

Clark, Gregory. A farewell to alms: a brief economic history of the world. Princeton, 2007. 420p bibl index afp Clark (Univ. of California, Davis) adds substantively to an understanding of perhaps the important questions of this--or any--era: what makes economies grow, and why have some not experienced any success at all? Within the last decade have come valuable steps forward in exploring this topic: data collection and interpretations from British economic historian Angus Maddison and the formal growth theories of Nobel laureates Robert Solow and Robert Lucas, and contemporary volumes such as David Landes's *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (CH, Jun'98, 35-5770), Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence* (CH, Sep'00, 38-0415), and David Walsh's *Knowledge and the Wealth of Nations* (CH, Sep'06, 44-0440). Into this fray jumps Clark, who dissects competing, and in some cases complementary, explanations for growth: innovations and advances in knowledge versus geography, and social institutions conducive to growth versus the value of religion and culture. His 16-page introduction is the perfect summary, followed by chapters that probe fertility, life expectancy, technological change, institutions, the Industrial Revolution, diverging rates of growth (and in some nations, the absence of change). *Alms* is provocative, authoritative, insightful, readable, well documented, and an inescapable detour for anyone wanting to tackle economic growth and development topics and enter into these conversations. Summing Up: Essential. General readers, students at all levels, and faculty. -- A. R. Sanderson, University of Chicago