

The Moor

- In Shakespeare's time, the word "Moor" was equivalent to "African."
- Literally meant "native of Mauratania," a country in north Africa, but meaning had become generalized by the 17th century.
- It was not derogatory or offensive.
- Shakespeare "borrowed" the plot of *Othello* from a 1566 short story by Cinthio Giambattista Giraldi, also about a Moor.
- 17th century attitudes toward Moors were mostly distrusting—they were often called "devils" or "villains."



Background-Cyprus

- Island near Turkey that was annexed by Venice in 1489 and conquered by the Turks in 1571.
- The play changes the historical events, having the Venetians conquer the Turkish fleet and thus leaving the island Venetian.
- “Ottomans” is another name for the Turks.



