

## NEH Application Cover Sheet (DR-272611)

### Fellowships Open Book Program

#### PROJECT DIRECTOR

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Alan G. Thomas  
 Editorial Director  
 University of Chicago Press  
 Chicago, IL 606370000  
 USA

**E-mail:** athomas2@uchicago.edu

**Phone:** (b) (6)

**Fax:**

**Field of expertise:** Literature, General

#### INSTITUTION

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The University of Chicago  
 Chicago, IL 606375418

#### APPLICATION INFORMATION

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**Title:** *Open Access Edition of "Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi"*  
*by Kenda Mutongi*

**Grant period:** From 2020-09-01 to 2022-03-31

**Project field(s):** African Studies; Cultural Anthropology

**Description of project:** This project will publish the book "Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi," written by Kenda Mutongi (NEH grant number FB-56100-12), in an electronic open access format under a Creative Commons license, making it available for free download and distribution. The author will be paid a royalty of at least (b) (6) upon release of the open access ebook.

#### BUDGET

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<b>Outright Request</b>	5,500.00	<b>Cost Sharing</b>	0.00
<b>Matching Request</b>	0.00	<b>Total Budget</b>	5,500.00
<b>Total NEH</b>	5,500.00		

#### GRANT ADMINISTRATOR

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Andre L. Walker  
 University Research Administration  
 Chicago, IL 606370000  
 USA

**E-mail:** andre.walker@uchicago.edu

**Phone:** 773-702-3466

**Fax:**

**Kenda Mutongi**

***Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi***

**The University of Chicago Press**

**Published June 2017**

### **Description**

Drive the streets of Nairobi, and you are sure to see many matatus—colorful minibuses that transport huge numbers of people around the city. Once ramshackle affairs held together with duct tape and wire, matatus today are name-brand vehicles maxed out with aftermarket detailing. They can be stately black or extravagantly colored, sporting names, slogans, or entire tableaux, with airbrushed portraits of everyone from Kanye West to Barack Obama. In this richly interdisciplinary book, Kenda Mutongi explores the history of the matatu from the 1960s to the present.

As Mutongi shows, matatus offer a window onto the socioeconomic and political conditions of late-twentieth-century Africa. In their diversity of idiosyncratic designs, they reflect multiple and divergent aspects of Kenyan life—including, for example, rapid urbanization, organized crime, entrepreneurship, social insecurity, the transition to democracy, and popular culture—at once embodying Kenya’s staggering social problems as well as the bright promises of its future. Offering a shining model of interdisciplinary analysis, Mutongi mixes historical, ethnographic, literary, linguistic, and economic approaches to tell the story of the matatu and explore the entrepreneurial aesthetics of the postcolonial world.

### **Initial Print Run, Current Sales Profile, and Intended Audiences**

*Matatu* was published in paperback and ebook with an initial print run of 670 paperback copies. To date, net sales of the paperback are approximately 650 units, and net sales of the ebook are approximately 105 units.

The initial audiences for the book were scholars of African history and anthropologists, in addition to college and university students taking courses in cultural and social anthropology. We anticipate that the open access edition will generate increased interest among students, and the book may appear more frequently on undergraduate- and graduate-level syllabi as a result of this newfound accessibility.

### **Distribution Channels**

The planned launch of this open access edition will make it available for free download and online viewing on two sites: the University of Chicago Press’s product page for the book and the HaithiTrust Digital Library. Further open access repositories and resources may be added at a later date.

### **Awards**

- Winner, **Martin A. Klein Prize in African History** for the best book in African history (American Historical Association, October 2018)
- Winner, **Hagley Prize** for the best book in business history, broadly defined (Business History Conference, May 2018)

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- Finalist, **Elliott P. Skinner Book Award** for a book that furthers the wider interests of the African continent (Association for Africanist Anthropology, November 2018)

### Select Review Quotations

"[*Matatu*] offers important contributions to the literature on African cities, informal economies, mobility, regulatory landscapes, and urban infrastructures. . . [by] using the matatu sector to highlight the success of African-run business without assistance from government or development agencies. . . . [It] will be of great interest to all scholars in disciplines spanning African history, urban studies, anthropology, and geography, as well as scholars of mobility, infrastructures, and the regulatory environment of neoliberalism at work and on the road."

– *African Studies Review*

"Mutongi offers a nuanced and rigorously researched analysis that will serve as an excellent model for the study of both history and culture in Africa. . . . A magnificent book that challenges the conventional view of the matatu."

– *Daily Nation*

"*Matatu*. . . provides Nairobians with an intriguing and marvelously written history. Mutongi presents the story of the matatu with enthusiasm, narrative élan, and a balanced view of all actors involved. . . . Mutongi is a gifted historian, representing a new generation of Kenyan historians."

– *Global Urban History*

"Mutongi's authoritative deconstruction and story-telling dazzles. Her *Matatu* becomes the baseline and re-entry point for African minibus research. Her antenna are acutely sensitive. Her phrasings are a treat. Not least, her gorgeously written and accessible presentation is testimony to the enduring value of books as vehicles for argument, learning and pleasure. This book glows with stamina, patient inquiry and careful thought. Its coherence, layering and depth far surpass online capsule histories. *Matatu* slices with diamond-tipped tools. May there be more such glinting dissections of urban transport history in Africa."

– *Journal of Transport History*

"Mutongi has written a lively, meticulously researched history of the matatu industry in Nairobi. Incorporating an array of ethnographic, documentary and archival sources, Mutongi vividly illustrates how matatus, those raucous, crowded, colorful van taxis that ply the city's thoroughfares, are not merely an indispensable means of transport for the wanainchi (everyday Kenyans), but also significant, highly charged sites of expansive entrepreneurship, economic nationalism, political critique, cultural innovation, gender and generational contests, and common corruption."

– *International Journal of African Historical Studies*