provides a degree of emphasis and detail that exceeds what is currently available. Admittedly, this study deals primarily with diplomatic and legal issues and leaves business history and African perspectives aside, but that should not be taken as a criticism. Press is fully occupied with the themes he has chosen and has wisely decided not to range beyond his sources. The highlight of the book is probably the chapter on the Berlin Conference. Although the subject has long been a standard entry in diplomatic history and studies of partition, it has been some time since it was the subject of a substantial review. Press provides a balanced assessment of established interpretations, one holding that it impelled partition, the other that it made little difference to a movement that was already under way, and concludes that the Conference, though not decisive, did hasten the expansion of Europe into Africa.

The limits of the book are those shared by many revised dissertations. The forest is not always discernible among the trees. Short concluding sections at the end of each chapter would have helped readers to stay on track; a general conclusion at the end of the book would have removed uncertainties and underlined the message. The historiography of partition needed more than the one page allocated to it in the Introduction. The acute brevity of the summary offered there raises questions about the robustness of the author's own claim that a fresh answer lies 'not just in Europe, or even in Africa itself, but in Southeast Asia' (9). The Epilogue contains a more modest claim: 'Without Borneo the partition would not have accelerated dramatically in 1884–1855' (248). Even so, this conclusion depends on a series of counterfactuals that open the way to interpretations other than the one advanced here. Borneo was a precedent, not a cause. It was set long before partition and was seized upon in the 1880s and 1890s because it was regarded as a means of realising new ambitions in circumstances that had changed greatly since the 1840s and made partition feasible. These comments are not intended to detract from Press's achievement in illuminating the process of partition. Rather, they are meant to oblige historians to reconsider established interpretations of the Berlin Conference, and direct attention to the evolving legal framework that helped individuals to carry Europe into Africa.

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ISLAM, POWER, AND DEPENDENCY IN THE GAMBIA RIVER BASIN

Islam, Power, and Dependency in the Gambia River Basin: The Politics of Land Control, 1790–1940. By Assan Sarr.

Rochester NY and Suffolk, UK: University of Rochester Press and Boydell and Brewer Limited, 2016. Pp. xiii + 244. $49.95, hardback (ISBN: 9781580465694).
doi:10.1017/S0021853719000185

Key Words: land, Gambia, oral sources, West Africa.

This book is a very important one. Assan Sarr addresses critical issues and offers valuable, new insights from a well-researched base. His case is the middle and lower Gambia River

Basin, one of Africa's 'small' areas. Yet, his questions and viewpoints are significant for historical interpretation throughout the continent. In studying the Gambia, Sarr builds on the major work of Donald Wright, but he also often engages scholars who have researched other areas of Africa, making his conclusions especially relevant to broader debates.

Sarr takes on one of the oldest assumptions in the literature of Africanists, non-Africanists scholars, and popular writers: that in precolonial Africa land was plentiful and had no value. He also seeks to alter various related understandings of the African past, such as the means of control over people and the importance of wealth in people. Ultimately, Sarr wants to restore a more 'indigenous' position against western materialist interpretations. It does not matter if oral sources fail to give hard evidence for the past. What matters is that they provide insights into local ways of thought and action, the spiritual nature of the land-human bond, and the many varied and changing sources of power found in Africa. As the latter suggests, Sarr has a long time frame, and builds into his interpretation the impacts of Islam, the world economy, and colonial rule. All the while, he seeks to foreground African agency.

Sarr begins by recounting the founding of Mandinka settlements and the centuries of rule by kings and Soninke elders. He feels that in the Gambia 'while aristocratic power depended on control of people, land was the foundation upon which this control rested' (81). If he were to support that assertion fully, Sarr would need to treat more systematically how those with social and political power and authority acquired and used all types of resources. The author, however, turns to oral sources in two ways. '[I]t was easier for people in power to claim additional land since they were successful in creating traditions describing how the land became theirs' (82). Furthermore, the intersection between control of land and demonstrations of power must be understood through the spiritual realm, which can be studied with oral traditions. Mandinka ruled by controlling spiritual dimensions of the land and, therefore, access to land. They often were assisted by hunters, blacksmiths, and *marabouts* (Muslim holy men), who were all successful in attracting followers and clients. Such religious specialists provided people with spiritual protection.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, this situation changed when jihad leaders and other Muslims ended Soninke rule, and altered the spiritual relationship with the land. *Marabouts*, in particular, introduced new practices by performing *karamas* (wonders), which opened land for cultivation and also enhanced their reputations. They were thus able to attract more people, who often provided labor. As Islam expanded, the influence of *marabouts* grew, while that of hunters and smiths declined.

In offering his interpretations, Sarr typically presents standard views then argues they are insufficient where they miss African perspectives, especially in the spiritual domain. For example, he looks at existing explanations for the rapid expansion of peanut production in the Gambia and adds a new reading of it. But sometimes he challenges economic understandings without providing enough evidence to support his interpretation. Such is the case when Sarr argues that while *marabouts* held enslaved people, 'it is probably true that their economic survival was not significantly dependent on servitude alone' (155).

Sarr runs quickly through issues pertaining to the world economy, colonial rule, and the twentieth century, but still offers arresting insights. He shows that there was a high environmental price paid for the expanding peanut production, as forest and other 'spirit' lands

were planted and soils rapidly exhausted. He also discusses how British rule opened more land for farming and private ownership. In part, that process occurred through the spread of ideas (supported by 'oral traditions') about communal land and claims to it by appointed chiefly families, who alienated it. Here, as in various sections of the book, a gendered perspective would have been useful.

Islam, Power, and Dependency speaks in valuable ways to Africanist historians and other scholars, as well as to individuals who have absorbed rarely challenged ideas about Africa. Unfortunately, studies located in smaller, weaker present-day countries often are not as widely read as studies located in powerful states or those favored by western donor agencies. Hopefully, that trend will not affect the reception of Assan Sarr's book, which deserves wide and serious attention.

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CITIZENSHIP IN THE FRENCH ATLANTIC EMPIRE

To Be Free and French: Citizenship in France's Atlantic Empire.
By Lorelle Semley.
New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xxi + 362. $32.99, paperback (ISBN: 9781107498471).
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Key Words: West Africa, colonialism, citizenship, Atlantic World.

Lorelle Semley argues that people of African descent in the French Atlantic empire were central actors in the development and enactment of notions of citizenship. She considers geography and temporality broadly, and she both focuses closely on individuals and also considers wide systems of empire. Unlike most studies of French colonialism, the book spans the first and the second French empires, from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, and covers the Caribbean, Africa, and France itself. Through an unwavering attention to colonial spaces and subjects, she demonstrates not only that men and women of color engaged in the struggle for citizenship, but also that, through their actions and their identities, they defined it.

Semley surmounts the methodological challenges of writing a trans-imperial history by weaving the stories of individuals into each chapter. Some are well-known, such as Toussaint Louverture or Gerty Archimede, and some are more obscure, such as Anne Rossignol, a free woman of color from Africa who lived in pre-revolutionary Saint-Domingue, and Jean-Jacques Alin, a free man of color born in Martinique who entered the French colonial administration in Senegal. These biographical vignettes by no means form the entirety of each chapter, yet these stories play a significant dual purpose: they both anchor what otherwise could be a narrative that ranged too widely, and they demonstrate with striking clarity the specific ways in which people of color contested, negotiated, and created citizenship in the French empire. They also show the interconnectedness of the empire. The peripatetic individuals Semley highlights circulated around the