The World of the Computer
Edited by John Diebold
Random House $12.50

By Norman D. Sandler
Few people in this country know anything about much less understand - computers.

To millions of people computers are mysterious black boxes, electronic brains or mechanized geniuses which cheat them on their monthly bank statements, lose their airline reservations, make their jobs unpleasant or are destined to take over the whole world. To far too many people, these are their only experiences and knowledge of computers.

It is difficult to fully understand the intricate workings of today's fourth generation electronic marvels, without a five year accumulation of un-checked political power has prompted an ever increasing number of self-proclaimed "constitutional scholars" and "political analysts" to write long dissertations on the philosophical and political ramifications of a strong executive branch.

Some have done so well, others have done so merely to exploit the current interest in the way this unpopular president has managed to assume the duties of not only his own office, but those in the other two branches of government, as well. The Imperial Presidency is not one of these "fad books" on the state of the American executive branch. Instead, historian Schlesinger has opted for presenting a detailed account of how presidential powers have escalated to their current level.

The constitution created a federal system composed of three co-equal branches of government: executive, legislative and judicial. The Framers of the Constitution gave each branch different functions for a separation of powers, but built in checks and balances to prevent any one branch from acting without accountability from the other two. Article I of the Constitution created a Congress of the United States, which to ensure democratic action was to be comprised of members elected by citizens within the various states. Article II vested executive power in a President of the United States and a Vice President, to be chosen by electoral bodies appointed by each state. The President was to be Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and responsible for managing the carrying on of foreign relations. However, his actions were not to be unaccountable, and the Framers made presidential appointments and the signing of treaties subject to the "advice and consent" of the Senate.

As Schlesinger points out in the introduction to The Imperial Presidency, the constitutional system which the Founding Fathers created "trended toward inertia." The system was not designed for optimal efficiency, but as Justice Louis Brandeis once said, "to preclude the exercise of arbitrary power."

None the less, The World of the Computer presents an interesting, although slightly incomplete, discussion of the "invention of the century." Both layman and computer scientist alike should be conscious of the advantages - as well as the negative ramifications - which computers have had on society. Nonetheless, The World of the Computer presents an interesting, although slightly incomplete, discussion of the "invention of the century." Both layman and computer scientist alike should be conscious of the advantages as well as the negative ramifications which computers have had on society.

However, somewhere along the line of the political system's development, during the Republic's first 200 years, the executive has assumed many powers and duties not mentioned specifically by the Framers, some of which should belong to either the judicial or - more likely - the legislative branch.

Although there was not a unanimous consensus among the Founding Fathers as to the exact nature of the federal system, above all they were opposed to an unrestrained presidency. The colonials had experienced arbitrary executive power in Britain, and wanted to make sure the same would not happen to the United States presidency.

However, as Schlesinger points out, the balance of power remained uneven through out the early years of the Republic, especially with respect to war-making powers. The Constitution gave Congress the power to declare war and made the President Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Yet, the President soon assumed the power to call upon the Armed Forces as he determined necessary to protect the United States. There are instances of the exercise of this authority as early as the beginning of the 18th century, and Schlesinger theorizes that the role of president, then as now, also gave rise to a number of other unsaid powers which strengthened the executive branch and maintained its superiority over Congress and the courts. Among these problems associated with the development of presidential power, the system in which the executive could withhold information from not only the public, but from Congress as well. The secrecy system - including the justification for the overclassification that is devised by the components of the executive branch and created. (Please turn to next page)