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# John F. Sonnett Memorial Lecture Series: The Bill of Rights

John J. Gibbons

*U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit*

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Introduction for:

GIBBONS

Every four years, a small group of politicians and the American public go through a Presidential election, an event not unlike the Dating Game. Candidates for president spend several furious months courting the American voter. For the chance to be president, normally dignified politicians will ride in tanks, consume pork rinds, and otherwise bend over backwards to convince voters they are one of them. While watching this, voters may be reminded of the premise Judge John J. Gibbons used to start his Sonnett Lecture: that all governments depend on the good opinion of the governed. A presidential election does much to prove this true. Each major candidate for president will travel thousands of miles and spend millions of dollars to convince the American voter that their policies and characters are most sound. Candidates with popular support make it to the covention and may win the nomination while those who fail to inspire vanish from the scene.

The presidential selection process may not be perfect, but it is a fundamental part of our republican government. Our elections also serve as a model for fledgling democracies striving to develop their own free political traditions. America's most cherished export is democracy. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union may herald a new era of freedom for the people in these regions and many of these countries look to America for guidance in establishing new governments. Judge Gibbon's lecture does much to explain why

non-republican governments fall and why other countries might consider the American model when establishing a new government.

Judge Gibbons uses English history to examine the progression of political "fictions" used by governments to justify their hold on power. By focusing on episodes of dramatic political change, Judge Gibbons shows how previous political fictions, authored by those in power, legitimized systems prone to despotic rule. This came to an end when the American colonies threw off English control and formed a united government. For Judge Gibbons, the political fictions born of the American Revolution broke with the past by truly recognizing the people as the source of political power. Judge Gibbon's lecture reminds us that the political freedoms we exercise on a daily basis were many centuries in the making, and should be cherished as our most valuable heirloom.