
Robert F. Copple

*University of Nebraska College of Law, rfc@copplelaw.com*

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Public Trials and a First Amendment Right of Access: A Presumption of Openness


I. INTRODUCTION

The first amendment\(^1\) freedoms of speech and press, and the sixth amendment\(^2\) right to a fair trial are considered to occupy a special place in the constitutional hierarchy.\(^3\) When these rights collide, rarely is the resulting fair trial-free press conflict easily resolved.\(^4\) In *Gannett Co. v. DePasquale*,\(^5\) the Supreme Court added

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1. U.S. Const. amend. I reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

   The first amendment is made applicable to the states by section one of the fourteenth amendment, which reads, in pertinent part:
   
   No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

   U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1.

2. U.S. Const. amend. VI reads:

   In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence.

   The sixth amendment is made applicable to the states by section one of the fourteenth amendment. The due process clause of the fourteenth amendment has special application in providing for the right to a fair trial. *See* Sheppard v. Maxwell, 384 U.S. 333 (1966).


4. For a discussion of the fair trial-free press conflict, see § III-A of text infra.

one more facet to the conflict by holding that the sixth amendment right to a public trial was personal to the accused, and that the public trial right did not confer upon the public a right of access to pretrial suppression hearings. The Court's ambiguous opinion was viewed by some lower courts as allowing the closure of criminal trials, as well as pretrial suppression hearings.6

In order to "wash away at least some of the graffiti that marred" Gannett,7 the Court agreed to hear Richmond Newspapers, Inc. v. Virginia8 and held that trials are presumptively open to the public. In reaching its decision, the Court recognized a first amendment public right of access to governmental institutions and information. This note will analyze Richmond, focusing on its precedential bases, its qualification of Gannett, and on the source and scope of the newly recognized public right to access.

II. THE FACTS

In July, 1976, John Paul Stevenson, a Baltimore man,9 was convicted of second degree murder10 in the Circuit Court of Hanover County, Virginia for the 1975 stabbing death of a Hanover County hotel manager.11 However, in October, 1977, the Virginia Supreme Court found that a bloodstained shirt, purportedly belonging to Stevenson, had been improperly admitted into evidence.12 Consequently, the conviction was reversed, and the case was remanded to the circuit court.13 Two subsequent attempts to try Stevenson were no more successful. The second ended in a mistrial in May, 1978, when a juror was excused because of illness.14 In June, 1978, a third trial also ended in a mistrial because a prospective juror had been influenced by the publicity surrounding the case and, in turn, may have influenced other jurors.15

At the beginning of the fourth trial in September, 1978, counsel for the defendant entered a motion to close the trial to the public.16

6. See notes 112-13 & accompanying text infra.
8. 100 S. Ct. 2814 (1980).
10. 100 S. Ct. at 2818.
13. Id.
14. 100 S. Ct. at 2818.
15. Id.
The prosecutor had no objection. The court granted the motion without a hearing, and ordered\textsuperscript{17} that the courtroom be kept clear of all parties except the witnesses when testifying\textsuperscript{18} thus planting the seed that became \textit{Richmond}. Appellants Timothy Wheeler and Kevin McCarthy, reporters for appellant Richmond Newspapers, Inc., were present during the closure motion but apparently registered no objection at that time. However, later that same day they sought and received a hearing on a motion to vacate the order\textsuperscript{19}.

Counsel for the appellants\textsuperscript{20} argued, first, that the closure order was, in substance, the equivalent of a prior restraint and, as a result, the appellants' first amendment rights had been infringed\textsuperscript{21}. Secondly, counsel argued that the defendant's sixth amendment right to a fair trial must be balanced against the public's interest in open criminal proceedings "to ensure that the integrity of the judicial process remains intact."\textsuperscript{22} Finally, it was argued that before the court could issue a closure order it was constitutionally mandated to consider other less drastic means of protecting the defendant's fair trial right, such as sequestration of the jury\textsuperscript{23}.

On the other hand, Stevenson's counsel described the problems that had been encountered in trying the defendant in a small town where it was difficult to impanel and maintain an impartial jury\textsuperscript{24}. He argued that Stevenson's right to a fair trial superseded all other rights and that it was the court's responsibility to insure that right\textsuperscript{25}. The court denied the motion to vacate the order and stated that in any balancing of rights, the fair trial right of the defendant must be given the greater weight\textsuperscript{26}. The trial resumed the next day.

\textsuperscript{17} The order was presumably under the authority of VA. CODE § 19.2-266 (1950), which provides in part:
    In the trial of all criminal cases, whether the same be felony or misdemeanor cases, the court may, in its discretion, exclude from the trial any persons whose presence would impair the conduct of a fair trial, provided that the right of the accused to a public trial shall not be violated.
\textsuperscript{18} 100 S. Ct. at 2819.
\textsuperscript{19} Id.
\textsuperscript{20} Appellants Wheeler and McCarthy were also excluded from the hearing on the motion to vacate the closure order. The court concluded that the hearing was to be treated as part of the original trial and, therefore, subject to the closure order. 5 MEDIA L. REP. at 1546.
\textsuperscript{21} Id.
\textsuperscript{22} Id. at 1547.
\textsuperscript{24} 100 S. Ct. at 2819; 5 MEDIA L. REP. at 1548.
\textsuperscript{25} 5 MEDIA L. REP. at 1548.
\textsuperscript{26} The trial judge concluded by stating:
with the public excluded. At the conclusion of the Commonwealth's evidence, the court granted the defense counsel's motion to dismiss the case because of insufficient evidence, and found Stevenson not guilty.27

In September, 1978, immediately following the day-long trial, the appellants petitioned the Virginia Supreme Court for writs of mandamus and prohibition, and filed an appeal from the closure order. The court dismissed the mandamus and prohibition petitions,28 and, finding no reversible error, denied the petition for appeal, citing Gannett.29 Appellants next sought review by the United States Supreme Court. The Court granted review under its certiorari jurisdiction30 and then reversed the decision of the Virginia Supreme Court.

III. THE PRECEDENTIAL BASES

Richmond and Gannett both address the question of whether there is a public right of access to judicial proceedings. Viewed in this light, they represent the convergence of two lines of Supreme Court decisions. The first line is made up of those decisions which have involved the recurring conflict between the first and sixth amendments—commonly called the fair trial-free press conflict.31 In the second line are those cases which have wrestled with the

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I'm inclined to agree with [defense counsel] that, if I feel that the rights of the defendant are infringed in any way, [when] he makes the motion to do something and it doesn't completely override all rights of everyone else, then I'm inclined to go along with the defendant's motion.

Id. at 1548-49. The court also commented that the layout of the courtroom played a part in its decision in that it was "distracting" to the jury. "When we get into our new Court Building people can sit in the audience so the jury can't see them. The rule of the Court may be different under those circumstances . . . ." Id. at 1548.

After ruling against the motion to vacate the closure order, the court discussed whether it should "put a gag rule" on the counsel for the appellants to prevent him from divulging any information about the hearing to his clients. The court concluded that such a gag order would be purposeless because if the appellants are not allowed into court the next day, they will know what occurred in the hearing. Id. at 1549.

28. 100 S. Ct. at 2820.
30. The appellants sought review in the United States Supreme Court under both appellate and certiorari jurisdiction. However, appellate jurisdiction was denied because the appellants had not explicitly challenged the validity of the closure statute, VA. CODE § 19.2-266 (1950), in the state courts. 100 S. Ct. at 2820 n.4.
question of a public right of access to governmental institutions and information. In order to properly analyze the Richmond decision and gauge its legal impact, it is first necessary to examine these two lines of constitutional thought.32

A. The Fair Trial-Free Press Conflict

The conflicting functions of the first and sixth amendments often result in an adversary relationship.33 The difficulty of resolving this conflict is increased because the freedom of speech and press, and the right to a fair trial are said to occupy preferred positions in a constitutional hierarchy.34 As Justice Black stated, "free

33. Although still adversarial, the relationship has sometimes been viewed as symbiotic. For example, in Sheppard v. Maxwell, 384 U.S. 333 (1966), the Supreme Court observed:
A responsible press has always been regarded as the handmaiden of effective judicial administration, especially in the criminal field. Its function in this regard is documented by an impressive record of service over several centuries. The press does not simply publish information about trials but guards against the miscarriage of justice by subjecting the police, prosecutors, and judicial processes to extensive public scrutiny and criticism.

Id. at 350.
34. The principle that the rights enumerated by the Bill of Rights occupy a preferred position was first announced by the Court in United States v. Carolene Products Co., 304 U.S. 144 (1938), where Justice Stone stated: "There may be narrower scope for operation of the presumption of constitutionality when legislation appears on its face to be within a specific prohibition of the Constitution, such as those of the first ten amendments, which are deemed equally specific when held to be embraced within the Fourteenth." Id. at 152 n.4 (citations omitted).
A few years later the "preferred position" language was applied explicitly to the freedoms of press, speech and religion in Murdock v. Pennsylvania, 319 U.S. 105, 115 (1943). Although not the subject of a specific decision, the Court has implicitly recognized the right to a fair trial as a fundamental right. Cf. Douglas v. California, 372 U.S. 353 (1963) (right of an indigent to counsel). Justice Frankfurter criticized the use of the "preferred position" terminology in Kovacs v. Cooper, 336 U.S. 77, 90 (1949) (Frankfurter, J., concurring). For a more detailed discussion of the first amendment as a preferred right, see Van
speech and fair trials are two of the most cherished policies of our civilization, and it would be a trying task to choose between them."  

It has been suggested that the conflict was either planned by the framers of the Constitution or, at least, represented such a natural and inherent tension that its constitutional resolution was not possible. Nevertheless, whatever the source of the conflict, it has often been the responsibility of the Supreme Court to make a choice between a commitment to an "uninhibited, robust, and wide open" debate of public issues, and a commitment to a criminal process in which "conclusions . . . reached in a case will be induced only by evidence and argument in open court." The Court's decisions have done little to settle the conflict and have, instead, resulted in a state of law which resembles an ill-defined and often-violated truce.

The fair trial-free press conflict cases are connected by a common concern that publicity may endanger the defendant's sixth amendment right to a fair trial. The question usually arises within the context of pretrial publicity and its effect on the impartiality of potential jurors. In this context, the concern is that jurors or potential jurors will be prejudiced by pretrial publicity and will be unable to render an impartial verdict based only on the evidence presented at trial. However, both publicity during the


36. "[I]f the authors of these guarantees, fully aware of the potential conflicts between them, were unwilling or unable to resolve the issue by assigning to one priority over the other, it is not for us to rewrite the Constitution by undertaking what they declined to do." Nebraska Press Ass'n v. Stuart, 427 U.S. 539, 561 (1976).


40. Irvin v. Dowd, 366 U.S. 717 (1961). In *Irvin,* the Supreme Court also noted that "the mere existence of any preconceived notion as to the guilt or innocence of an accused, without more, [is not sufficient to] rebut the presum-
trial and methods of news gathering at trial have been found to have a prejudicial effect on the defendant’s right to a fair trial.

The Supreme Court’s current interest in the problems presented by publicity began in 1950. Since then, the Court has reversed or set aside a number of criminal convictions which possibly were tainted by prejudicial publicity. Thus, a trial judge who is presented with a question of prejudicial publicity will find himself within the eye of the fair trial-free press hurricane. An improper balancing of first and sixth amendment rights can sweep his decision into reversal. In achieving a proper constitutional balance, three questions must be asked: (1) How far must the trial court go in order to protect the defendant’s fair trial rights? (2) What procedures are available to neutralize the effect of the prejudicial publicity? (3) How far can the trial court go in protecting the defendant’s fair trial right without infringing on the first amendment freedoms of the press and public?

In Sheppard v. Maxwell, the Supreme Court attempted to answer the first two questions. Dr. Sam Sheppard was convicted of murdering his wife after a trial which the Court described as having a “carnival atmosphere.” The murder apparently had
shocked the community and, as a result, Sheppard’s conviction was marred by all three types of prejudicial publicity (i.e., pretrial, during trial, and methods of news gathering).

In reversing Sheppard’s conviction, the Supreme Court held that the trial judge had failed to properly protect the defendant, jurors, and witnesses from the intensity of publicity. The Court stated that the trial judge had at his disposal more than adequate procedural safeguards to protect the defendant’s fair trial right. These procedures included: (1) intensive voir dire examination to assure the presumption of juror impartiality had not been eroded by pretrial publicity; (2) sequestration of the jury; (3) control of members of the press within the courtroom by limiting their number and controlling their conduct; (4) proscribing extrajudicial statements by police, witnesses, court officials and counsel; (5) continuance; and (6) change of venue. In conclusion, the Court stated that “reversals are but palliatives; the cure lies in those remedial measures that will prevent the prejudice at its inception.”

In the subsequent ten years, the Sheppard mandate that “[t]he courts must take such steps by rule and regulation that will protect their processes from prejudicial outside interferences” was heartily followed by trial courts. Trial judges made increasing use of protective orders to neutralize the effect of prejudicial public interest.

*Id.* at 355.

48. *Id.*

49. *Id.* at 357-63.

50. The Supreme Court affirmed the power of trial judges to restrain statements by counsel, court officials, witnesses and defendants in Nebraska Press Ass’n v. Stuart, 427 U.S. 539, 564 (1976); *id.* at 601 n.27 (Brennan, J., concurring). However, a criminal defendant may have a strong interest in gaining media attention to counteract the stigma of guilt produced by a criminal charge. “A bare denial and a possible reminder that a charged person is presumed to be innocent until proved guilty is often insufficient to balance the scales.” Chicago Council of Lawyers v. Bauer, 522 F.2d 242, 250 (7th Cir. 1975), *cert. denied*, 427 U.S. 912 (1976). As a result, the propriety of orders restraining statements by a defendant and his counsel is subject to question. See Note, *Silence Orders—Preserving Political Expression by Defendants and their Lawyers*, 6 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 595 (1971).

51. 384 U.S. at 363.

52. *Id.*

licity on the defendant's fair trial right. However, during that period the constitutional outer limits of the protective order remained undefined. The Supreme Court had not yet answered the question of how far a protective order could reach before it infringed upon the first amendment freedoms of the press and public.

_Nebraska Press Association v. Stuart_ represented the first time the Supreme Court squarely confronted the conflict between the first and sixth amendments. In _Nebraska Press_, the Court examined the constitutionality of a protective order which prohibited the press from publishing the existence or nature of any confessions or other facts "strongly implicating" of an accused mass murderer. The order was to stay in effect until the jury was impaneled. The crime, which occurred in the small town of Sutherland, Nebraska, soon drew nationwide publicity.

The Court unanimously held the order invalid. The opinion of the Court, written by Chief Justice Burger, characterized the order as a prior restraint, which is "the most serious and the least tolerable infringement on First Amendment rights." While stating that a prior restraint only postpones publication, the Chief Justice recognized that such a postponement can destroy the timeliness required by the news media, and, in essence, freezes first amendment freedoms at least for the time.

In determining the validity of the order, the Chief Justice

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5. _Supra_ note 54.
6. The decision consisted of five separate opinions. Justices White, Blackmun, Powell and Rehnquist joined the Chief Justice in the majority opinion. Justice Brennan (joined by Justices Stewart and Marshall) and Justices White, Powell, and Stevens all wrote separate concurring opinions.
7. Basically, a prior restraint is a governmental order which restricts or prohibits speech prior to its publication. For a discussion of prior restraints, remedies to prior restraints, and prior restraints as distinguished from subsequent punishments, see T. Emerson, _The System of Freedom of Expression_ 503-12 (1970); J. Nowak, R. Rotunda & J. Young, _Constitutional Law_ 741-49 (1978); L. Tribe, _supra_ note 56, at 724-32; Monaghan, _First Amendment Due Process_, 83 Harv. L. Rev. 518, 543-44 (1970).
presented a test which, within the context of the evidence before the trial judge, examined: "(a) the nature and extent of pretrial news coverage; (b) whether other measures would be likely to mitigate the effects of unrestrained pretrial publicity; and (c) how effectively a restraining order would operate to prevent the threatened danger."\footnote{64}

While not foreclosing the possibility that circumstances could occur which would justify a prior restraint, the Chief Justice emphasized that "the barriers to prior restraint remain high and the presumption against its use continues intact."\footnote{65} Despite the Chief Justice’s statement that prior restraints could conceivably be constitutionally acceptable, it has been suggested that \textit{Nebraska Press} implicitly holds that "prior orders restraining the publication of news prejudicial to a criminal defendant are never permissible."\footnote{66}

The combination of \textit{Sheppard} and \textit{Nebraska Press} help to de-
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fine the responsibilities and limitations imposed upon a trial judge in dealing with a fair trial-free press conflict. However, the fair trial-free press cases do not provide a complete basis for the examination of a closure order. Although a closure order arises within the context of the conflict, the real substance of the closure problem lies within the Court's "right of access" decisions.

B. A Question of Access

The Court has discussed the existence of a right of access in at least three different theoretical contexts. First, "right of access" has been used to describe a right to receive information from a willing source. Secondly, the phrase has been defined as a right of access to a forum in order to transmit a message. Finally, "right of access," as discussed in Gannett and Richmond, has been used to describe a right to gather information, particularly from a governmental source.

Much of the present controversy concerning the existence of a public right of access to governmental institutions or processes began with Branzburg v. Hayes. The Court in Branzburg rejected the claim of a reporter's privilege to protect confidential sources and held that "newsmen are not exempt from the normal duty of appearing before a grand jury and answering questions relevant to a criminal investigation." In support of the principle that the

restraints would be on the press. Because of the difficulty involved, many improper prior restraints would go unchallenged. Id. at 610-11.

It is arguable that all of Justice Brennan's practical arguments against prior restraints could also apply to court closures.

67. For a discussion distinguishing prior restraints from closure orders, see § IV-A of text infra.
68. "It is the right of the public to receive suitable access to social, political, esthetic, moral, and other ideas and experiences which is crucial here." Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. Federal Communications Comm'n, 395 U.S. 367, 390 (1969). See also Lamont v. Postmaster General, 381 U.S. 301 (1965) (the Court held unconstitutional a statute permitting the government to require that the addressee of unrequested "communist political propaganda" affirmatively request postal delivery in writing).
69. See Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. Federal Communications Comm'n, 395 U.S. 367 (1969), where the Court upheld the Federal Communications Commission's "fairness doctrine" which requires broadcasters to allow time to reply to personal attacks and political editorials. But see Miami Herald Publishing Co., Inc. v. Tornillo, 418 U.S. 241 (1974), where the Court struck down a state statute that required newspaper publishers to allow free reply space to political candidates that they had attacked in the newspaper.
71. 408 U.S. at 685.
press and the public are equal under the law, the Court noted that "the First Amendment does not guarantee the press a constitutional right of special access to information not available to the public generally." Finally, in what appeared to be an offhand and contradictory remark, the Court added that "news gathering is not without its First Amendment protections . . . ."

The precise holding of *Branzburg*, which rejected a testimonial privilege for reporters, has been substantially eroded by subsequent lower court decisions and state shield laws. Moreover, although the case did not squarely address the question of a public right of access to governmental institutions and processes, its assertions have fueled the continued debate over the existence of the right. Those assertions were that: (1) the press and public are equal; (2) the first amendment does not guarantee the press a constitutional right of access to information not available to the public; and (3) news gathering may be subject to some first amendment protection.

72. In terms of a theory of the first amendment, there is sound reasoning for the principle that the press and public are equal. To do otherwise would force the development of arbitrary distinctions which could eventually result in different degrees of first amendment rights for the metropolitan newspaper publisher and for the lonely pamphleteer. See *id.* at 704.

However, for a particularly offensive application of this principle, see *Zurcher v. Stanford Daily*, 436 U.S. 547 (1978), where the Supreme Court held that the first and fourth amendments permit searches of press offices pursuant to a valid warrant and do not require use of the less intrusive subpoena duces tecum where practicable. In *Zurcher*, the newspaper was not suspected of committing a crime, but of having within its possession photographic evidence of the identity of demonstrators who had beaten police officers. *Id.* at 551.

73. 408 U.S. at 684.

74. *Id.* at 707.


In *Pell v. Procunier*[^1] and *Saxbe v. Washington Post Co.*,[^2] the Supreme Court again tangentially addressed the issue of a first amendment right of access. In opinions authored by Justice Stewart,[^3] the Court rejected claims by the press that it has a right of access to interview specific individual inmates and that prison regulations which prohibited such interviews infringed on the petitioner's first amendment rights.[^4] The reasoning in both cases was substantially similar.[^5] The Court based its holdings, in part, on the fact that the prison policies in question allowed the press, under prison supervision and restrictions, to observe prison conditions and to carry on limited interviews with random prisoners. This, the Court said, allowed the press to fulfill its watchdog function over public institutions.[^6] More importantly, in both cases the Court reemphasized the *Branzburg* reasoning that the press has no greater right of access than that of the general public.[^7] How-


[^3]: In *Pell*, Justice Stewart was joined by Chief Justice Burger and Justices White, Blackmun and Rehnquist. Justice Powell filed a separate opinion in which he concurred with the majority that the prison regulations had not infringed on the first amendment rights of the inmates. However, he dissented on the question of a right of access for the press, stating: "I would hold that California's absolute ban against prisoner-press interviews impermissibly restrains the ability of the press to perform its constitutionally established function of informing the people on the conduct of their government." 417 U.S. at 835 (Powell, J., dissenting in part). Justice Douglas, joined by Justices Brennan and Marshall, filed a dissenting opinion.

[^4]: In *Saxbe*, Justices Stewart, White, Blackmun, Rehnquist, and Chief Justice Burger again made up the majority. Justice Douglas dissented and simply referred to his dissent in *Pell*. Justice Powell filed a strong dissent and was joined by Justices Brennan and Marshall.


> Press representatives will not be permitted to interview individual inmates. This rule shall apply even where the inmate requests or seeks an interview. However, conversation may be permitted with inmates whose identity is not to be made public, if it is limited to the discussion of institutional facilities, programs and activities.

417 U.S. at 844 n.1.

[^6]: However, in *Pell* the Court addressed the additional question of the constitutional right of inmates to seek individual interviews with members of the press. 417 U.S. at 821-28.

[^7]: *Id.* at 830-31; *Saxbe v. Washington Post Co.*, 417 U.S. at 847-49.

ever, in *Pell*, the Court once again fueled the access debate by acknowledging that "news gathering is not without its First Amendment protections . . . ."94

Finally, in *Houchins v. KQED, Inc.*,85 the Supreme Court squarely confronted the issue of whether the public and press have an affirmative right of access to information controlled by the government. In a four-to-three vote86 the Court reversed a lower court injunction which ordered prison officials to grant the press access to certain prison facilities which had previously been closed to public and press inspection. However, there was no clear-cut majority holding. Three members of the plurality found no first amendment right of access to information or sources of information within the government's control.87 Justice Stewart concurred on somewhat narrower grounds, restating his argument in *Pell* and *Saxbe* that the press has no right of access "superior to that of the public generally."88

The dissenters distinguished *Pell* and *Saxbe* as cases where substantial access had already existed.89 However, *Houchins* demonstrated "[a]n official prison policy [of concealment] by arbitrarily cutting off the flow of information at its source . . . ."90 The dissenters agreed with the majority that the press had no greater right of access than the public, but concluded that "[w]ithout some protection for the acquisition of information about the operation of public institutions . . . the process of self-governance contemplated by the Framers would be stripped of its substance."91

After *Houchins*, the Court's theory of a right of access was best summarized by an extrajudicial statement by Justice Stewart where he concluded:

The press is free to do battle against secrecy and deception in government. But the press cannot expect from the Constitution any guarantee that it will succeed. There is no constitutional right to have access to par-

84. 417 U.S. at 833 (quoting Branzburg v. Hayes, 408 U.S. at 707).
86. Chief Justice Burger was joined by Justices White and Rehnquist in the judgment of the Court. Justice Stewart filed a separate opinion concurring in the judgment. Justice Stevens, joined by Justices Brennan and Powell, filed the dissenting opinion. Justices Marshall and Blackmun took no part in the decision.
87. 438 U.S. at 9.
88. Id. at 16 (Stewart, J., concurring). Justice Stewart modified this statement somewhat by suggesting that the concept of equal access must be flexible enough to "accommodate the practical distinctions between the press and the general public." Id. at 16.
89. Id. at 24-30 (Stevens, J., dissenting, joined by Brennan, J. & Powell, J.).
90. Id. at 38.
91. Id. at 32.
ticular government information, or to require openness from the bureaucracy. The public's interest in knowing about its government is protected by the guarantee of a Free Press, but the protection is indirect. The Constitution itself is neither a Freedom of Information Act nor an Official Secrets Act.

The Constitution, in other words, establishes the contest, not its resolution.92

Justice Powell, in his dissent in Saxbe, quite correctly pointed out the implications of this view by stating:

From all that appears in the Court's opinion, one would think that any governmental restriction on access to information, no matter how severe, would be constitutionally acceptable to the majority so long as it does not single out the media for special disabilities not applicable to the public at large.93

In conclusion, the Court's theory of a right of access for the public and press might be best summarized as one of equal treatment rather than equal rights.94

C. Gannett Co. v. DePasquale

Gannett Co. v. DePasquale95 represents the first time the Supreme Court addressed the question of access within the context of a fair trial-free press conflict. In a five-to-four decision,96 the Court held that the sixth amendment right to a public trial is personal to the accused and does not give the public or the press a right of access to a pretrial suppression hearing, if the accused, the prosecutor and the trial judge all agree that the proceeding should be closed in order to assure a fair trial.97 In reaching its decision, the Court cited Sheppard for the proposition that "a trial judge has an affirmative constitutional duty to minimize the effects of prejudicial pretrial publicity,"98 and that pretrial suppression hearings present special risks of unfairness.99
In concluding that the sixth amendment guarantee of a public trial is personal to the accused, the Court acknowledged that "there is a strong societal interest in public trials." However, that interest is not elevated to constitutional stature. Therefore, the sixth amendment does not provide a public right of access. The Court added that any public interest is fully protected by the "participants in the litigation." The Court declined to decide whether the public had a first amendment right of access to criminal proceedings, stating that even if such a right existed, it was given "all appropriate deference" by the trial court.

Justice Powell was the only member of either the majority or dissent to recognize a first amendment right of public access. Although concurring with the majority, he would have held that the press, as an agent of the public, has a first amendment right to be present at the hearing. Nevertheless, he added that the right of access is not absolute and is subject to limitation by the defendant's right to a fair trial.

The scope of Gannett immediately became the subject of widespread confusion among both journalists and commentators. have a prejudicial effect on potential jurors. However, the Court noted that "[a]fter the commencement of the trial itself, inadmissible prejudicial information about a defendant can be kept from a jury by a variety of means." Id. at 383.

However, Justice Blackmun, in his dissent, suggested that the public's interest needs to be protected from the trial participants. Id. at 438 (Blackmun, J., dissenting in part).

443 U.S. at 392.

It should be noted that the trial court's treatment of the closure order and subsequent hearing on the motion to vacate the order was substantially similar in Gannett and Richmond. In both cases the defendant, prosecutor and trial judge agreed to close the proceeding, no objection was made by the press at the time of the closure motion and order, and a subsequent hearing was granted to argue the validity of the closure order. Id. at 375-77. For a discussion of the procedure in Richmond, see notes 17-19 & accompanying text supra.

443 U.S. at 397-98 (Powell, J., concurring).

Id. at 398.


The controversy centered around the question of whether the decision was limited to pretrial suppression hearings or also applied to other court proceedings, including trials. The confusion was understandable. *Gannett* can only be described as ambiguous. This ambiguity resulted from the fact that "[n]o less than 12 times in the primary opinion . . . the Court . . . observed that its Sixth Amendment closure ruling applied to the trial itself."\(^{109}\) The puzzle of interpretation was compounded by the Chief Justice who explicitly stated that in his view the decision only applied to pretrial suppression hearings, yet nonetheless joined the Court's opinion.\(^{110}\) In subsequent extrajudicial statements, several of the participating Justices made it clear that they still did not agree on just what the Court had decided.\(^{111}\)

Considering this ambiguity, it is not surprising that the lower courts began closing trials as well as pretrial suppression hearings.\(^{112}\) The lower courts simply had reacted as Justice Blackmun had predicted.\(^{113}\) However, this rash of closure orders required the Court to once again examine the question of a public right of access to judicial proceedings.

IV. ANALYSIS

Like its predecessor in *Gannett*, the plurality opinion in *Richmond*\(^{114}\) presents a problem of interpretation which turns on subtle semantics. The majority\(^{115}\) unquestionably held that "a presumption of openness inheres in the very nature of a criminal

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110. 443 U.S. at 394-97 (Burger, C.J., concurring).


113. "Under this analysis, the defendant—so long as the prosecution and the judge agree—may surely close a full trial on the merits as well as a pretrial suppression hearing." 443 U.S. at 438 (Blackmun, J., dissenting in part).

114. Since the Stevenson trial had long since ended, there was a suggestion that the case was moot. However, as in *Gannett* and *Nebraska Press*, the dispute was deemed "capable of repetition, yet evading review" and, therefore, not moot. 100 S. Ct. at 2820-21 (quoting Southern Pac. Terminal Co. v. ICC, 219 U.S. 498, 515 (1911)).

115. In *Richmond*, there were five separate opinions and two concurrences filed. The four separate majority opinions were authored by: the Chief Justice (joined by Justices White and Stevens), *id.* at 2818, Justice Brennan (joined by Justice Marshall), *id.* at 2832, and Justices Stewart, *id.* at 2839, and Blackmun, *id.* at 2841. Justice Rehnquist filed the only dissenting opinion. *Id.* at 2842. Justice Powell, a former Richmond, Virginia resident, took no part in the decision. *Id.* at 2818.
trial . . . " that, without more, the agreement of the trial participants is not enough to justify closure, and that the public and press have a first amendment right of access to criminal trials. The majority also basically agreed that *Gannett* held only that "the Sixth Amendment's guarantee to the accused of a public trial gave neither the public nor the press an enforceable right of access to a pretrial suppression hearing," leaving open the question of whether a right of access might be guaranteed by another constitutional provision. However, after this initial consonance, opinions of the plurality present a myriad of rationales and qualifications as to the source and the scope of the public right of access to criminal trials.

A. The Characterization of the Issue

In *Richmond*, the Court was correct in characterizing the closure of a trial as a question of access within the fair trial-free press conflict rather than merely treating the issue as an extension of *Sheppard* and *Nebraska Press*. Although the Court did not specifically state its reasons for this characterization, the point is worth discussing in order to demonstrate the precedential pressures

116. 100 S. Ct. at 2825 (Burger, C.J., joined by White, J. & Stevens, J.).
117. Although not directly at issue, the majority generally agreed that the presumption of openness also applied to civil trials. 100 S. Ct. at 2829 n.17.
118. *Id.* at 2821 (Burger, C.J., joined by White, J. & Stevens, J.). Even so, the scope of *Gannett* is not entirely clear. Justice Stewart, in his separate opinion in *Richmond* stated that the sixth amendment "does not confer . . . any right of access to a trial." *Id.* at 2839 (Stewart, J., concurring) (emphasis added). However, Chief Justice Burger, and Justices White, Stevens, Brennan, Marshall and Blackmun adopted or concurred with the limitations of *Gannett* to pretrial suppression hearings.

Justices White and Blackmun, apparently refusing to lay down the swords of their dissent in *Gannett*, attempted to strike one more blow in *Richmond*. Justice White stated his view in a succinct concurrence with Chief Justice Burger's opinion:

> This case would have been unnecessary had *Gannett Co. v. DePasquale* . . . construed the Sixth Amendment to forbid excluding the public from criminal proceedings except in narrowly defined circumstances. But the Court there rejected the submission of four of us to this effect, thus requiring that the First Amendment issue involved here be addressed. On this issue, I concur in the opinion of THE CHIEF JUSTICE.

*Id.* at 2830 (White, J., concurring) (citations omitted).

Justice Blackmun, in his separate opinion, stated that he still believes that *Gannett* was incorrectly decided and remains "convinced that the right to a public trial is to be found where the Constitution explicitly placed it—in the Sixth Amendment." *Id.* at 2842 (Blackmun, J.). However, after reconciling himself to the fact that the scope of the sixth amendment had been defined, he concluded "as a secondary position, that the First Amendment must provide some measure of protection for public access to the trial." *Id.*
which helped to shape the Court's decision. The closure of a court proceeding, as in *Richmond* and *Gannett*, seems to present a novel question which falls outside of the scope of the Court's previous fair trial-free press cases. The use of closure to protect a defendant's right to a fair trial\textsuperscript{119} is neither listed among the *Sheppard* alternatives nor specifically proscribed by the *Nebraska Press* limitations on prior restraints.\textsuperscript{120}

At first glance, a court closure may appear to be analogous to a prior restraint. They are similar in effect, and both are ex parte orders which prevent or postpone the publication of news concerning a court proceeding. However, upon closer examination, there appear to be three major distinctions between prior restraints and court closures. First, a prior restraint may be variable in its scope, while a closure order is limited to that proceeding or proceedings covered in the order. More specifically, a prior restraint, such as the order at issue in *Nebraska Press*,\textsuperscript{121} may apply to information received both in and out of the proceeding. A closure order, on the other hand, only limits publication of information presented within the proceeding.\textsuperscript{122}

In addition, the two orders differ, from the news media's point of view, in the probable benefits of their violation. A prior restraint is an order not to publish, while a closure order is an order not to attend. Since a prior restraint allows attendance at a court proceeding, the press, for the sake of reporting the news, may make an informed choice to violate the order, publish the restricted information, and, thereby, face a possible contempt citation.\textsuperscript{123} A clo-

\textsuperscript{119} The lower courts have approved limited closures for reasons other than protecting a criminal defendant's right to a fair trial. See, e.g., United States *ex rel.* Lloyd v. Vincent, 520 F.2d 1272 (2d Cir. 1975), cert. denied, 423 U.S. 937 (1975) (protecting young complaining witness in a rape case); Stamicarbon v. American Cyanamid Co., 506 F.2d 532 (2d Cir. 1974) (avoiding disclosure of corporate trade secrets); United States v. Bell, 464 F.2d 667 (2d Cir. 1972), cert. denied, 409 U.S. 991 (1972) (preserving confidentiality of skyjacker profile); Geise v. United States, 262 F.2d 151 (9th Cir. 1958), cert. denied, 361 U.S. 842 (1959) (protecting identity of an undercover agent).

\textsuperscript{120} However, in *Nebraska Press*, Chief Justice Burger did imply that closure of a preliminary hearing possibly was an acceptable alternative. He stated: "The County Court could not know that closure of the preliminary hearing was an alternative open to it until the Nebraska Supreme Court so construed state law. . . ." 427 U.S. at 568.

\textsuperscript{121} See note 57 & accompanying text supra.

\textsuperscript{122} However, what constitutes the proceeding appears to be somewhat within the discretion of the trial judge. For example, the closure order which was the subject of *Richmond* was deemed by the trial judge to encompass the hearing on the motion to vacate the closure order. See note 20 supra.

sure order, however, eliminates any choice. Practically speaking, any attempt to invade a closed court probably would be fruitless in terms of news gathering. The trial simply would stop until the invader was cited for contempt and ejected.

The final and most important distinction between a prior restraint and a closure order is in the methods by which they restrict the publication of the news. As mentioned above, a prior restraint restricts the press from publishing information presented at trial, but not from attending the trial. In essence, a prior restraint allows the public and press to gather news, but prevents them from publishing the news. On the other hand, a closure order prevents the public and press from attending trial in order to prevent the publication of the news by preventing access to the news. Thus, the major distinction between a prior restraint and a closure order is that a prior restraint prevents publication of information while a closure order prevents access to information.

This distinction between proscriptions on publication and proscriptions on access has been a major pressure point in the development of the Supreme Court's theory of the first amendment. Because *Nebraska Press* virtually eliminated prior restraints on the publication of information presented at trial, it can be argued that the first amendment gives the press a right to publish the news it has gathered. However, this does not mean that the press has an unconditional right to gather news. Until *Richmond*, a majority of the Court had never recognized a first amendment right of access. As Justice Stevens stated, it is the recognition of a right of access which makes *Richmond* a "watershed case."

**B. The Source of the Right**

The characterization of *Richmond* as an access question was only the first problem faced by the Court in reaching its decision.

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124. First amendment rights tend to be personal to the individual. The existence of first amendment rights most often comes into issue when the individual has challenged a majoritarian opinion or the order of a governmental authority. Considering the sheer power and chilling effect of this sort of opposition, in order for the individual to practice his first amendment rights, he must be willing to vigorously assert those rights. Thus, it could be said that the practice and principles of the first amendment require that the individual be strong enough to assert his rights. Therefore, it is arguable that a closure order is more offensive than a prior restraint. The individual faced with a prior restraint at least has the choice to be strong, violate the order and test his rights. However, a closure order, which prohibits access to information, does not allow the individual a choice to violate the order and, therefore, does not allow him a choice to be strong.

125. See § III of text infra.

126. See note 66 & accompanying text supra.

127. 100 S. Ct. at 2830 (Stevens, J., concurring).
More importantly, the Court had to clarify *Gannett* and find a way to keep trials open. Avoiding either part of the problem could have resulted in turning the nation's courts into a system of secret justice.\(^1\) However, in constructing a method to meet these problems, the Court was confronted with two major stumbling blocks. The first was *Gannett* itself. The Court's vague holding in *Gannett* that the sixth amendment public trial right was personal to the accused was the very reasoning used by the lower courts to justify trial closures.\(^2\) Unless the Court was willing to substantially overrule *Gannett*, it was foreclosed from finding a public right of access to criminal trials in the sixth amendment.\(^3\)

The second precedential problem faced by the Court was its prior treatment of the first amendment public right of access question. In this area, the *Houchins* holding that there was no first amendment right of access to information or sources of information within the government's control was particularly troublesome.\(^4\) A trial courtroom is certainly a government institution, and a rule which allows the closure of that courtroom certainly puts trial information within governmental control. Therefore, it could easily have been argued that a closed trial was the same as a closed prison facility, and that there was no first amendment right of access to either.

As a result, in order to open trials the Court basically had two options: It could overrule its entire line of access cases, which would have resulted in subjecting almost all governmental institutions and information to public scrutiny under a broad right of access; or, it could have created a limited right of access, which would have been sufficient to open trials and still be somewhat congruent with its prior cases. This option would have allowed the Court a substantial degree of control over the future development of a public right of access to governmental institutions.

After clarifying and limiting *Gannett*, the Court chose the second alternative and set to work structuring a limited right of public access to criminal trials. *Richmond* contains two primary theories of the source of the right. The first is authored by Chief Justice Burger and the second by Justice Brennan.

Chief Justice Burger, joined by Justices White and Stevens, found the source of the public access right to criminal trials in the Anglo-American history of the judicial process and in the speech, press and assembly clauses of the first amendment. The Chief

\(^{128}\) See id. at 2837-39 (Brennan, J., concurring, joined by Marshall, J.).

\(^{129}\) *Gannett* was cited by the Virginia Supreme Court in upholding the closure order at issue. See note 29 & accompanying text supra.

\(^{130}\) See 100 S. Ct. at 2841-42 (Blackmun, J., concurring).

\(^{131}\) For a discussion of *Houchins*, see notes 85-91 & accompanying text supra.
Justice' historical analysis served as a policy statement in support of his decision. He stated that in the long tradition of Anglo-American justice, criminal trials were presumptively open to the public. Attendance was encouraged so the public could "satisfy themselves that justice was in fact being done." This policy of openness helped assure that the proceedings were conducted fairly, and protected the judge and other trial participants from unfounded accusations of impropriety and dishonesty. Throughout history, he stated, the public trial has had a "therapeutic value" as a safety valve for an angry public. When a particularly shocking crime has enraged a community, a public trial helped to satisfy the appearance of justice, explain an unpopular result, and prevent vigilante retribution. Finally, he noted that, historically, public unruliness in the courtroom has been controlled by rules of conduct rather than closure.

Like the rest of the majority, the Chief Justice found the constitutional basis for the public right of access to criminal trials within the first amendment. However, in his view, access is essentially a penumbra right, born within the context of the Court's self-government theory and fashioned from the speech, press and assembly clauses. As the Chief Justice stated:

132. See 100 S. Ct. at 2821-26. A detailed discussion of the historical bases of the open criminal trial is beyond the scope of this note. For such a discussion and further authority, see Gannett v. De Pasquale, 443 U.S. 368, 406 (1979) (Blackmun, J., dissenting in part); 1 J. Bentham, Rationale of Judicial Evidence 522-27 (1827); 3 W. Blackstone, Commentaries *373; M. Hale, The History of the Common Law of England (6th ed. 1820); F. Heller, The Sixth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States: A Study in Constitutional Development 30 (1951); Radin, The Right to a Public Trial, 6 Temple L.Q. 81 (1931).

133. 100 S. Ct. at 2823.
134. Id. at 2825.
135. Id. at 2824.
136. Id.
137. Id. at 2822-23.
138. See id. at 2829 n.16. The Chief Justice did not explicitly refer to the public right of access as a penumbra. However, in supporting his construction of the right, he did cite to recognized penumbra decisions such as Shapiro v. Thompson, 394 U.S. 618 (1969) (right to interstate travel); Stanley v. Georgia, 394 U.S. 557 (1969) (right to privacy); Griswold v. Connecticut, 381 U.S. 479 (1965) (right to privacy); NAACP v. Alabama, 357 U.S. 449 (1959) (right of association). 100 S. Ct. at 2829 n.16.

139. Essentially, the self-government theory states that the purpose of free speech is to help the people govern themselves in a democratic society. Therefore, speech which serves this purpose is considered to be of particular value and subject to a higher degree of protection. See A. Meiklejohn, Free Speech and Its Relationship to Self-Government 18-19, 22-27 (1948); J. Mill, Essays on Government, Jurisprudence, Liberty of the Press and Law of Nations 19, 28 (1825).
These expressly guaranteed freedoms share a common core purpose of assuring freedom of communication on matters relating to the functioning of government. Plainly it would be difficult to single out any aspect of government of higher concern and importance to the people than the manner in which criminal trials are conducted . . . .

In explaining his reasoning behind the construction of the public right of access, the Chief Justice pointed out that the freedoms of speech and press are not limited to the protection of the speaker or writer. The first amendment also protects the right of the listener to receive information and ideas. This broad right to speak and listen, combined with the right to assemble in public places, creates a public right of access to criminal trial courtrooms, which traditionally are public places.

The Chief Justice simply distinguished Pell and Saxbe as cases dealing with penal institutions which do not have this tradition of openness and, therefore, are not subject to the application of the new right of access. The task of paying heed to precedent fell to Justice Stevens, a proponent of a public right of access and the author of the dissenting opinion in Houchins. He applauded the Richmond decision, but wrote to point out the incongruity of the Chief Justice' theory, which opens the trials to public inspection but does not allow the same type of public oversight of the subse-

140. 100 S. Ct. at 2826-27.
142. “People assemble in public places not only to speak or to take action, but also to listen, observe, and learn . . . .” 100 S. Ct. at 2828.
143. One commentator has suggested a similar formula for creating a first amendment public right of access to criminal trials. See Note, Trial Secrecy and the First Amendment Right of Public Access to Judicial Proceedings, 91 HARV. L. REV. 1899 (1978). This right is grounded in the rights of public discussion and personal autonomy embraced by the constitutional guarantee of free speech rather than a concern for just results in particular cases.
144. Id. at 1902-03 (quoting Stanley v. Georgia, 394 U.S. 557, 564 (1969)).
145. 100 S. Ct. at 2828 n.13. The Chief Justice seemed somewhat reluctant to explicitly label the right to attend criminal trials as right of access. He stated:

It is not crucial whether we describe this right to attend criminal trials to hear, see, and communicate observations concerning them as a ‘right of access,’ . . . or a ‘right to gather information,' for we have recognized that 'without some protection for seeking out the news, freedom of the press could be eviscerated.'

Id. at 2827 (citations omitted).
146. See 438 U.S. at 19 (Stevens, J., dissenting, joined by Brennan, J. & Powell, J.); notes 89-91 & accompanying text supra.
quent step in the criminal justice system.\textsuperscript{146} Such a limitation is all the more serious, he explained, because cases such as \textit{Houchins} involve "the plight of a segment of society least able to protect itself ...."\textsuperscript{147}

Justice Brennan, joined by Justice Marshall, disagreed with the Chief Justice on two primary points. First, Justice Brennan stated that the public right of access is not new to constitutional law.\textsuperscript{148} The right has always existed, but until \textit{Richmond} has never been asserted in a circumstance which commanded recognition by a majority of the Court. Prior decisions, such as \textit{Pell}, \textit{Houchins}, and \textit{Saxbe}, only held that "any privilege of access to governmental information is subject to a degree of restraint dictated by the nature of the information and countervailing interests in security and confidentiality."\textsuperscript{149}

Furthermore, Justice Brennan disagreed with the Chief Justice concerning the structure of the right. He acknowledged that the first amendment embodies more than the rights to speak and listen. However, instead of constructing the public right of access out of a conglomeration of first amendment clauses, Justice Brennan began his analysis by pointing out that the first amendment has a "structural role to play" in securing and fostering self-government.\textsuperscript{150} This "structural model links the First Amendment to that process of communication necessary for a democracy to survive ...."\textsuperscript{151} Thus, Justice Brennan's model of the first amendment and the right of access protects both wide-open debate and the processes by which information is gathered to fuel the debate.\textsuperscript{152}

Despite this broad language, Justice Brennan apparently was not ready to subject all of government to an unconditional public right of access.\textsuperscript{153} In order to determine when access to a governmental institution or process should be allowed, he proposed a two-tiered test. The governmental institution or process in question should be examined to determine: (1) whether it represents

\textsuperscript{146} 100 S. Ct. at 2830-31 (Stevens, J., concurring). Justice Stevens viewed the \textit{Richmond} decision as recognizing a broad right of access. He stated: "Today, however, for the first time, the Court unequivocally holds that an arbitrary interference with access to important information is an abridgment of the freedoms of speech and of the press protected by the First Amendment." \textit{Id.} at 2831.

\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{148} \textit{Id.} at 2832 (Brennan, J., concurring, joined by Marshall, J.).

\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Id.} at 2833.

\textsuperscript{150} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{151} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Id.} at 2834.

\textsuperscript{153} "An assertion of the prerogative to gather information must accordingly be assayed by considering the information sought and the opposing interests invaded." \textit{Id.}
an area of traditional openness; and (2) whether access to that institution or process is important to the function of that process.\textsuperscript{154}

The first tier is basically a historical question. Applied to the issue of closure orders, Justice Brennan determined, upon the basis of a historical analysis similar to that of the Chief Justice, that "criminal proceedings" are an area of traditional openness.\textsuperscript{155}

In the second tier of his analysis, he noted that "[p]ublicity serves to advance several of the particular purposes of [the] trial . . . process," such as helping to protect a criminal defendant's fair trial right.\textsuperscript{156} In addition, he pointed out that the trial process serves other political interests which are advanced by public access. First, "justice must satisfy the appearance of justice" to demonstrate to the members of society that "they are governed equitably."\textsuperscript{157} Secondly, he stated that because the courts are responsible for "construing and securing constitutional rights" they are, in essence, part of the lawmaking process.\textsuperscript{158} Because trial courts are making law which will later be interpreted to affect individuals not involved in the particular litigation, trials are "preeminently a matter of public interest."\textsuperscript{159} Therefore, just as in the legislative process, public access to trials acts as a check on the courts' lawmaking function. Finally, Justice Brennan explained that public access assists the factfinding process of trials by bringing unknown witnesses forward and by encouraging those witnesses who are already present to be more candid.\textsuperscript{160}

In conclusion, Justice Brennan found that trials are a traditional area of openness and that "public access is an indispensable element of the trial process itself."\textsuperscript{161} Therefore, both tiers of his public access test had been satisfied, tipping "the balance strongly toward the rule that trials be open."\textsuperscript{162}

A comparison of the two theories offered by the Chief Justice and Justice Brennan, presents two points of disagreement. The first concerns the existence of a right of access prior to \textit{Richmond}. The Chief Justice states that the right is a new penumbral discovery, while Justice Brennan maintains that the right has always existed but has never received an affirmative treatment until

\textsuperscript{154} Id. at 2834-36.
\textsuperscript{155} Id.
\textsuperscript{156} Id. at 2837.
\textsuperscript{158} 100 S. Ct. at 2838 (Brennan, J., concurring, joined by Marshall, J.).
\textsuperscript{159} Id.
\textsuperscript{160} See 6 J. Wigmore, \textit{Evidence in Trials in Common Laws} § 1834 (Chadbourn rev. 1976); Radin, \textit{ supra} note 132, at 384.
\textsuperscript{161} 100 S. Ct. at 2839 (Brennan, J., concurring, joined by Marshall, J.).
\textsuperscript{162} Id.
Much of the resolution of this disagreement turns on the philosophies expressed by individual members of the Court in *Branzburg, Pell, Saxbe, and Houchins*.163

Chief Justice Burger is correct in two respects: (1) No majority of the Court has ever held a right of access to exist;164 and (2) in his *Houchins* opinion, the Chief Justice made it quite clear he did not recognize "a right of access to government information or sources of information within the government's control."165 However, Justice Brennan's view—backed by strong dissents,166 the arguments of commentators,167 and an occasional peace-saving phrase in a majority opinion168—demonstrates that the right of access has been, and will continue to be, a hotly contested issue. In the future development of the public right of access, it is quite likely that Justice Brennan's view will be favored. The Court will not be allowed to forget its previous theory of access which spawned such irritating offspring as *Pell, Saxbe and Houchins*.

The second point of disagreement concerns the structure of the right. The basic terms of the two theories of access appear to be quite similar. Both chart the right of access as radiating from somewhere within the first amendment, and both place a good deal of weight on traditional openness.169 However, the two theories are not simply the same rule expressed in the terms of different constitutional philosophies.170 The Chief Justice' penumbra theory and Justice Brennan's structural model each present distinct implications for the future definition and scope of the right of ac-

163. See § III-B of text *supra*.
164. Id.
165. 438 U.S. at 15.
166. See § III-B of text *supra*.
167. See note 32 *supra*.
168. See, e.g., notes 74, 84 & accompanying text *supra*.
169. The Court's reliance on tradition as part of the test to determine whether there exists a first amendment right of access presents some interesting questions. For example, it is questionable whether tradition should play any part in a first amendment analysis. First amendment problems are probably more accurately solved by applying the ever changing, yet still constant, principles of free expression. Furthermore, if the Court does choose to make historical study part of its first amendment theory, what is the result when the tradition, itself, proves to be unconstitutional? Finally, the Court's use of tradition appears to be more akin to due process analysis than it does to first amendment theory. See *Duncan v. Louisiana*, 391 U.S. 145 (1968); *Palko v. Connecticut*, 302 U.S 319 (1937). If the Court has indeed adopted a due process analysis to determine the scope of the right of access, then it is possible that a closure order could be challenged, alternatively, on first amendment and on due process grounds.
170. It could be argued that Chief Justice Burger's penumbra might have been the result of his strict constructionist method of solving constitutional problems, while Justice Brennan's structural model seems to show his theoretical leanings in the application of the first amendment.
cess. The Chief Justice’ penumbra theory emphasizes a strong reliance on a “public places” requirement.\textsuperscript{171} It appears that his view of the public right of access might best be described as the maintenance of the status quo. That is, those institutions which are open \textit{will} remain open and those which are closed \textit{may} remain closed.

On the other hand, Justice Brennan’s structural model sets up a method by which some closed governmental institutions and those institutions which allow limited access might be opened to the sunlight of public inspection. Although Justice Brennan relied on the requirement of traditional openness,\textsuperscript{172} historical analysis is just as subject to argument and disagreement as is any purely conceptual legal principle. But more importantly, the structural model is completely in line with what many commentators have referred to as the larger role of the first amendment in the governing of a democratic society.\textsuperscript{173} This view emphasizes that the people are the governmental decision makers. In such a system of self-governance, access to governmental institutions and processes is strongly favored in order to allow the people the information they need to make their own decisions. Justice Brennan’s structural model, although somewhat limited by his traditional openness requirement, could become the basis for a new onslaught against the barriers of access.

C. The Right of Access to Criminal Trials—Its Limits

Despite the efforts of Chief Justice Burger and Justice Brennan to construct a constitutional basis for a right of access, the parameters of its application to criminal trials are far from clear. All the members of the majority agreed that the right is not absolute. However, beyond this initial observation, “uncertainty marks the nature . . . of the standard of closure the Court adopts.”\textsuperscript{174} Nevertheless, some general guidelines can be isolated.

The majority emphasized the dominion of a trial judge over the

\textsuperscript{171} The Chief Justice listed streets, sidewalks, and parks as places which are “traditionally open” and “where First Amendment rights may be exercised.” 100 S. Ct. at 2828.

\textsuperscript{172} It is possible that Justice Brennan included the historical requirement as a part of his public access test in order to create a precedent which could later be used in a reexamination of closures of pretrial proceedings like the proceeding in \textit{Gannett}.


\textsuperscript{174} 100 S. Ct. at 2842 (Blackmun, J., concurring).
atmosphere in the courtroom, even though the imposition of decorum may somewhat limit access.\textsuperscript{175} This dominion includes time, place and manner restrictions to assure that trials are conducted in a “quiet and orderly setting.”\textsuperscript{176} Furthermore, \textit{Richmond} preserves the validity of the \textit{Sheppard} alternatives,\textsuperscript{177} and it appears that these alternatives must, at least, be considered before a closure order may be issued.\textsuperscript{178} Finally, the majority generally agreed that some justification is required in order to close a trial. However, in attempting to define what is sufficient justification, the \textit{Richmond} plurality did not provide a clear answer. Nevertheless, it does appear that four members of the Court would require at least “an overriding interest articulated in the findings” to reverse the presumption of openess.\textsuperscript{179} These four votes, along with the vote of Justice Blackmun, who insisted that trials are open to the public,\textsuperscript{180} might be sufficient to provide a degree of guidance to the lower courts. However, any more definite standard will have to be forged by subsequent decisions. But no matter how it is subsequently phrased, it is clear that the standard which must be met in order to close a trial is substantially less demanding than the \textit{Nebraska Press} prior restraint test.\textsuperscript{181} Such inconsistency is hard to justify. The practical effect of both orders is to prevent or postpone the publication of news of court proceedings. Therefore, the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{175} \textit{Id.} at 2830 n.18 (Burger, C.J., joined by White, J. & Stevens, J.); \textit{Id.} at 2839 n.23 (Brennan, J., concurring, joined by Marshall, J.) (“reasonable restrictions imposed upon courtroom behavior in the interests of decorum”); \textit{Id.} at 2840 (Stewart, J., concurring) (“reasonable limitations upon the unrestricted occupation of a courtroom”).
\item Both Chief Justice Burger and Justice Brennan accepted the view of the press as an agent of the public. Furthermore, although the press and public are equal, the press might be allowed special access or treatment in the courtroom. \textit{Id.} at 2825 (Burger, C.J., joined by White, J. & Stevens, J.); \textit{Id.} at 2831 n.2 (Brennan, J., concurring, joined by Marshall, J.).
\item \textit{Id.} at 2830 n.18 (Burger, C.J., joined by White, J. & Stevens, J.).
\item \textit{See} note 49 & accompanying text \textit{supra}.
\item \textsuperscript{176} \textit{Id.} at 2830 n.25 (Brennan, J., concurring, joined by Marshall, J.); \textit{Id.} at 2840 (Stewart, J., concurring).
\item \textsuperscript{177} \textit{100 S. Ct.} at 2830 (Burger, C.J., joined by White, J. & Stevens, J.); \textit{Id.} at 2839 n.25 (Brennan, J., concurring, joined by Marshall, J.); \textit{Id.} at 2840 (Stewart, J., concurring).
\item \textsuperscript{178} \textit{Id.} at 2830 (Burger, C.J., joined by White, J. & Stevens, J.). The Chief Justice and Justice White appeared to agree on this language. However, Justice Stevens, who concurred with the Chief Justice, seemed to hedge on this standard and probably would require a lesser standard. \textit{Id.} at 2831 n.2, 2832 (Stevens, J., concurring). Justice Brennan, joined by Justice Marshall, seemed to require “compelling” justification. However, he explicitly refused to discuss what fact situations would meet his standard. \textit{Id.} at 2839 (Brennan, J., concurring, joined by Marshall, J.).
\item \textsuperscript{179} It appears that Justice Blackmun is determined to keep trials open on whatever theory the court may adopt. \textit{See} \textit{id.} at 2841-42 (Blackmun, J., concurring).
\item \textsuperscript{180} \textit{See} notes 64-66 & accompanying text \textit{supra}.
\end{itemize}
Court's reasoning for prescribing different standards for the two orders must center around how each order prevents or postpones publication.182

A prior restraint restricts publication by proscribing firsthand observers from publishing what they see or hear. In essence, under a prior restraint, the press and public are told they may attend the court proceeding, but they may not communicate their observations to others. However, although they may not communicate what they have learned, their personal access to the information has not been proscribed. A closure order, on the other hand, restricts publication by proscribing access to the court proceeding. Therefore, in addition to restricting publication, a closure order also prevents the press and public from learning firsthand about the trial activities. It prevents their personal access to the information.

In light of this distinction, it could certainly be argued that a closure order represents the more severe infringement of first amendment rights since it does not even allow the interested citizen to learn, by personal observation, what transpires in the courtroom. Nevertheless, the Court has not accepted this reasoning. Under the Court's theory of the first amendment, it is apparently a greater infringement to prevent an individual from communicating what he knows or believes than it is to prevent access to the source which provides the basis for the individual's knowledge or beliefs. This less stringent standard for a closure order may stem from an attitude that a closure order is less of an infringement because an individual cannot be prevented from communicating what he does not know.

D. The Impact of Richmond

I was hopeful of victory but fearful that the court might shrink from the sweeping implications of recognizing, for the first time, an affirmative right of access and newsgathering under the First Amendment. All who cherish an open society are profoundly grateful that the court was not so timid. The full reach of the right established in Richmond may not be clear for decades. Efforts to establish the right of access in contexts other than criminal trials will not always succeed. But the right will not be easily confined, and its broad affirmation in Richmond Newspapers marks a milestone.183

There is little question that Richmond will be primarily remembered as the decision which recognized a first amendment public right of access, and it is in the area of access where its im-

182. See § IV-A of text supra.
183. PRESSTIME, Aug. 1980, at 10 (quoting Professor Laurence H. Tribe who argued the case for Richmond Newspapers, Inc.).
pact will be felt. Since a total of eight members of the Court have recognized the right, future opponents of access are going to be hard pressed to deny its existence.

Arguments over the scope of the right are far from over. And the precise positions of the individual members of the Court are not certain. However, because of the strong recognition of the right by Richmond, future questions of the scope of access must be met with careful examination and a balancing of interests rather than flat denial.

It must be emphasized that the public right of access is by no means absolute. After the existence of the right had been denied for so long, the Richmond Court was not about to turn around and recognize a broad right which would subject all governmental institutions and information to public access. As demonstrated by the primary theories offered in Richmond, the Court's attitude toward the right in the future undoubtedly will be one of controlled development. Nevertheless, although the right of access will be controlled, it is unlikely that its scope will be limited to the status quo interpretation offered by the Chief Justice. The potential of the right is simply too powerful and far-reaching to be limited to maintaining things as they are.

Without a doubt, one of the first questions presented will be whether the public has a first amendment right of access to pretrial suppression hearings. At the time Gannett was decided, the majority of the Court had not recognized the first amendment right of access. Therefore, it could be argued that as a result of Richmond a judge now will be required to weigh the first amendment public right of access before closing pretrial proceedings to the public and press. It is unlikely that such closures will be allowed without some justification. The real question is how much?

V. CONCLUSION

The Richmond Court should be applauded for its recognition of a first amendment right of public access. It is a right too long denied the people of a self-governed nation. However, in its recogni-

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184. In Richmond, seven members of the Court recognized a right of access. However, Justice Powell, who did not participate in the Richmond decision, had previously recognized the right in Saxbe, Pell, Houchins and Gannett. See § III-B & -C of text supra.
185. See § IV-B of text supra.
186. See note 171 & accompanying text supra.
187. In Richmond, Justice Stewart recognized this question, but declined to comment further. 100 S. Ct. at 2841 (Stewart, J., concurring).
188. See § III-C of text supra.
189. Justice Powell was the only member of the Court to recognize a first amendment right of access in Gannett. See notes 105-06 & accompanying text supra.
tion of the new right, the Court failed to satisfactorily answer the narrower question of the requirements and standards for the right of access to criminal trials. The multitude of opinions will undoubtedly leave the lower courts in a state of confusion and require them to decide the issue again and again.

Such a divergence of theory and rationale has been the norm in the Court's fair trial-free press and access decisions. Certainly, wide-open debate and differences of opinion are at the core of the first amendment. However, the highest Court in the land has a responsibility to decide constitutional questions in a manner which produces relatively firm and understandable results.

The Richmond decision is the product of a fractionalized Court, which, either because of unreconcilable differences or philosophical rigidity, was unable to agree upon a clear and workable standard. Regardless of the reason for the ambiguity in Richmond, there is more than a little truth in Justice Rehnquist's dissent, where he quoted the Lord Chancellor in the Gilbert & Sullivan operetta, Iolanthe: "The Law is the true embodiment of everything that's excellent. It has no kind of fault or flaw. And I, my lords, embody the law."190

Robert F. Copple '81

190. 100 S. Ct. at 2843 (Rehnquist, J., dissenting).