

W. Arthur Lewis and the Birth of Development Economics. *By Robert L. Tignor.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. xi + 315 pp. Photographs, bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, \$35.00. ISBN: 0-691-12141-9.

Reviewed by Randal Michie

This book can be read on two levels. On the human level, it is the story of triumph against adversity. W. Arthur Lewis, a black West Indian born in 1915, overcame racial prejudice to become a respected academic in Britain and the United States, an internationally recognized expert in his subject, and a winner of the Nobel prize for his pioneering work in development economics. He was also a happy family man, indicating that an academic can have success on all fronts. What more could one hope to achieve in a lifetime? However, at the level of the contribution made by a professional economist to economic development, this book reads as a story of intellectual failure in the face of political reality. Whether in Africa or the West Indies, little that Lewis played a role in shaping turned out as he intended, while the verdict of those operating with the benefit of hindsight has been harsh. Models of economic development were formulated by economists like Lewis in the wake of the 1930s depression and the expansion of the government's role during the Second World War, and their understanding was shaped by the British industrial revolution. These views were then applied in a modified form to postwar developing economies in the British Empire, both before and after independence, with results that were rarely labeled successful. African countries, such as Ghana, that benefited from the advice of experts like Lewis in the 1950s and 1960s performed badly in comparison to nations in Southeast Asia that pursued a different path toward economic growth. The attempt to maintain a federal structure in the West Indies also failed in the face of inter-island rivalry, though the university with which Lewis was associated did survive the federation's breakup.

Readers of this biography can thus take their pick from the variety of themes and issues that it covers, ranging from the personal story of Lewis himself to the birth and then the fading of development economics. However, in expanding on these multiple themes, this book also contains much of value on a disparate collection of themes and

issues. There is a discussion of British universities in the 1940s and 1950s, as Lewis was on the staff of both the London School of Economics and Manchester University. What the chapters on this period reveal is Lewis's popularity as a teacher, which he achieved despite having to overcome the racial prejudice manifested more by administrators worried about his acceptance by students than by students themselves. Relations between Britain and its empire at a time of decolonization are also explored, as Lewis was an adviser to both the colonial office and post-independence governments. What is surprising is the high degree of continuity that prevailed in the postwar years as the British went about disposing of their imperial possessions in an orderly fashion. Ghana is given special treatment, as Lewis was heavily involved in its economic planning in the 1950s, and here a rather depressing picture emerges, both for Lewis himself and for that country. There is also a section on the West Indies in the early 1960s, when Lewis should have returned in triumph to the university that now existed. Instead, he had to spend all his time trying to make it work as a federal institution. This task was clearly very frustrating. Finally an appointment at Princeton removed Lewis from both development economics and university administration, providing him with the freedom to write a number of influential books, which were read with special interest by aspiring economic historians in the 1960s and 1970s, including myself. However, even there Lewis courted a degree of controversy, as he was opposed to the growing black-power movement. Having overcome racial prejudice himself, he clearly believed the path he had chosen was the correct one.

Each of these chapters is thoroughly researched, judiciously blending discussions of Lewis's personal life and of the changes taking place in the world. The book's weakness is that there is not enough cement to hold it together. Over his long life, Lewis was a man of many parts; thus his story touches on much more than the history of development economics. As an account of the life and times of W. Arthur Lewis, the book is of the most interest to those who want to know about the man and his achievements. However, it suffers from the attempt to cover too many different subjects, with the result that the reader sees only snapshots of each one. This includes the too-brief coverage of development economics. Consequently, it would be possible for readers who want to find out, for example, about Britain during the 1940s and 1950s, Ghana and the

West Indies in the 1950s and 1960s, the United States from the 1960s on, or the formative years of development economics to read just the chapter on a particular subject, which would be a pity, as they would not gain a complete picture of the rich life of a very interesting man.

*Ranald Michie is professor of history at the University of Durham. He has written extensively on financial history over the course of many years. His most recent books are The London Stock Exchange: A History (1999) and The British Government and the City of London in the Twentieth Century (2004), edited with Philip Williamson. His latest book, The Global Securities Market: A History, is due out in 2006.*