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As the title suggests, Prakash (Univ. of Virginia) makes the case that the American presidency was created as an imperial, even a monarchical institution. This provocative theory stems from the “unitary theory” of the executive, so ardently advanced by legal scholars in the George W. Bush administration to justify their activities and further articulated by lawyers from the Federalist Society, a conservative, even libertarian organization. The author examines the views of the framers of the Constitution as well as early constitutional practice. In doing so, he sometimes trips over his evidence (e.g., pages 16, 18, and 322). Relying largely on analysis from legal journals and ignoring most of the excellent work on this subject by political scientists, the case is skewed toward a single end while excluding and not confronting critics such as Louis Fisher and David Gray Adler. The author tries to defend his “imperial from the beginning” thesis by presenting a rather broad, shape-shifting definition of monarchical that covers so much terrain that in the end it ceases to define his subject. This challenging, powerfully argued book makes a strong case, but it is a view most mainstream scholars will find problematic.

--M. A. Genovese, Loyola Marymount University

Summing Up: Recommended. Graduate students.