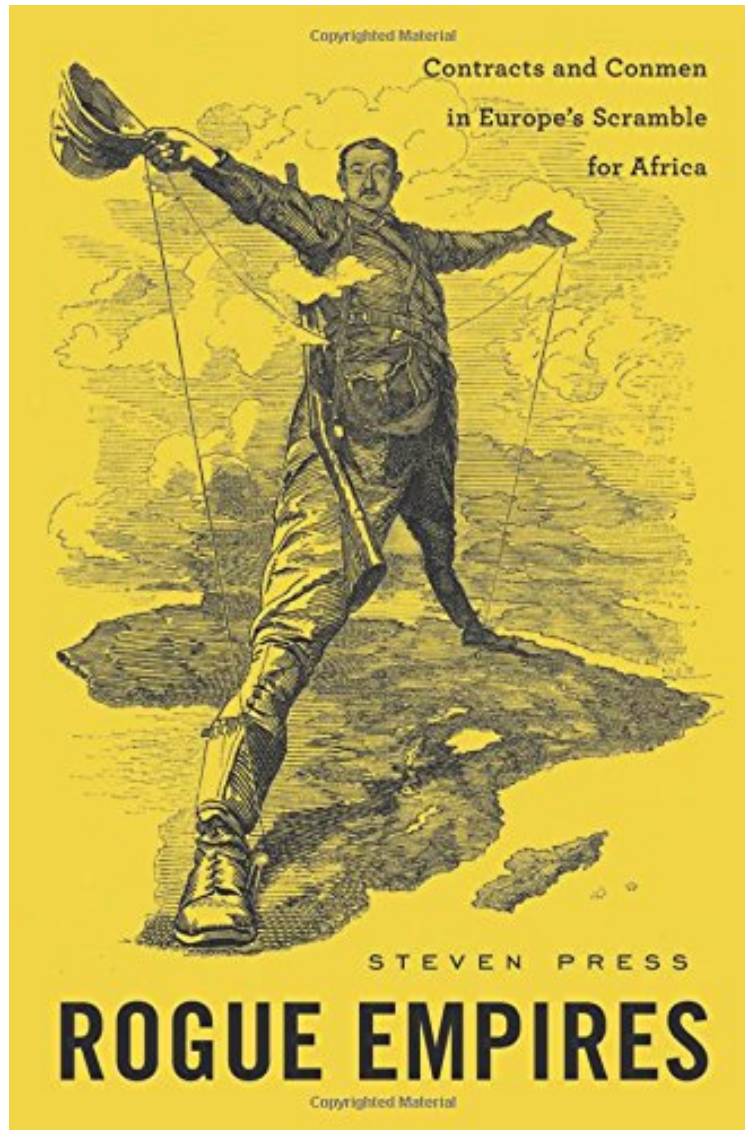


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Rogue Empires: Contracts and Conmen in Europes Scramble for Africa

Steven Press

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Steven Press : Rogue Empires: Contracts and Conmen in Europes Scramble for Africa before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rogue Empires: Contracts and Conmen in Europes Scramble for Africa:

In the 1880s, Europeans descended on Africa and grabbed vast swaths of the continent, using documents, not guns, as their weapon of choice. *Rogue Empires* follows a paper trail of questionable contracts to discover the confidence men whose actions touched off the Scramble for Africa. Many of them were would-be kings who sought to establish their own autonomous empires across the African continent often at odds with traditional European governments which competed for control. From 1882 to 1885, independent European businessmen and firms (many of doubtful legitimacy) produced hundreds of deeds purporting to buy political rights from indigenous African leaders whose understanding of these agreements was usually deemed irrelevant. A system of privately governed empires, some spanning hundreds of thousands of square miles, promptly sprang up in the heart of Africa. Steven Press traces the notion of empire by purchase to an unlikely place: the Southeast Asian island of Borneo, where the English adventurer James Brooke bought his own kingdom in the 1840s. Brooke's example inspired imitators in Africa, as speculators exploited a loophole in international law in order to assert sovereignty and legal ownership of lands which they then plundered for profit. The success of these experiments in governance attracted notice in European capitals. Press shows how the whole dubious enterprise came to a head at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, when King Leopold of Belgium and the German Chancellor Bismarck embraced rogue empires as legal precedents for new colonial agendas in the Congo, Namibia, and Cameroon.

A fascinating and complex book. Press persuasively demonstrates that the private treaty making of adventurers in Borneo in the middle of the nineteenth century had major and overlooked implications for the new wave of imperial expansion in Africa. In doing so, it resituates the Scramble for Africa within global imperial history and offers a new understanding of processes and events that have been the object of decades of scholarly scrutiny. Thoroughly researched, grounded in a wide range of secondary reading, and compellingly written, *Rogue Empires* will appeal to the specialist and the general reader alike. (Christopher Vaughan, author of *Darfur: Colonial Violence, Sultanate Legacies, and Local Politics*, 19161956) *Rogue Empires* provides a fresh and innovative perspective on the Scramble for Africa by focusing on the speculators, conmen, and thugs who managed to acquire private empires at virtually no cost to themselves. Press convincingly explores the diplomatic, political, and legal factors that enabled the European conquest and partition of Africa. He effectively engages, and at times pushes back against, conventional narratives and explanations for key events in African history. (Timothy Parsons, author of *The Second British Empire: In the Crucible of the Twentieth Century*) Engaging and original, *Rogue Empires* retells this familiar story of the so-called scramble for Africa in the 1880s and 1890s, this time with particular attention to its complex diplomatic and legal dimensions. Press places these events in the context of global imperial history, carefully tracing the emergence, proliferation, and legitimization of these rogue empires. (J. P. Smaldone *Choice* 2017-08-01) First-rate Press originality lies in adding a thorough analysis of the private companies, typically chartered or at least encouraged by European governments, that paved the way for colonization. (Nicolas van de Walle *Foreign Affairs* 2017-09-01) About the Author Steven Press is Assistant Professor of History at Stanford University.