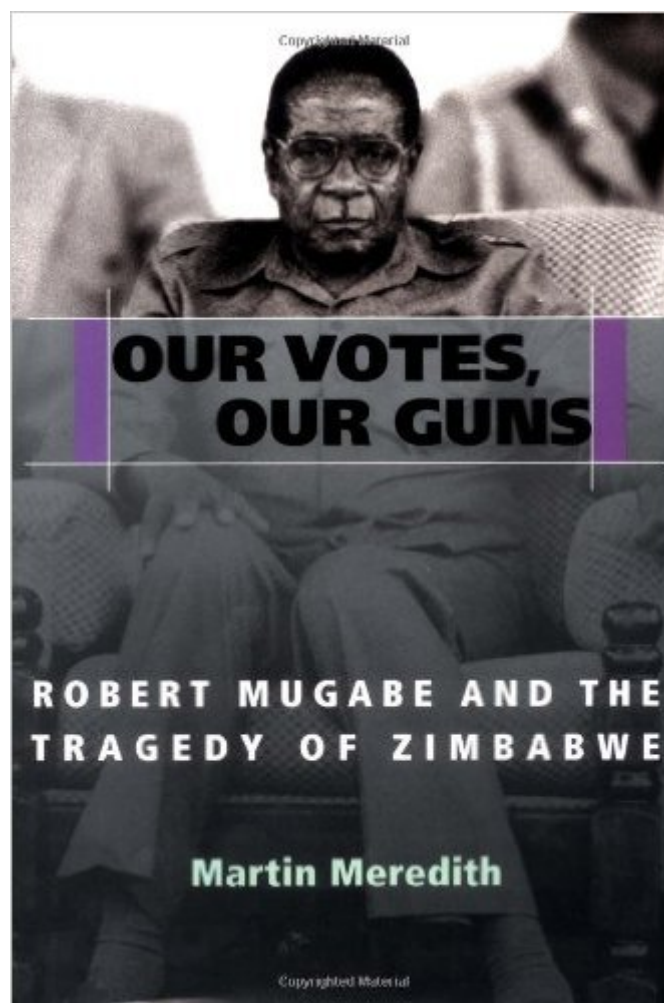


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Our Votes, Our Guns: Robert Mugabe And The Tragedy Of Zimbabwe



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

So said Archbishop Desmond Tutu of Robert Mugabe. This is coming from a church leader about someone who often publicly boasts about being a devout christian. If the Archbishop's criticism doesn't bother Mugabe then maybe Nelson Mandela's dismissive epithet - calling the man

"Comrade Bob" hits more to home. Mandela throws cold water on Mugabe's previously illustrious reputation as a freedom fighter and liberator of his people. Mentioning Mandela is an appropriate starting point for discussing OUR VOTES, OUR GUNS because the author - Martin Meredith - is best known for his authoritative biography of Mandela. Here he applies his writing skills and powers of observation with the same results - a thorough analysis with keen insights into the personality. So who is Robert Mugabe and how is it that from a position of world acclaim as a hero at Zimbabwe's independence in April, 1980 - inheriting "a jewel" as Meredith quotes another African leader as telling him - he has sunk to such a low position today? Meredith says that a lot of this can be explained by over optimism and excessive expectations. In the 1970's he was the guerilla leader of the Zimbabwe African National Union/Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) which wrested control of Rhodesia from the minority, white-ruled government of Ian Smith. Following independence Mugabe emerged as a statesman. He was committed to reconciliation with whites and Meredith refers to Mugabe's speech on Independence day. He promised to "draw a line through the past" and said "if yesterday I fought you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and ally with the same national interest..." Meredith argues however that the hope in Mugabe as a model of the new African leader was badly misplaced.

Two decades can ultimately change the course and path of a country's ruler, from ambitious construction to utter and complete despotism; no one has demonstrated this more in recent years than Robert Gabriel Mugabe, the one president that Zimbabwe ever had since its official independence from the UK in April 1980. When first elected, he promised hope and harmony between all people of Zimbabwe, as one of his speeches outlined: "Racism, whether practiced by whites or blacks, is anathema to the humanitarian philosophy of Zanu [Mugabe's political party]. It is as primitive a dogma as tribalism or regionalism. Zimbabwe cannot just be a country of blacks. It is and should remain our country, all of us together" (pp. 9-10). That speech was in the beginning. Consider what another speech looked like, just twenty years after independence, by the same "humanitarian" president: "Our present state of mind is that you are now are [sic] enemies because you really have behaved as enemies of Zimbabwe. We are full of anger. Our entire community is angry and that is why we now have the war veterans seizing land" (p. 175). To this, Mugabe was referring to the controversial and unlawful land reform program that he had unleashed full-force beginning in February 2000. Such change in the course and path of Zimbabwe is the subject of Martin Meredith's most recent book on contemporary African issues. Like Philip Gourevitch, who broke the silence over the genocide and post-1994 experiences of Rwanda in his magnificent book,

Meredith offers the same eulogy to a country that has become a pariah state on the verge of complete anarchy.

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