

Linear Development in the Global South? We've Had It All Wrong

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As calls for decolonization escalate in various disciplines and fields, institutions must reckon with preserving their history and legacy, while accurately depicting historical events and the negative impact of colonialism. It may be relatively easier to memorialize someone, remove names from buildings or support restitution efforts for marginalized groups, but greater difficulty arises when attempting to deconstruct theories of development and how we understand the trajectory of progress within the global South. Is that even possible and if so, how?

In the recently published [APSR article](#), David Temin argues that Walter Rodney, revolutionary Black Power activist and author of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972), constructs a distinctive practice of popular anticolonial development that is useful for deconstructing a Eurocentric view of progress and development. In political theory and development more generally, there is often an underlying assumption that Europe (and the West) is the pinnacle of civilization that others should follow and imitate. Such thinking implies that the rest of the world is backward and that the “West,” which is assumed to be at the top of the hierarchy, has an obligation to guide others. Rodney’s work is valuable for thinking about development in the global South in a more democratic way that reinforces transnational liberation struggles.

While anticolonial critiques of developmentalism are popular, Temin offers insight that not only encourages the reader to be critical of the Eurocentric influence in development but to consider the influence of different directions in anticolonial theory. He finds that development is more nuanced and complex than it appears, but recognizes that Rodney is peculiar. Rodney uses alternative development theories to construct a radical popular form of anticolonial development that focuses on revolutionary pan-African politics. The popular anticolonial developmentalism



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Temin refers to refutes a linear historical account of development and captures the essence of ideological and politically diverse projects in empowering colonized subjects to think of development in and through popular practices of mobilization and self-liberation.



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Using Rodney’s writings and activism from Jamaica (1968) and Tanzania (1969-1974), Temin highlights how Rodney’s conception of developmentalism and revolutionary politics in the global South shaped contemporary anticolonial political struggles. In Rodney’s opinion, capitalism, imperialism, and slavery contributed to the adoption of Eurocentric ideas about development. Forced to withstand economic deprivation and racial and colonial hierarchies as a result of European (or Western) domination, pan-African ideas became underdeveloped. As a result, Rodney argues that the global South needs different historical paths that give societies autonomy to choose the best way forward that honors and respects their own cultures, norms, and institutions.

Rodney’s transnational perspective argues that progress occurs through popular anticolonial struggle and the mobilization of civil society beyond state. Although imperialism had multiple competing development ideologies, Rodney details that colonized populations need to transform their own progressive historical development paths by challenging existing narratives about their history and status as defined by colonialists. Rodney proposes that we actually assess what it means to decolonize political theory and think about development in a way that re-orient and reimagines anticolonial futures. ■

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