and sharing some of your work.

If you haven't picked up the book, it's *American Prisoner: A Reporters' Undercover Journey into the Business of Punishment* by Shane Bauer. It's available in paperback. It's just fantastic.

That's all the time we have for this episode of "The Presumption of Innocence." Until next time. Take care. Bye-bye.