

## **Black Dionysus: Greek Drama in Africa and the African Diaspora**

I have been teaching this course and researching relevant material for it since 2016, and still feel like a newcomer to the subject. The number of adaptations from Africa and the African diaspora is vast and growing annually; and the theoretical underpinnings have taken me into areas of history, political science, anthropology, colonialism, and neo-colonialism (to name a few) that I had rarely considered before. The title of the course, and much of its initial content, owes much to Kevin Wetmore, whose 2003 book is entitled *Black Dionysus: Greek Tragedy and African American Theatre*, and whose work on adaptations of Greek drama continues as a foundation of this course. And Classicists working on reception have increasingly turned their attention to the peoples and places previously left out of the conversation. I rely heavily on their work.

In this paper, I will outline some of the primary questions I raise in this class: why do playwrights adapt rather than create something wholly new? Does the success of the adaptation require familiarity with its source text? What were the different contexts – political, social, intellectual, etc. – in which plays were produced, and how did that context influence each version? And perhaps the most interesting questions: What accounts for the popularity of the Greek plays and stories among those from Africa and the African diaspora who have every reason to reject European cultural models? Why do these ancient Greek tragedies still matter, and not only to white people of European descent? I will then provide some specific examples of the adaptations we use in the class and the questions and concerns those raise.