

Previous RSC grants:

I have not yet applied for an RSC grant because without supplementary funding it is difficult to spend an entire summer conducting research in France. In summer 2017 I will be attending a conference in Aix-en-Provence (funded by Kendall Center travel money) and have received outside funding from the American Philosophical Society Franklin grant. In combination with these funding sources, the RSC will support the entirety of my travel to France and allow me to complete research on my next book project.

Project description:

This RSC grant proposal seeks funding to support a portion of summer travel expenses to conduct archival research on the life of Mamadou Alioune Kane, a Senegalese man who migrated to France in the early twentieth century. In summer 2017 I plan to complete research begun on a previous summer trip with the plan of later writing a book on Kane called *Prince, Wizard, and Marabout: An African Life in Twentieth-century France*. The editor of the Oxford University Press series “The World in a Life” has expressed interest in publishing the book. I have also secured outside funding from the American Philosophical Society Franklin Grant to support the costs for the remainder of my two-month trip to France. RSC will provide a critical supplement, making it possible to complete all of the research on this topic before moving on to writing the book.

Mamadou Alioune Kane is a unique and fascinating figure in French history. According to contemporary press sources, “Prince El W. Batoula,” a self-proclaimed wizard described as a “towering Negro with a yellow-green turban” appeared at the International Exposition in Paris in 1937 and at the 1939 World’s Fair in New York.¹ In Paris his acts of magic were so impressive (or fraudulent) that they drew the intervention of the police.² In reality, Prince “Batoula” was neither prince nor wizard, but Mamadou Alioune Kane, a man born on Gorée Island in the French colony of Senegal. He arrived in Paris in the 1920s where he drove a taxi and owned a fruit store before taking up this royal and magical persona. Later, during the Second World War, Kane convinced French and German authorities he was *grand marabout* (high Muslim religious leader) of French West Africa. Appointed military chaplain to African POWs, Kane succeeded in swindling ration cards from the soldiers to supply a black market operation in goods such as chocolate and sugar. Kane was arrested in 1941, put on trial for black marketeering, and castigated by the press as a “vulgar” crook.³ In 1945 he was convicted of committing treason with Germany and sentenced to five years hard labor. In the 1950s, however, Kane applied for and received amnesty for this conviction from a French court. Grounded in this extraordinary tale, *Prince, Wizard, and Marabout* will be the first scholarly study of Kane’s life, chronicling a global history of France through the life of one man.

Relevant topics in today’s world, Kane’s life gives insight into periods in French history when race, migration, and Islam were discussed in newspapers, courtrooms, and government offices. I envision the following chapters for the outline of the book:

1) **Introduction:** The introduction will familiarize readers with the basic details of Kane’s life and will thread his unusual story into the historical strands of colonialism, interwar culture,

¹ Meyer Berger, “At the Fair,” *The New York Times*, May 5, 1939.

² *Archives Nationales d’Outre Mer* Government General of AOF, FMOD 17 G 110 Chef de Section, Jan 15, 1941.

³ “Alphonse Kane dit Prince Batoula n’était qu’un vulgaire escroc,” *L’Oeuvre*, March 12, 1941.

African identity, and the Second World War and its consequences.

2) **Citizen:** This chapter introduces Kane's origins, family, and claims to royal ancestry on Gorée Island, Senegal, one of the "four original communes" of Senegal. Residents of these early French settlements on the coast of Africa were granted rights of French citizenship as of 1848. The chapter will integrate Kane's background story into the larger history of French colonialism in Senegal and other migrants who left for France.

3) **Migrant:** The next chapter follows Kane to Paris where he was living by the 1920s. The chapter will weave tales from Kane's life -- his marriage to a Frenchwoman, stint as a mandolin player, and jobs as a fruit seller and taxi driver --into the story of the wider social history of the African migrant community.

4) **Prince and Wizard:** In the 1930s Kane moved on from conventional jobs to performing as the wizard "Batoula" in Paris and New York. The chapter relies on government records and press sources to explore three themes: the phenomena of colonial expositions as transnational sites for Western understanding of African-ness, French images about black Africans developed in the interwar era, and the flourishing of black culture and politics.

5) **Chaplain and Black Marketer:** After France was defeated by Germany in 1940, Kane cozied up to the collaborationist Vichy French and German authorities, persuading them of his status as a Muslim leader and becoming chaplain to the thousands of African troops imprisoned in camps on French soil. When he was caught using the prisoners' ration coupons to sell goods on the black market, authorities unmasked him as a fraud and put him on trial. This chapter will use trial records and press accounts to probe both official and unofficial perceptions of Africans during the Second World War.

6) **Traitor and Petitioner:** After the liberation Kane was tried and convicted of treason for collaborating with the Germans. This chapter will tease out the precise ways race and religion shaped French debates about responsibility for wartime collaboration. Taking advantage of a 1953 law, Kane applied for and was granted amnesty by a special court in 1956. This chapter will include analysis of Kane's request for amnesty to consider how he viewed his own place in French history and how he defended himself.

1. **Purpose.** What are the intellectual, conceptual, or artistic issues? How does your work fit into other endeavors being done in this field?

First, the purpose of the book is to use Kane's life to provide a wide readership with an introduction to important themes in twentieth-century French and world history such as colonialism, migration, global popular culture, national identity, race, and the Second World War and its aftermath. This approach, known as "global biography," is exemplified by such works as *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh* by Linda Colley and *The Two Princes of Calabar* by Randy Sparks. The book will integrate analysis of Kane's life into the rich French, colonial, and global historical contexts of each time period and demonstrate how other historians have interpreted crucial issues in these eras.

Another important purpose of the book is to contribute to scholarship on twentieth-century France. First, the book responds to scholars of race and colonialism who contend that France's history needs to be understood in a global context. Moving from Senegal to France, the U. S., and Germany, Kane's life helps to show how France's history was deeply intertwined with global history in terms of colonialism, interwar culture, and the world wars. A one-of-a-kind person, Kane emerges as a marginal figure, but one whose life provides a critical outsider's perspective and helps to de-center the narrative of French history from metropolitan centers of

power. Secondly, the book adds to the growing body of scholarship on race, religion, and migration in France. The majority of historical studies on Islam and migration focus on North Africans while historical studies on blackness in France tend to emphasize political and literary groups as well as popular images. My book brings these two fields into dialogue, arguing that black African migrants played vital roles in shaping French society, politics, and culture in the interwar era, the dark days of the Second World War, and the postwar period. The book traces how black and Muslim migrants were perceived in France over the course of the twentieth century and how Africans contributed to shaping these perceptions. I argue that Kane's unique voice reveals a new way Africans participated in influencing views of black and Muslim identity in France.

- 2. Feasibility.** What qualifications do you bring to this project? What have you done/will you do to prepare for this project? What is the time period, i.e. summer, summer and academic year, academic year only? Is the work's scope commensurate with the time period of the project?

As a historian of modern France and colonial Africa, I am well-positioned to research and write this book. I am well-versed in the literature on migration, identity, citizenship, Islam, and the Second World War. I am fluent in reading and speaking French and have considerable experience working in French archives. My first book, *Colonial Suspects: Suspicion, Imperial Rule, and Colonial Society in Interwar French West Africa*, on the history of colonial political policing, is under contract with the University of Nebraska Press and will be completed in early spring semester 2017.

Preliminary research conducted in French archives during a brief summer research trip in 2012 allowed me to study Kane's amnesty file and a government file of press clippings and correspondence. At that time I also located other important archival sources for future research. While in the United States I have found and studied digital newspaper sources. I have also contacted archivists in France to identify other sources critical to my research.

I will spend a total of 7 weeks in France this summer doing research at archives in Aix-en-Provence (about one week) and in Paris (6 weeks). Based on my experience, this is an appropriate amount of time to complete the research. With the use of photocopies and digital photography, I am confident I will finish the planned work as well as study of any other sources that I discover in the process of research.

- 3. Project Design.** This should include a specific description of the project design and activities, including location, staff, schedules or itineraries, and desired outcomes.

The entire project involves seven weeks of archival research in a variety of archives in both Aix-en-Provence in the south of France and Paris, France. The funding request from RSC is to support the expenses of two weeks of research. The first part of my trip consists of travel to Aix-en-Provence which includes a history conference (funded by \$1700 travel funds from the Kendall Center) in addition to archival research, followed by six weeks in Paris.

I will consult the following sources, available only at archives in France. At the French National Overseas Archives I will consult the private papers of Minister Georges Mandel, the first French

official to hire Kane. At the Prefecture of Police in Paris I will study Kane's surveillance file (file 77W1395 no. 1698). At the National Archives I will study World War II-era files on colonial prisoners of war (AJ 40, 552), records of fraud investigations (F 9 2957), and Kane's 1945 court file (Z/6/118 dossier 1725). At the Army's archives *Service historique de la défense* ("Historical Service of the Defense") I have identified a set of records to research on prisoners of war from French West Africa (5H 12 -16).

The desired outcome is the completion of the archival research on this book project. After returning from France I expect to do further secondary research and then to write the book in summer 2018 and possibly the following j-term.

Here is my proposed itinerary:

6/10 arrive in Paris from MSP spend one night

6/11 –travel by train to Aix-en-Provence

6/11 -6/21 stay in hotel in Aix-en-Provence for research in National

Overseas Archives and French Colonial History Society Annual Conference (6/15- 6/17)

6/21- return by train to Paris

6/21-8/2 stay in apartment in Paris; conduct archival work at various archives named above

8/2 return flight to MSP

Justice

The story of Mamadou Alioune Kane helps us pose important questions about justice in a few ways. Kane was twice brought before courts—once in a black-market trial in 1941 and again in 1945 when he was tried for treason. First, an examination of his black market trial will consider the role of race in court decisions in the context of wartime collaboration with the Nazis. A look at trial records and newspaper accounts will explore official and popular reactions to Kane's trial. Preliminary research suggests that specific racial stereotypes (he was portrayed as both stupid and princely) surfaced in Kane's trial. An analysis of perceptions of Africans and Muslims in meting out justice in occupied France is especially important as most of the scholarship on this period emphasizes the racialization of Jews, not Africans. A comparison with other black market trials should reinforce my observations about Kane's race and its role in his trial and perceptions of it.

This story will also provide important insight into how the French broadly conceived of justice in the aftermath of collaboration with the Nazis. Many scholars have analyzed the set of treason trials known as the purges. Many of them now believe that the punishments doled out, execution in some cases, were excessive. Moreover, scholars see the period of the purges as a time when the French struggled to create a new moral and national identity. My analysis of Kane's trial and his successful application for amnesty will consider how Kane's trial fits into this scholarship. Was his punishment excessive or lenient? Did his status as an African, Muslim, migrant, and colonial person (all qualities that characterized him as an outsider), affect the decision of the court? My project ultimately asks how Kane and other colonial people like him fit into French attempts to achieve justice and national moral renewal.