

Comparative Heritage Project  
mis-Reading Heritage Series

Reading Africa 2025

July 2 – Bi-Weekly Summer Discussion Group

[comparativeheritage.org/summer](http://comparativeheritage.org/summer)

SESSION SCHEDULE & THEMES

I. **July 2** —Resistance, Identity & the Postcolonial Spirit

**Suggested Readings:**

- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o – *Weep Not, Child* (1964)
- W.E.B. Du Bois – *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) — Preface + Ch. 1 + one other chapter

**Discussion Prompts:**

- What is the psychological cost of colonialism?
- How do education and resistance intersect?
- How does Du Bois’s “double consciousness” speak to the African experience?

➤ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o – *Weep Not, Child* (1964)

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Weep Not, Child* (1964) by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o follows Njoroge, a young Kenyan boy whose dreams of education clash with the harsh realities of British colonial rule and the Mau Mau uprising. As violence engulfs his family and village, hope erodes, revealing the devastating impact of imperialism on personal aspirations, familial bonds, and national identity.

**Thesis**

*Weep Not, Child* argues that colonialism shatters individual dreams and family unity. Through Njoroge’s failed pursuit of education, Ngũgĩ shows how imperialism and violent resistance leave personal hope crushed, highlighting the tragic cost of Kenya’s struggle for freedom.

**Argument**

The argument of *Weep Not, Child* is that British colonialism, though oppressive, cannot be opposed without deep personal and societal sacrifice. Ngũgĩ contends that even noble paths like education are rendered powerless amid political violence, showing how both colonial rule and resistance movements deeply wound the African psyche, disrupt family life, and make peaceful progress nearly impossible.

**Critical perspective:**

From a critical perspective, *Weep Not, Child* is a powerful postcolonial critique of British imperialism’s devastating effects on Kenyan society. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o exposes how colonial violence and economic exploitation destroy traditional family structures and render education powerless. The novel reflects the psychological trauma of oppression, where personal aspirations collapse under historical forces. It interrogates both the British colonial system and the limitations of Western-style education, revealing how colonial structures distort African identity, suppress agency, and transform hopeful dreams into despair and disillusionment. A Marxist reading highlights the core issues of land dispossession, class divisions, and labor injustices, showing how colonial capitalism fractures indigenous social orders. Simultaneously, a psychoanalytic lens sees Njoroge’s personal breakdown as mirroring collective colonial trauma, where the mind becomes a battleground for dignity, shame, and the unbearable burden of inherited struggle. Ultimately, the novel challenges romanticized views of resistance, portraying liberation as a painful process marked by loss, disillusionment, and fractured identity.

➤ W.E.B. Du Bois – *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

Du Bois’s *Souls* (1903) is a seminal work exploring the African American experience after slavery. Du Bois introduces the concept of “double consciousness,” describing the internal

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conflict of Black Americans living in a racially divided society. The book combines history, sociology, and personal reflection to argue for racial equality, education, and cultural pride as essential to Black liberation in the United States.

### Thesis

African Americans live with a “double consciousness,” struggling to reconcile their Black identity with the oppressive expectations of a white-dominated society; true liberation requires both political equality and the affirmation of Black cultural and spiritual dignity.

### Argument

The argument of *The Souls of Black Folk* is that African Americans endure a unique psychological and social struggle—“double consciousness”—as they navigate a society that denies their full humanity. Du Bois contends that overcoming this requires not only legal and political rights but also the cultivation of Black education, culture, and self-respect to achieve genuine freedom and equality.

### Critical Perspective

From a critical perspective, *The Souls of Black Folk* is foundational to African American intellectual history and postcolonial thought. Du Bois’s concept of **double consciousness** remains a crucial framework for understanding racial identity and systemic oppression. The work critiques both the failures of Reconstruction-era America and Booker T. Washington’s accommodationist approach, advocating for political activism and higher education. It also prefigures later discussions on intersectionality and the enduring effects of racism on identity formation.

### AUTHORS’ BIOS

- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (b. 1938): Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o is a Kenyan novelist, playwright, and scholar, renowned for his role in African literature and postcolonial criticism. Writing primarily in Gikuyu and English, Ngũgĩ’s works, such as *Weep Not, Child* (1964), confront colonialism, language politics, and cultural identity. He critiques neocolonialism and advocates for African languages and decolonized education, making him a leading voice in Pan-African intellectual and literary movements.
- William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868–1963) was an American sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, and writer. A co-founder of the NAACP, Du Bois was a pioneering intellectual who advanced the study of African American history and culture. His work, including *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), introduced critical concepts like “double consciousness” and advocated for political equality, education, and cultural pride as means to combat racial oppression.