**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

did; and he skimps on the social moorings of political alliances. But this is an almost unique attempt in English to lay out the modern evolution of Japanese ideas about politics and the individual. Najita has a wide reach: His scrutiny of *samurai* activists in the 17th through early 19th centuries, of popular rights agitators in the late 19th century, and of fanatical superpatriots in the 1930s and '40s lays bare a continuity of intellectual turmoil little understood in the West. Najita's specialized study will be most profitably read along with such general works as Edwin O. Reischauer's *Japan, the Story of a Nation* (1970).

*—Lawrence Olson ('80)*

**THE CHESAPEAKE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: Essays on Anglo-American Society**
edited by Thad W. Tate & David L. Ammerman
Univ. of N.C., 1979
310 pp. $26

*Courtesy of the Arents Collection, The New York Public Library.*

During the 1600s, between 130,000 and 150,000 English immigrants fled economic hardships in the mother country for Virginia and Maryland. These nine demographic essays make clear just how harsh life was in the fragile society of the 17th-century Chesapeake Bay region. Virginia's mortality rate is estimated to have been between 27 and 45 percent, partly due to the Virginia Company's fixation on the settlement of swampy Jamestown, where "burning fever" (typhoid) and "bloudie Flixe" (dysentery) raged. Traditional English family life—late marriages, large numbers of offspring, firm parental control of children—degenerated into chaos. The fact that most immigrants were male made the establishment of a native population difficult. Yet, many of the newcomers were indentured servants who "achieved considerable property" and "were fully integrated into the community as small [tobacco] planters . . . and participants in local government," report historians Lois Green Carr and Russell R. Menard. After 1660, the death rate fell as the coastal settlers moved inland to high ground. Male immigration decreased with the decline of the tobacco industry in the 1680s, and a balanced sex ratio resulted. A local elite began to form. The more prosperous early settlers looked down on the new