People v. Antommarchi: Do Antommarchi Rights Benefit Anyone? A Comprehensive Examination of the Decision and Its Ramifications

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COMMENT

PEOPLE v. AN TOMMARCHI: DO AN TOMMARCHI RIGHTS BENEFIT ANYONE? A COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION OF THE DECISION AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS

One of the most basic rights of a criminal defendant is the right to be present at trial.¹ This right is sternly embedded in

¹ See Snyder v. Massachusetts, 291 U.S. 97, 98-99 (1934); Lewis v. United States, 146 U.S. 370, 373-74 (1892) (quoting Hopt v. Utah, 110 U.S. 574, 578-79 (1884)); Schwab v. Berggren, 143 U.S. 442, 448 (1892); United States v. Washington, 705 F.2d 489, 497 (D.C. Cir. 1983); see also Decision, Presence of Accused Felon at His Trial, 10 N.Y.L.F. 262, 262 (1964) (stating that presence of accused felon at trial is well established principle of law).

A criminal defendant's right to be present, however, is not absolute. See Diaz v. United States, 223 U.S. 442, 450-56 (1912) (indicating defendant can waive right when voluntarily absent from court). By the turn of the century, common law provided that a criminal defendant could waive his right to be present by voluntarily absenting himself once the trial began, as long as he was not charged with a capital offense and was not in custody. See James G. Starkey, Trial In Absentia, 53 St. John's L. Rev. 721, 724 (1979). In 1912, the Supreme Court in Diaz recognized the right as extending to every stage of the proceedings and being almost as important as presence at the trial itself. Diaz, 223 U.S. at 455. The Second Circuit, however, was reluctant to extend this rule to a criminal defendant who absents himself before the trial begins. See Starkey, supra, at 727-28. In United States v. Tortora, 464 F.2d 1202, 1210 (2d Cir.), cert. denied, 409 U.S. 1063 (1972), the Second Circuit held that commencing a trial without the defendant is within the court's discretion but should only be exercised in extenuating circumstances in which the interest of the absent defendant is clearly outweighed by that of the public. Id. In reaching this decision, the trial court must consider scheduling problems, the burden of multiple trials, and the ability to proceed promptly without the defendant. Id. Although Tortora's narrow limits were considered stricter than what the Constitution requires, the Supreme Court implicitly upheld the constitutionality of commencing trial without a defendant in Tacon v. Arizona, 410 U.S. 351, 352 (1973).

Alternatively, a defendant may waive his right to be present by engaging in severe misconduct. See Illinois v. Allen, 397 U.S. 397, 342-43 (1970) (defendant can lose right to be present if disruptive behavior creates difficulty in continuing trial); Sny-
common law and guaranteed by both the federal and state constitutions. Additionally, it has been secured by federal and state law. See, e.g., Snyder, 291 U.S. at 99. The right of a criminal defendant to be present at his trial dates back to early Anglo-Saxon law. Starkey, supra note 1, at 721-22. This right stems from the early methods of determining guilt, such as trial by ordeal and trial by battle, which necessitated the defendant’s presence. Id.

3 See U.S. Const. amend. VI; U.S. Const. amend. V; U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1. The Confrontation Clause of the Sixth Amendment provides that “[i]n all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right ... to be confronted with the witnesses against him ...” U.S. Const. amend. VI. The Confrontation Clause has often been cited as providing the right of presence. See, e.g., Snyder, 291 U.S. at 106; Dowdell v. United States, 221 U.S. 325, 329-30 (1911); United States v. Raper, 676 F.2d 841, 846 (D.C. Cir. 1982); infra note 30 and accompanying text (discussing Confrontation Clause roots of right of presence). It likewise follows that a fair hearing, in accordance with due process protections, cannot be held without the defendant’s presence. Calley v. Callaway, 382 F. Supp. 650, 683 (M.D. Ga. 1974), rev’d, 519 F.2d 184 (5th Cir. 1975); SEC v. Kimmes, 759 F. Supp. 430, 437 (N.D. Ill. 1991).

4 See, e.g., N.Y. Const. art. I, § 6 (“In any trial in any court whatever the party accused ... shall be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation and be confronted with the witnesses against him ... No person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law.”).

5 See Fed. R. Crim. P. 43(a). Rule 43(a) provides, in pertinent part, that “[t]he defendant shall be present ... at every stage of the trial including the impaneling of the jury ...” Id. The Rule codifies the common law and the constitutional guarantees of the Confrontation Clause and the Fifth Amendment’s Due Process Clause. See Washington, 705 F.2d at 496; United States v. Chrisco, 493 F.2d 232, passim (8th Cir.), cert. denied, 419 U.S. 847 (1974). As originally promulgated, Rule 43 was intended to be a restatement of existing law on the issue of a criminal defendant’s right to be present at his trial. See 8B James W. Moore, Moore’s Federal Practice ¶ 43.01[2] (2d ed. 1993).

Rule 43 grants broader rights than does the Constitution. See United States v. Gagnon, 470 U.S. 522, 527 (1985) (indicating that in some circumstances defendant’s right to be present may be guaranteed by rule 43 but not by Constitution). The rule must, however, be read in conjunction with rule 52 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, which requires prejudicial error for a reversal. See United States v. Schor, 418 F.2d 26, 30 (2d Cir. 1969) (finding that granting of new trial due to defendant’s absence subject to rule 52); Estes v. United States, 335 F.2d 609, 619 (5th Cir. 1964), cert. denied, 379 U.S. 964 (1965) (distinguishing harmless and plain error).
Traditionally, a defendant's right to be present at trial has extended to the impaneling of the jury. Despite this historic protection afforded the accused, sidebar conferences conducted without the defendant's presence during impaneling have become commonplace in today's courts. Recently, however, in People v.
Antommarchi, the New York Court of Appeals radically departed from the judicial norm by holding that a criminal defendant has a fundamental right to be present at sidebar conferences. Sideline conferences were particularly common in the New York City area. See Ruling Threatens Verdicts: Defendants Get Listening Rights, ATLANTA CONST., Nov. 14, 1992, at B10; Court Chaos?, supra note 8, at G8. The practice was so long-standing and pervasive that neither defendants nor their attorneys ever imagined that such a right of presence existed. See Morning Edition: New York State Supreme Court Hears Case on Retrying Convicted Criminals (National Public Radio, Nov. 19, 1992). Paul Schectman, counsel for the Manhattan District Attorney, stated, “Whether you call it a technicality or a fundamental right, the important thing is nobody knew it existed.” Id.

Under Chief Judge Sol Wachtler, the New York Court of Appeals expanded the rights enjoyed by an accused, even while the United States Supreme Court was moving in the opposite direction. See Jane Fritsch, Ruling in Minor Trial Imperils Some Big New York Verdicts, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 13, 1992, at A1, B5 [hereinafter Fritsch, Ruling in Minor Trial]; Jane Fritsch, Court Limits Appeals of Juror-Interview Errors, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 18, 1992, at B1, B14 [hereinafter Fritsch, Court Limits Appeals]. In April 1992, the Court of Appeals held that a defendant has the right to appeal if his request to join the sidebar during jury questioning, when his presence would have had a substantial effect, was denied. People v. Sloan, 592 N.E.2d 784, 786-87 (N.Y. 1992).


11 Id. at 97. Acting Chief Judge Simons’ use of the term “fundamental” in describing the defendant’s right was ambiguous because of its many different definitions, one of which denotes a constitutional right. See West’s LEGAL THESAURUS/DICTIONARY 342 (1985). Fundamental rights are derived from, and guaranteed by, the Constitution, see, e.g., Price v. Cohen, 715 F.2d 87, 93 (3d Cir. 1983), cert. denied, 465 U.S. 1032 (1984), and state constitutions, see, e.g., Sidle v. Majors, 341 N.E.2d 763, 766 (Ind. 1976); see also BLACK’S LAW DICTIONARY 674 (6th ed. 1990). However, in Mitchell, a later opinion that determined that Antommarchi would not have retroactive effect, Simons wrote that it was strictly a statutory decision, with no constitutional implications. People v. Mitchell, 606 N.E.2d 1381, 1385 (N.Y. 1992). Yet, ironically, the Antommarchi opinion makes no mention of § 260.20, except to cite it in one parenthetical. Antommarchi, 604 N.E.2d at 96. Some commentators have interpreted the decision to be statutory. See Sidney H. Stein, New York Court of Appeals Roundup, 209 N.Y. L.J. 3 (1993); Fritsch, Court Limits Appeals, supra note 9, at B1; Gary Spencer, No Retroactive Effect for Antommarchi: Defendants’ Right to Hear Jurors Questioned, 208 N.Y. L.J. 118 (1992) [hereinafter Spencer, No Retroactive Effect]; Gary Spencer, Misreading of Controversial Ruling Claimed by Simons, 208 N.Y.L.J. 100 (1992) [hereinafter Spencer, Misreading]; John Caher, Court Cuts Way to Appeal, TIMES UNION, Dec. 18, 1992, at B2. Others have construed it as resting on both statutory and federal constitutional grounds. See Fritsch, Ruling in Minor Trial, supra note 9, at A1. Chief Judge Simons later tried to narrow the scope by stating that the holding applies only to an “extreme case” in which questioning prospective jurors about potential bias takes place without the defendant and at the invitation of the trial judge. See Spencer, Misreading, supra, at 1; see also Fritsch, Ruling In Minor Trial, supra note 9, at A1 ("I think when the court thinks about it, it's going to think..."
during jury selection when the questioning relates to the objectivity of prospective jurors.\textsuperscript{12}

In Antommarchi, the defendant was convicted of third degree criminal possession of a controlled substance in the Supreme Court of New York County.\textsuperscript{13} During the voir dire, the trial judge questioned several of the prospective jurors at the bench regarding personal matters they did not wish to reveal in open court.\textsuperscript{14} These sidebar conferences were recorded in the presence of defendant's counsel,\textsuperscript{15} while the defendant remained only a few feet away.\textsuperscript{16} The defendant did not request to be present at these conferences, nor did he object to his absence at any point during the trial.\textsuperscript{17} Nevertheless, he appealed his conviction to the New York Court of Appeals, claiming, \textit{inter alia}, that his absence from the sidebar conferences deprived him of his right to be present at every material stage of trial.\textsuperscript{18} The New York Court of Appeals agreed, holding that sidebars constitute material stages of trial, and accordingly, reversed his conviction and granted him a new trial.\textsuperscript{19}

Writing for a unanimous court, Acting Chief Judge Simons explained that under New York Criminal Procedure Law ("CPL")

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Antommarchi, 604 N.E.2d at 97.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Antommarchi, 604 N.E.2d at 97. Of 67 potential jurors, 37 were individually questioned at the bench. \textit{See} Spencer, \textit{No Retroactive Effect, supra} note 11, at 1. The potential jurors spoke about a wide variety of issues which concerned them. \textit{See} Steven W. Fisher, "People v. Antommarchi": \textit{A Trial Judge's Perspective,} 208 N.Y.L.J. 1 (1992). For example, several discussed their "business commitments, doctor appointments, and Sabbath observance." \textit{Id.} Others expressed their attitudes about drugs and revealed prior arrests of family members. \textit{Id.} Additionally, the potential jurors were asked whether they or anyone they had known had been the victim of a crime or had been accused of committing a crime. Antommarchi, 604 N.E.2d at 97. They were also asked whether they thought the defendant was guilty simply because he had been arrested. \textit{Id.}
\item \textsuperscript{15} See Antommarchi, 604 N.E.2d at 97.
\item \textsuperscript{16} See Bauder, \textit{supra} note 8, at B2.
\item \textsuperscript{17} See Fisher, \textit{supra} note 14, at 1.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Antommarchi, 604 N.E.2d at 96. On appeal, the defendant argued that both his constitutional and statutory rights were violated by his absence from the sidebar conferences. \textit{Id.} (claiming breach of Sixth and Fourteenth Amendment rights, rights under Article 1, section 6 of New York State Constitution and section 260.20 of New York Criminal Procedure Law).
\item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{Id.} at 97.
\end{itemize}
section 260.20,20 as well as New York case law,21 a defendant has a fundamental right to be present during any material stage of his trial.22 More importantly, the court concluded that sidebar conferences constitute material stages of trial.23 The court, however, limited a defendant's right to be present at sidebar conferences to questioning relating to a potential juror's bias;24 thus, a defendant need not be present for questioning relating to routine matters such as prior obligations or physical impairments.25 The court reasoned that a defendant should be entitled to observe prospective jurors' facial expressions, demeanor, and body language, so as to gauge any possible bias.26 Furthermore, the court concluded that since the right to be present at sidebars is fundamental, it cannot be waived by a defendant's inaction,27 thus attaching automatically.

20 N.Y. CRIM. PROC. LAW § 260.20 (McKinney 1993). Section 260.30 recognizes jury selection as part of a jury trial. Id.; see Lewis v. United States, 146 U.S. 370, 376 (1892) (impaneling jury members represents official start of trial). Section 260.20 incorporates the impaneling of the jury as a stage at which a defendant has the right to be present. See People v. Sloan, 592 N.E.2d 784, 786 (N.Y. 1992); People v. Velasco, 570 N.E.2d 1070, 1071 (N.Y. 1991); People v. Mullen, 374 N.E.2d 369, 372 (N.Y. 1978).

21 See Sloan, 592 N.E.2d at 786; People v. Turaine, 577 N.E.2d 55, 56 (N.Y. 1991); Velasco, 570 N.E.2d at 1071; People v. Mehmidi, 505 N.E.2d 610 (N.Y. 1987); Mullen, 374 N.E.2d at 370.

22 See Antommarchi, 604 N.E.2d at 97; Sloan, 592 N.E.2d at 786; see also supra note 11 (discussing ambiguity of word "fundamental").

23 Antommarchi, 604 N.E.2d at 97; see Sloan, 592 N.E.2d at 787 (concluding that failure to permit defendant's presence at sidebar questioning of potential jurors was error).

24 Antommarchi, 604 N.E.2d at 97 (citing Sloan, 592 N.E.2d at 787). The defendant should be present to permit the enhanced assessment of prospective jurors for conferring and advising counsel. Id.

25 Id.; Velasco, 570 N.E.2d at 1071.

26 Antommarchi, 604 N.E.2d at 97. The court felt this was necessary so that a defendant can "have the opportunity to assess the juror's 'facial expressions, demeanor and other subliminal responses.'" Id. (quoting Sloan, 592 N.E.2d at 787).

27 Id.; see People v. Dokes, 595 N.E.2d 836, 840 (N.Y. 1992) (explaining failure to object to fundamental rights does not bar appeal). The Antommarchi court did not hold that the right cannot be waived, but rather that it will not be waived by the defendant's inaction. See Lewis, supra note 7, at 2. Although the Antommarchi opinion did not discuss how a defendant can waive his right, New York courts have held that fundamental rights will be preserved unless they are "knowingly, intelligently, and voluntarily" waived by the defendant personally. People v. Epps, 334 N.E.2d 566, 571 (N.Y.), cert. denied, 423 U.S. 993 (1975). Almost immediately following the Antommarchi decision, Supreme Court Judge Gerald Sheindlin devised a procedure to allow mid-trial waivers to avoid a flood of potential reversals regarding matters which were already pending. People v. Cook, 591 N.Y.S.2d 760, 762 (Sup. Ct. 1992). In order to determine whether a defendant had "knowingly, intelligently, and volun-
It is submitted that by granting criminal defendants an automatic right to be present at sidebar conferences with prospective jurors, the Antommarchi court erred to the detriment of both the criminal justice system and criminal defendants. This Comment asserts that such conferences do not constitute material stages of trial, and therefore, do not trigger a criminal defendant's constitutional right to be present. Further, it is suggested that "Antommarchi rights" are not supported by section 260.20 of the CPL.

Initially, several commentators reacted to the Antommarchi decision with a surge of opposition and outrage. See supra note 11. Although these tensions eased slightly when the New York Court of Appeals decided that Antommarchi would be applied only prospectively, see People v. Mitchell, 606 N.E.2d 1381, 1384 (N.Y. 1992), a debate nevertheless persists concerning the legitimacy and ramifications of the ruling itself. Some critics argue that because the benefit of a defendant's presence at such sidebars would be negligible, if not non-existent, Antommarchi rights are unnecessary. See, e.g., George F. Will, Our Expanding Menu of Rights, Newsweek, Dec. 14, 1992, at 90 (discussing absurd results that may arise due to Antommarchi); infra notes 70 to 81 and accompanying text (setting forth policy arguments against Antommarchi). However, other commentators reason that the mere prospect of imprisonment warrants providing defendants with the right to attend the sidebar. See Bauder, supra note 8, at B2 ("This goes right to the heart of the fundamental right to be present at your own trial . . . These are people who are going to be judging this defendant." (quoting Kenneth Finkelman, Legal Aid Society attorney)); Lewis, supra note 7, at 2 (stating defendants should have right to be present at sidebar and should have choice to waive right); Spencer, Misreading, supra note 11, at 1 (explaining defendants should be present because "a general bias [on the part of a prospective juror] can be much, much more stubborn than a specific bias" (quoting William A. Loeb, Legal Aid Society attorney)).
Finally, this Comment concludes that on both policy and practicality grounds Antommarchi rights must be eradicated.

I. CONSTITUTIONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE RIGHT TO BE PRESENT

Courts have determined that a criminal defendant's constitutional right to be present at trial generally commences with jury selection,\(^{28}\) and extends through the return of a verdict.\(^{29}\) A number of constitutional provisions collectively establish this right: the Confrontation Clause of the Sixth Amendment,\(^{30}\) the

\(^{28}\) See Hopt v. Utah, 110 U.S. 574, 578 (1884) (stating that trial commences at latest when jury impaneling begins); United States v. Miller, 463 F.2d 600, 603 (1st Cir.) (stating that challenging prospective jurors is essential to defendants), cert. denied, 409 U.S. 956 (1972); see also supra note 7 (discussing inclusion of jury impaneling as material stage of trial).

In United States v. Chrisco, the circuit court struggled with the issue of what constituted "presence." 493 F.2d 232, 235 (8th Cir. 1974). In that case, the defendants were present in the courtroom during the entire voir dire of the jury for causal strikes. Id. at 236. The peremptory strikes, however, were made in the absence of the defendants, but in the presence of their counsel, although the defendants were later present at the reading of the list by the clerk. Id. The court held that the defendants were "sufficiently present" at the impaneling of the jury to satisfy the requirements of rule 43 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure and the Constitution. Id. at 237.

In addition to being present during jury impaneling, a criminal defendant also has the right to be present when the jury instructions are given, even if they are only supplemental. See Evans v. United States, 284 F.2d 393, 394-95 (6th Cir. 1960) (noting that defendant has right to "see and observe" proceedings). The majority view is that the right to be present at jury impaneling exists only in felony cases. State ex rel. Sheteky v. Utecht, 36 N.W.2d 126, 130-31 (Minn. 1949). But see State v. Campbell, 24 S.E. 875, 878 (W.Va. 1896) (recognizing right to be present at jury impaneling in misdemeanor trials if imprisonment is at stake).

\(^{29}\) See Rogers v. United States, 422 U.S. 35, 39 (1975) (discussing defendant's right to be present until jury renders verdict); Frank v. Magnum, 237 U.S. 309, 316 (1915) (stating that defendant has right to be present at every stage of trial but may waive right to be present at verdict); see also J.H.W., Presence of Accused Felon at His Trial, 10 N.Y.L.F. 262, 263 (1964) ("[I]t is a prisoner's right to be present throughout the entire trial, from the commencement of jury selection until the verdict is rendered and the jury discharged.").

Although a criminal defendant possesses a broad right to be present at trial, he does not have the right to be present during preliminary, preparatory, or ministerial stages of processes, or during proceedings which do not take place during trial. See, e.g., Smaldone v. People, 81 P.2d 385, 388 (Colo. 1938) (holding that defendant does not have right to be present when jurors are drawn to be sent to defendant's district); North v. State, 65 So.3d 77, 79 (Fla. 1952) (holding that it is not necessary for defendant to be present when judge excuses jurors), aff'd, 346 U.S. 932 (1954); Commonwealth v. Green, 20 N.E.2d 417, 422 (Mass. 1939) (holding that defendant's right to be present does not extend to matters before trial begins); State v. Moon 262, P. 859, 860-61 (Or. 1925) (same).

\(^{30}\) U.S. Const. amend. VI; see New York v. Mitchell, 606 N.E.2d 1381, 1384 (N.Y. 1992) (stating that right to be present is rooted in Confrontation Clause of Sixth
Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment, and the Sixth Amendment right to effective assistance of counsel. The Due Process Clause, however, has been regarded as perhaps the strongest source for the right to be present.

A. The Due Process Standard for Presence

In Snyder v. Massachusetts, the Supreme Court set forth the standard to be utilized in determining whether due process mandates the presence of the accused. Justice Cardozo stated that "the presence of a defendant is a condition of due process to the extent that a fair and just hearing would be thwarted by his absence, and to that extent only." The Snyder Court further articulated that the Constitution grants a defendant the right to be present only when "his presence has a relation, reasonably substantial, to the fulness [sic] of his opportunity to defend against the charge," it does not assure such a right "when presence

Amendment); United States v. Raper, 676 F.2d 841, 846 (D.C. Cir. 1982) (same). Since the Confrontation Clause ensures a criminal defendant the right to confront all witnesses, it necessarily follows that a defendant cannot exercise this right without being present at trial. See supra note 3 (discussing derivation of right of presence from Confrontation Clause).


32 See U.S. CONST. amend. VI ("In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right . . . to have Assistance of Counsel for his defense."); see also United States v. Washington, 705 F.2d 489, 497 (D.C. Cir. 1983) (noting right of presence is essential to constitutional right of assistance); cf. Faretta v. California, 422 U.S. 806, 819-21 (1975) (Sixth Amendment allows defendant to make own defense).

33 See Snyder v. Massachusetts, 291 U.S. 97, 116 (1934) (discussing how Due Process Clause ensures fair trial and creates right to be present).

34 Id.

35 Id.

36 Id. at 107-08; see People v. Sloan, 592 N.E.2d 784, 786 (N.Y. 1992). A defendant's right to be present requires not only physical presence, but also the ability to understand the proceedings and cooperate with his attorney. See In re Dennis, 335 F.2d 657, 661 (Cal. 1959).

37 Snyder, 291 U.S. at 105-06; see Sloan, 592 N.E.2d at 786 (holding no right of presence exists where defendant's presence or absence could have no effect on ultimate fairness); Peterson v. United States, 411 F.2d 1074, 1081 (8th Cir.), cert. denied, 396 U.S. 920 (1969) (holding that defendant's absence did not violate Snyder standard).

The court also held that there is no fundamental right for a defendant to be present at a juror view. See Snyder, 291 U.S. at 122. Yet in Snyder, Justice Cardozo wrote that some "[p]rivileges [are] so fundamental as to be inherent in every concept of a fair trial that could be acceptable to the thought of reasonable men." Id. Most impor-
would be useless, or the benefit but a shadow." Therefore, for a stage of trial to be deemed one that requires a defendant's presence, it must be essential to the trial, such that the defendant's absence might hinder the ability to properly defend.

Factors which courts will consider include whether the defendant's attorney was present, and whether he or she had ample opportunity to consult with the defendant. Additionally, with regard to jury selection, a court will evaluate other factors such as the nature of the questioning, how far from the bench...
the defendant was situated, how much of the questioning was conducted in defendant's absence, and whether the particular juror was actually removed from the case.

B. Application to Antommarchi

In Antommarchi, each sidebar conference was conducted in the presence of defendant's counsel, with whom the defendant was given ample opportunity to consult. Furthermore, Antommarchi was only a few feet away the entire time. Although approximately half of the prospective jurors were questioned at the bench, most of them ultimately did not serve on the jury. Twenty-one were excused on consent, one was removed for cause, and four were struck by the defense. Thus, of the sixty-seven prospective jurors originally impaneled, only eleven remained who had been questioned in Antommarchi's absence. Furthermore, not all of the sidebar discussions referred to the jurors' ability to remain impartial. As the New York Court of Appeals held in People v. Velasco, this type of questioning does not give rise to a constitutional right of the defendant to be present.

Therefore, it is submitted that careful examination of the jury selection process in Antommarchi reveals that the defendant's absence from the sidebar conferences had no impact whatsoever on his opportunity to defend against the drug charge. Accordingly,
the Snyder standard for mandating the defendant's presence remained unsatisfied. Because there was no substantial relation between the defendant's absence and his ability to defend, it is asserted that the conferences that took place in Antommarchi were not stages of trial at which he had a constitutionally protected right to be present.66

II. DID THE AN TOMMAR CHI COURT MISINTERPRET THE STATUTE?

Section 260.20 of the CPL provides, in pertinent part, that "[a] defendant must be personally present during the trial of an indictment . . . ."57 The Antommarchi court held that section 260.20 bestows upon a criminal defendant the right to be present at sidebar conferences with prospective jurors when the inquiry relates to impartiality.58 It is evident from the language and legislative purpose of the statute, however, that section 260.20 is not intended to address such stages of trial.

It is a well-settled rule of statutory construction that courts cannot give a statute an interpretation which the legislature could have, but did not, clearly articulate.59 If the New York Legislature had intended that section 260.20 guarantee defendants the right to be present at sidebars, it would have expressly provided so in the statute.60 In fact, since it had become standard procedure in New York to conduct sidebar conferences without the defendant,61 it would have been necessary for the legislature to explicitly indicate that it was supplanting the existing judicial

66 See Snyder, 291 U.S. at 107-08; Fritsch, Ruling in Minor Trial, supra note 9, at A1, B5 ("I don't think there is a real injury to the interests of the defendant . . . .") (quoting H. Richard Uviller, Columbia University Law School professor). Further, because there is no constitutional right to be present at sidebars, a defendant's informed and knowing consent is not needed in order to waive it. See Taylor v. Illinois, 484 U.S. 400, 402 (1988) (holding that witness may be excluded from testifying without violating Constitution when lawyer commits wilful misconduct).

57 N.Y. CRIM. PROC. LAW § 260.20 (McKinney 1993).

58 Antommarchi, 604 N.E.2d at 97.

59 See 1 McKinney's Consolidated Laws of New York: Statutes § 94 (1971) ("Words will not be expanded so as to enlarge their meaning to something which the Legislature could easily have expressed but did not, and a court will not strain the clear language of a statute to produce an unintended and inequitable result." (citations omitted)); see also id. § 230 ("It is fundamental that the words used should be given the meaning intended by the lawmakers . . . .") (citation omitted)).

60 See American Tobacco Co. v. Patterson, 456 U.S. 63, 71-72 n.6 (1982) ("Had Congress intended so fundamental a distinction, it would have expressed that intent clearly in the statutory language or the legislative history.").

61 See supra note 9 and accompanying text (noting that sidebar conferences in defendant's absence are customary).
interpretation of the statute in order to effectuate such a change in the law.\textsuperscript{62} Furthermore, even if the legislature had intended to change the customary practice in New York by enacting section 260.20, it gave absolutely no guidance to courts on the issue of defendants' presence at sidebars.\textsuperscript{63}

In addition, the legislative purpose behind section 260.20 supports the argument that it was misinterpreted by the \textit{Antommarchi} court. The statute's purposes are to abolish the "ancient evil of secret trials and to guarantee the defendant's right to be [physically] present at all important stages of his trial."\textsuperscript{64} The right to be present, however, "must be kept within the limits of common sense and reason."\textsuperscript{65} It is submitted that this purpose illustrates that the statute was intended only to extend to parts of a trial which affect the defendant's opportunity to defend the charge. Therefore, sidebars are necessarily excluded.\textsuperscript{66}

The function of the judiciary is not to make law, but to interpret and enforce it.\textsuperscript{67} Judicial intent cannot replace legislative intent.\textsuperscript{68} Thus, regardless of whether it agreed with the result,\textsuperscript{69} the

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{62} See \textit{American Tobacco}, 456 U.S. at 71-72 n.6.
\textsuperscript{65} See \textit{Lupo}, 196 N.E.2d at 58 (citation omitted).
\textsuperscript{66} See \textit{id.}
\textsuperscript{67} See 1 McKinney's Consolidated Laws of New York: Statutes § 73 (1971).
\textsuperscript{68} Id. § 73, at 145-48 (citations omitted).
\textsuperscript{69} See \textit{id.} § 73, at 148 ("A statute must be read and given effect as it is written by the Legislature, not as the court may think it should or would have been written if the Legislature had envisaged all of the problems and complications which might arise in the course of its administration . . . ." (citations omitted)).
\textsuperscript{70} See \textit{id.} § 92, at 180-81 ("Indeed the Legislature's intent must be ascertained and effectuated whatever may be the opinion of the judiciary as to the wisdom, expediency, or policy of the statute . . . ." (citation omitted)).
\end{footnotes}
Antommarchi court was bound to effectuate the statute in the way the legislature intended.

III. “RIGHT TO BE PRESENT”: WRONG FOR OUR FUTURE

Ironically, Antommarchi rights may work to a defendant’s detriment.70 According to one member of the judiciary, most jurors already feel uncomfortable about revealing prejudices and sensitive information to judges and lawyers.71 It is likely, therefore, that many jurors will become even more reluctant to answer questions honestly when a criminal defendant is present, or even to approach the bench when asked.72 In the aggregate, this procedure leads to less disclosure of prejudice, resulting in more biased juries.73 Consequently, most defense attorneys now advise their clients to waive their right to be present at sidebars,74 so that the

70 See infra notes 71-75 and accompanying text (noting that defendants may not want “Antommarchi rights”).
71 See Fisher, supra note 14, at 1, 4; see also Steven B. Rosenfeld, Misperceived Issue From “Antommarchi”, 208 N.Y. L.J. 109 (1992) (stating jurors’ responses in open court may be inhibited).
72 See Fisher, supra note 14, at 1, 4 (discussing jurors’ desire to respond at bench).
73 See Fisher, supra note 14.
74 Telephone Interview with David Mudd, Assistant District Attorney, New York County District Attorney’s Office (Feb. 23, 1993). Criminal Court Judge Steven W. Fisher accurately predicted the waiving of these rights would occur more frequently when he stated: [It] may come to pass that, after an appropriate period of study, the defense bar will conclude that a defendant’s exercise of the right to be present exacts too high a toll in disrupting the flow of relevant and useful information about prospective jurors. We may then see increasing numbers of defendants, acting on the advice of counsel, waiving their “Antommarchi rights” and allowing jurors to speak on sensitive matters in their absence.

. . . .

I think it is reasonable to believe that many counseled defendants chose not to object to their exclusion from these private discussions in the past because they realized that their presence would be contrary to their own best interests in learning about prospective jurors. . . . It therefore seems ironic that these defendants now stand to win reversal of otherwise valid convictions on the ground that they were deprived of a right which they chose, or would have chosen, gladly to forego.

Fisher, supra note 14, at 1, 4.

The practice of advising such a waiver began after the New York Court of Appeals handed down their decision in People v. Sloan, 592 N.E.2d 784, 785 (N.Y. 1992) (holding that conference related to jurors’ knowledge of “pretrial publicity” went to merits of case, and therefore, defendant must be present); see Gary Spencer, Defendant’s Rights at Trial at Issue; 3 Cases to be Argued Involve Presence of Accused at Sidebar Conferences, 208 N.Y. L.J. 95 (1992).
attorneys may learn as much as possible about each prospective juror.\textsuperscript{75}

Furthermore, it is submitted that \textit{Antommarchi} rights will result in a multitude of baseless appeals and unfortunate reversals. Since it is in a defendant's best interests to waive \textit{Antommarchi} rights,\textsuperscript{76} the majority of defendants who do not waive them will be those who were unaware such rights existed.\textsuperscript{77} Thus, if \textit{Antommarchi} rights are preserved, the criminal justice system will be faced with the anomalous result of defendants exercising rights of which they were previously ignorant to subsequently secure reversals.\textsuperscript{78}

Moreover, it is suggested that \textit{Antommarchi} rights merely enable defendants to search for subtle signs of lack of sympathy, rather than to evaluate juror objectivity.\textsuperscript{79} Further, obtaining voir dire transcripts will be time consuming,\textsuperscript{80} thereby causing delays the courts cannot afford.

Accordingly, it is submitted that a criminal defendant should only have the right to attend sidebar conferences during jury impaneling when a balancing of the relevant factors manifests fulfillment of the \textit{Snyder} standard. It is further suggested that a defendant should have the right to appeal only when his or her request to be present was denied and a timely objection was made.

\section*{Conclusion}

A criminal defendant's right to be present during all material stages of trial is a fundamental tenet of criminal procedure law. This Comment has suggested that the \textit{Antommarchi} court, by holding that this right encompasses presence at sidebar conferences with prospective jurors, improperly extended the rights of criminal defendants without any legislative authority or judicial precedent. In holding that section 260.20 of the CPL deems sidebar conferences with prospective jurors material stages of

\textsuperscript{75} Telephone Interview with David Mudd, Assistant District Attorney, New York County District Attorney's Office (Feb. 23, 1993).

\textsuperscript{76} See supra notes 70-75 and accompanying text (discussing disadvantages of right of presence).

\textsuperscript{77} See Fisher, supra note 14, at 1, 4.

\textsuperscript{78} Fisher, supra note 14, at 1, 4.


\textsuperscript{80} See Spencer, supra note 74, at 1, 4 ("The problem is that it will take a very long time to get the voir dire transcripts . . . ." (quoting E. Joshua Rosenkranz, attorney in charge of the Office of the Appellate Defender)).
trial, the *Antomarchi* court misconstrued the language of the statute in a way that undermined its legislative purpose. In a society wrought with crime and overcrowded courts, it is astonishing that the New York Court of Appeals would, without precedent, grant useless rights to defendants, which only exacerbate the problems of the criminal justice system.

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