
**THE BEGINNINGS OF NATIONAL POLITICS:
An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress**
by Jack N. Rakove
Knopf, 1979
484 pp. \$15.95

The first Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in 1774, in anticipation of a "collision of British flint and American steel," as John Adams put it. After the costly eight-year War for Independence came disillusionment, inflation, and recession. The patriotic fervor of the 1770s dissipated in the mid-'80s, as did respect for Congress—among the French and Spanish abroad as well as among many of its own members—because Congress was unable to conduct even minor business without approval from at least seven states. Why were Americans so reluctant to entrust power to the government devised by the colonies? According to Colgate historian Rakove, the Continental Congress fell victim to the very ideology that forged the Revolution. To grant taxation privileges to a governing body whose members were appointed by state legislatures seemed to open the way to an "aristocratical power" as dangerous to liberty as the British crown. The Constitutional Convention of 1787 set Congress on firmer ground. By making the House of Representatives (but in a spirit of caution, not the Senate) a popularly elected body, the Convention vested Congress with its legitimacy. Congressmen could henceforth be trusted with the nation's purse.

—James Lang ('78)

JAPAN: The Intellectual Foundations of Modern Japanese Politics
by Tetsuo Najita
Univ. of Chicago, 1980
152 pp. \$4.95 (paper only)

Most books on 19th- and 20th-century Japan focus on economic "miracles" or military exploits. Najita's brief but ambitious essay surveys Japanese political thinkers. From the mid-19th century to the 1930s, political theory emanated from two groups: conservatives who pursued national unity and social harmony within a narrow and legalistic system of constitutional government that they themselves helped to design in the 1880s; and idealists who found that system increasingly repressive and proposed more or less radical alternatives to it. Najita tells more about the idealists than the conservatives, perhaps because the latter wrote less and were busier running the country or advising those who