

I chose to listen to Revisionist History and Serial

I listened to S1 E3, S1 E9, and S3 E9 of Revisionist History and the first episodes of Season 3 of Serial.

Revisionist History - S1 E3

Wilt Chamberlain was 7'1" and 275 lbs but played like a 6'0", 125 lbs guy. He averaged over 50 points a game during the 61'-62' season. He scored 100 points in a game against the Knicks, the most ever. A key component to his record was the amount of points scored by Wilt from the free throw line. This was remarkable because he was known for his terrible free throws compared to his beautiful play during the game. He switches up his game by shooting underhand, making 28/32, the most ever. For some reason, Chamberlain stopped shooting underhand, going back to his previous overhand technique. Both men and women shy away from the 'granny shot'. Prominent social scientists say thresholds are the real barrier for people switching over because people need validation that their choice is good. The reason Chamberlain didn't continue shooting underhand was because he was self-conscious about how he looked to people while doing it. One of the best to ever shoot free throws, Rick Barry, began not to care about how he looked because he was making them at such a high rate.

Revisionist History - S1 E9

98-year-old pastor Chester Wenger wrote a long open letter to the leadership of the Mennonite church, one of the most traditional Christian religions. The Mennonite way is the connection between Jesus and community, and the reconciliation between the two. The community feeling of the Mennonites led Gladwell's family to convert. An anecdote from his friend showed how willing Mennonites are to help one another, and to right the wrongs of those in their community. His friend used a work around to subvert the church's position against women in leadership roles by not technically ordaining them but allowing them to do anything an ordained minister would do, so rather than being fully orthodox, he was "generous orthodox". Wenger also followed this ideology. This became more complicated when his son Philip came out to him as gay. Phil lost his job in the ministry after publicly coming out, and was exiled at mass from the church without any previous conversation. The hardline position was difficult for Chester to think about, but he and his wife begged Phil not to lose his faith in God. Another example of generous orthodoxy is the protests against Woodrow Wilson's name being on the school of international policy at Princeton. Alums are willing to add just a paragraph about Wilson's virulent racism on the building's plaque. It seems they are only willing to accept change if the proposal comes from someone who truly cares about the university. Phil fell in love with Steve and they found a place for themselves in the Episcopal Church and was confirmed into it with his parents and siblings standing by. They were married in 2014 in Pennsylvania after gay marriage was legalized. Phil's father gave a blessing at their wedding and later officiated their legal ceremony. By doing so, he had broken the vows of the Mennonite clergy. He was stripped of his ministry, but wasn't affected by it because he knows he is still a man of God. His viral open letter perfectly summed up his generous orthodoxy by showing his open-mindedness while still appealing to the Mennonite leadership.

Revisionist History - S3 E9

Bernadine Healy, a groundbreaker for women in the field of medicine, is head of the Cleveland Clinic during the beginnings of an “anti-fraud hysteria” at the National Institute of Health. During her tenure, a prominent scientist is accused of fraud based on a single typo in a 79 page document. While she is head of the NIH, Rep. John Dingell, Democrat of Michigan, accuses her of misapplying her power and not accurately supervising the grant process, based on a two-day discrepancy in dates between her and the investigator of the aforementioned typo grant. Healy basically humiliates him with his lack of evidence, and sets forth a new standard of right to appeal when accused of fraud by the NIH.

Serial - S3 E1

Koenig starts by explaining that the case she is going to talk about is an example of the justice system working. A criminal justice attorney asks her to watch a video he’s using as evidence to drop the charges against his client Anna. Anna was groped in a bar by two different men. She repeatedly asked them to stop but they wouldn’t. A random woman comes over and gets in her face so Anna attacks her and doesn’t stop. A police officer grabs her by the neck from behind, she retaliates by hitting him in the face. She’s charged with assault on a peace officer, a 4th degree felony. Koenig thinks the charge is absurd. The prosecutor refused to drop the charge against Anna. Russ, the defense attorney, is upset with the way the prosecutor talked to him, saying his request to drop the charge was “laughable”. The prosecutor, Jennifer, says he was rude to her and stated his request in a matter-of-fact way, rather than an actual request. Russ disputes this. Jennifer’s view of the fight is completely different because of the lack of audio. Russ notes that the officer didn’t know Anna had been being harassed or that the random woman had got into her face. He believes that with that information she would not have been charged. The officer’s body camera shows they did. The police lets the man who harassed Anna go without charges because the bar patrons insist he didn’t do anything. They believe however that no one should be charged. The officer says he won’t press charges, but obviously doesn’t stop anything from occurring. She is then charged because he didn’t release her, even saying that he believes it is an accident. Anna already has a criminal record, something that Russ believes to be a reason the prosecutor won’t let up. Anna is offered a plea deal, 1st degree misdemeanor. 96% of Cuyahoga County cases end in a plea. She rejects it and it will go to trial. Her judge is known as “law enforcement friendly”, so a tough draw. Russ says he will be viewed as an “obstructionist” for taking this to trial, which is not good for his reputation. Russ and Anna offer a disorderly conduct charge which is rejected by the state. However the new charge given is actually a disorderly conduct because of the new prosecutor on the case. Koenig is upset because of how nonchalantly the case is treated by everyone involved after all. The people who prosecute and defend don’t understand the consequences that result from the process.

Serial - S3 E2

Koenig details how much leeway Ohio judges have in sentencing compared to other states. Judge Gaul is known for his lecturing of defendants. His blatantly racist questioning of a defendant is shocking. His conditions of probation are ridiculous, including not being able to

have children out of wedlock. His father was a Cleveland city councilman. Ohio's sentencing laws were hardened in the 1990s. The number of inmates in their prison system increased by over 400% in four decades. It eased up in 2011, giving room for diversion and probation. Probation is sometimes more constricting than actual jail time. While Gaul's methods are confusing, he seems to truly care about his defendants. Vivian, who is on probation for cocaine use, asks to be moved to drug court after numerous violations due to her inability to get and stay clean. The probation department also recommends drug court, so she can get the specialized help she needs. Gaul rejects the plea. The difference between Gaul's court and drug court is immense. She violates multiple times after this, begging for inpatient treatment to get off drugs, Gaul refuses and belittles her. The effect of sentencing is not tracked either federally or on a statewide basis. Koenig finds this appalling. Rayshawn Ellis's case was a good example of how Gaul's sentencing can depend on saying what he wants to hear. After Ellis didn't plead guilty on the charges brought against him, he was acquitted of the most serious but still convicted on weapons charges. Gaul angrily attacks him for not pleading guilty to the charges in the first place. The true absurdity of his sentencing trial is shown with the verbal animosity between Gaul and Rayshawn's lawyer. Rayshawn reads a letter aloud that "demonstrates his remorse" and "accepts responsibility" for his actions. It seems to some that the letter played right to Gaul's soft spot, but maybe it shows how his treatment of defendants can be helpful. He gets a reduced sentence and is told to come back in six months for a possibility of being released. Rather than using the letter that had magically made Gaul reduce his sentence previously, Gaul basically ignores it and brings back up all of his prior charges and convictions. Rayshawn compares this to Gaul acts as if he is a king. Koenig talks about how there is really no consequences for any of Gaul's actions. Gaul was reviewed once before when he threatened a defendant with a maximum sentence if he didn't accept a plea deal.

Serial - S3 E3

The Cleveland police department, and those surrounding them, have a real public relations issue with police brutality and balance of power. In the case of Erimius Spencer, he was going over to his friend's apartment when he was stopped and frisked by two police officers. He said this was normal and didn't think anything of it. The officers found a blunt in his pocket but he believed it was under the legal amount for an arrestable offense. He was then arrested, beaten, his orbital bone shattered, and tased multiple times. Later, his attorney tells him that while Cleveland, where he had previously resided, has a minimum amount for arrest, Euclid, where he was beaten, does not. This makes his arrest constitutional, but his lawyer believes the surrounding details are insane. Koenig asks Erimius's attorney, Paul, why he doesn't just file complaints to the police department to allow them to conduct an introspective examination of police proceedings. Paul responds by saying that he has no trust that the department would actually do that. The criminal trial of Erimius went poorly because the prosecution tried to state that the officers felt a bulge in his pocket when patting him down, which could give them justification for going into his pockets to find the blunt. The episode ends with Koenig talking to Paul about how seemingly dirty it is that the court and prosecutors overwhelmingly protect cops, rather than the city's citizens.

In Revisionist History, Malcolm Gladwell uses anecdotes from nearly unknown occurrences to back up a larger claim that he proves throughout the episode. Because each episode is standalone, he is able to concisely put together a message for the episode that creates a gratifying feeling when finishing it. On the contrary, Sarah Koenig's Serial is obviously a serialized timeline. Through the three episodes I listened to, Koenig established doubt in how the Cleveland justice system and, inferring from this, all American justice systems handle their citizens when they run into the law. By using direct dialogue from influential people like judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys, she is able to show how they are negligent in their jobs to protect the city, even if they aren't trying to.

I thought that both podcasts were great. Gladwell's Revisionist History is a great listen because each episode is standalone, so you can listen to one or thirty and still get the same effect. This can also work against itself just because it can leave you wanting more. Sarah Koenig's Serial is magnificent for the opposite reason. Even after completing the assignment of three episodes I wanted to keep listening, which I am going to, because I was so into how it would connect together in the end. I honestly don't have a single criticism for Serial, it's basically the perfect listening experience.