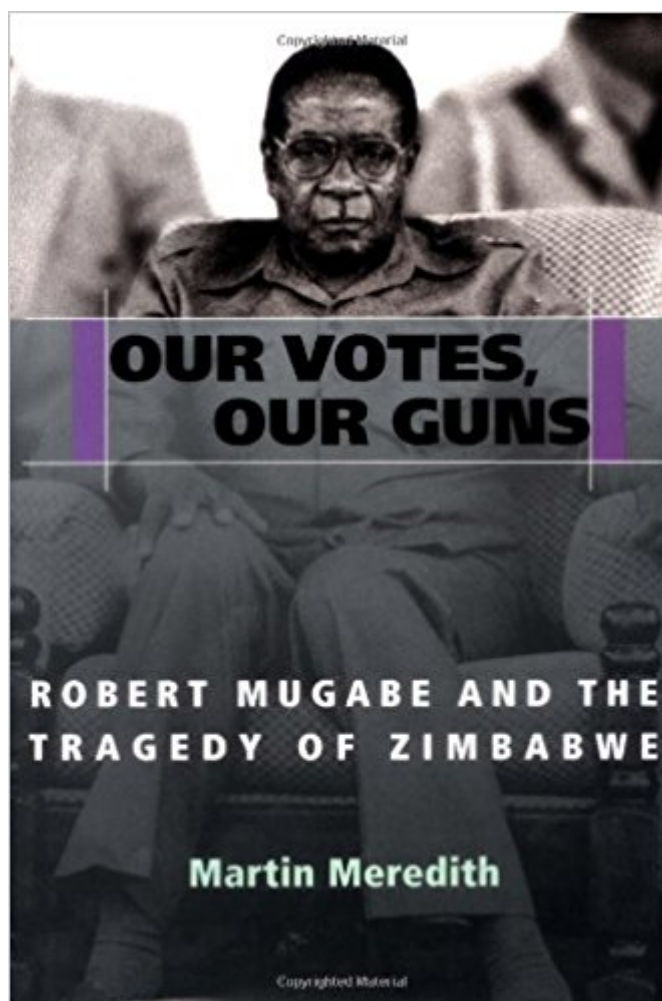


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# Our Votes, Our Guns: Robert Mugabe And The Tragedy Of Zimbabwe



## Synopsis

The story of what Robert Mugabe did to the once-flourishing African state of Zimbabwe: how it happened, why it happened, and its implications for Africa. Robert Mugabe came to power in 1980 after a long civil war in Rhodesia. The white minority government had become an international outcast in refusing to give in to the inevitability of black majority rule. Finally the defiant white prime minister Ian Smith was forced to step down and Mugabe was elected president of a country now called Zimbabwe. Initially hopes were high that he had the intelligence, political savvy and idealistic vision to help repair the damage done by colonialism and the bitter civil war, and to lead his country's economic and social development. He was admired throughout the world as one of the leaders of the emerging nations and as a model for a good transition from colonial leadership. But month by month, year by year, Mugabe became increasingly autocratic; his methods increasingly violent. In recent years he has unleashed a reign of terror and corruption in his country. Like the Congo, Angola, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Liberia, Zimbabwe has been on a steady slide to disaster. What happened in Zimbabwe? Now for the first time the whole story is told in detail by an expert. It is a riveting and tragic political story, a morality tale, and an essential text for understanding today's Africa.

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## Customer Reviews

In 1980, Zimbabwe was the great hope of Africa, a place where blacks were supposed to realize their postcolonial destinies under the enlightened leadership of Robert Mugabe. But now the country formerly known as Rhodesia is an international basket case with a wrecked economy and a dim

future. In this disturbing book by Martin Meredith, a British journalist with extensive experience in southern Africa, Mugabe transforms into a villain. "Year by year, he acquired ever greater power, ruling the country through a vast system of patronage, favoring loyal aides and cronies with government positions and contracts and ignoring the spreading blight of corruption," writes Meredith. "Power for Mugabe was not a means to an end, but the end itself." His reign has been so wretched, in fact, that some of the most sympathetic people in *Our Votes, Our Guns* are the white farmers who once supported apartheid-style rule but decided not to flee when Mugabe came to power. They were promised multiracial harmony; what they got instead was a racist dictator who thought nothing of using violence against them. Admirers of Philip Gourevitch--or, indeed, anyone with an interest in African politics--will appreciate Meredith's depressing but important story. --John Miller

"Fast paced and readable." -- *The Nation*, April 8, 2002 "Meredith's concise and lucid [book] gives some answers [regarding Zimbabwe], in the shape of Mr. Mugabe's career and character." -- *Wall Street Journal*, March 13, 2002.

This book puts into context better than anything I have read the major tragedy that has been occurring in Zimbabwe for over twenty years. The parallels with the Congo (as covered in the excellent book "In the footsteps of Mr Kurtz" on Mobutu's kleptocracy in Zaire) are matched here by the story of how a wealthy and well developed colony after a crippling war of independence came under Mugabe's control. The saddest aspect is while matters started very promisingly with the country ripe for a multi racial experiment and very similar to South Africa, the early use of force to remove tribal opposition was then applied unremmitingly to the white minority with fatal long term effects on the country's economy. That inequality existed and changes were needed on land distribution were clear - the redistribution when it occurred was done in such a manner that not only were the whites permanently alienated but the corruption and lack of planning as to what was to replace has had fatal consequences with mass poverty, unrest and a wealthy autocratic elite destroying the future prospects for the poorer native populace of the country. The control of every facet by Mugabe's Zanu Party whenever challenged has been met with violence from local opposition using North Korean trained cadres to outright intimidation of the judiciary, one of the real heroes in this story. A very well told and researched history.

This is an excellent account of Robert Mugabe and his indelible impact on the country of Zimbabwe.

Although the events of the election in March of 2002 were overshadowed by the six-month anniversary of 9/11 (here in the U.S.), those who did manage to catch the news from Africa may be curious about a country that has bucked the modern trend toward democratic rule. It is ironic that Robert Mugabe initially achieved political power (and Western support) by appealing to the ideals of democracy, while under his reign Zimbabwe has gone from being a wealthy nation ruled by law to a virtual autocracy now on the brink of a debilitating famine. The author does an excellent job of showing how personal depravity and public corruption have robbed the hope and future of a generation of wonderful people.

The book came out in 2002 amid mostly positive reviews, with the occasional cry of racism from those who confuse criticism of African politicians with hatred of their skin color. As the years have passed, the plight of Zimbabweans has worsened and the kleptocracy of Mugabe has just puttered along, often with the benign oversight of the South African government. No one listened, and the situation is still getting worse. The book has aged well, but the tragedy continues.

A nice book about the kleptocracy of present day Zimbabwe. Robert Mugabe took a jewel of a country and turned it into a failed state. He has done this so he can enrich his family, friends, and supporters at the expense of the vast Zimbabwean people. Meredith describes the liberation of Rhodesia and the early promise of Mugabe's presidency. After the honeymoon, Mugabe gave jobs to his supporters and enriched his party, the ZANU-PF. Latest developments in Zimbabwe continue to show the mass exodus of the few remaining whites, and the poverty of the majority population. Mugabe enriches himself and his supporters, but leaves the rest of the population to fend for itself. I couple of comments about what some of the other reviewers said. Zimbabwe is no longer a democracy. Hitler took Weimar Germany and made it into a Fascist state. Ferdinand Marcos took the Philippines and turned it into a tin horn dictatorship. Just because a country has some trappings of democracy, it is not a democracy. Remember the Soviet Union had elections, and they were not free. Zimbabwe may have elections and a somewhat free judiciary, but it is not a democracy any more than Rhodesia was a democracy. Mugabe is showing traits of a Fascist or Communist Dictator (i.e. hero worship of the leader). Mugabe is also showing signs of his racist nature. He often berates the former white leader Ian Smith, but Mugabe's leadership (or dictatorship) is worse. At least Smith gave up power, Mugabe wants to retain power forever. Another comment made by another reviewer is that the West should not show debt forgiveness to certain Third World countries. I quite agree, why subsidize Zimbabwe so we can enrich the kleptocrats of the ZANU-PF and Mugabe's family.

The West should have learned its lesson with Mobutu and Zaire. Don't give Zimbabwe a dime until ZANU-PF and Mugabe are gone. This is a good book from a great author. I am reading his latest work about the Fate of Africa, and this is a nice companion read.

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