

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #303
Robert Mugabe | Zimbabwean Liberator Turned Tyrant
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[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about a man who was one of the most feared men in Africa.

[00:00:29] His name was Robert Mugabe. He was the Zimbabwean schoolteacher **from humble beginnings**¹ who went onto become an anti-colonial leader and then, with time, a **notorious**² **tyrant**³.

¹ from a low social class

² famous for something bad

³ a ruler who governed with unlimited power and was not just

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[00:00:42] His rule was one of political assassinations and disappearances, corruption, and **rigged**⁴ elections, yet Mugabe was central to Zimbabwe's independence and establishment as a country.

[00:00:55] He was loved by some, hated by many, feared by all, and **begrudgingly**⁵ respected by most for his leading role in the decolonisation process.

[00:01:07] So, let's get right into it and talk about Robert Mugabe.

[00:01:12] Robert Gabriel Mugabe was born on February 21st, 1924, in Katuma, on a Jesuit **mission**⁶ in Southern Rhodesia, the area we now call Zimbabwe.

[00:01:25] Mugabe was born just one year after white settlers established Southern Rhodesia as a British colony in 1923.

[00:01:35] Northern Rhodesia, by the way, was the place we now know as Zambia.

[00:01:40] Both were run by the British South Africa Company on behalf of the British Government and were, as a result, self-governing British **protectorates**⁷.

[00:01:52] Like many other countries across Africa at the time, both countries were run not only by colonial governments but by white-minorities.

⁴ arranged in a dishonest way so that he could affect the result

⁵ without wanting to do it, reluctantly

⁶ an organisation with the goal to go out into the world and spread their faith

⁷ countries that were controlled by some other more powerful country

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[00:02:02] Historians estimate that in Southern Rhodesia, around a quarter of a million whites ruled over a population of six million black Africans.

[00:02:13] This was the historical context Mugabe was born into.

[00:02:18] His father, Gabriel, was a carpenter, and his mother, Bona, a religious teacher. The pair would go on to have six children.

[00:02:28] And growing up on a Jesuit [mission](#) meant that religion surrounded the young Mugabes.

[00:02:35] The priests who ran the schools were feared [disciplinarians](#)⁸, tough teachers, yet young Robert performed well at school, he was known for being quiet and [studious](#)⁹, a good student.

[00:02:49] But in 1930, when Mugabe's father had a disagreement with one of the Jesuits, the family was [shunned](#)¹⁰, pushed out, by its leader, Father Jean-Baptiste Loubière.

[00:03:03] The family moved to another village briefly, but the Mugabe children were allowed to remain at the [mission](#) school, living with relatives in a nearby town during the week.

⁸ tough, strict teachers

⁹ enjoying studying, a good student

¹⁰ pushed out, rejected

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[00:03:15] Around the same time, Mugabe's older brother, Raphael, died, and then a few years later another older brother, Michael, died of suspected poisoning.

[00:03:26] As you might imagine, his brother's deaths had a great impact on the young boy.

[00:03:31] And to make matters worse, shortly afterwards, when Mugabe was just 10 years old, his father, abandoned the family and left for the city of Bulawayo, where he would go on to have three more children with another woman.

[00:03:48] Mugabe found himself, aged only ten years old, with two of his older brothers dead, abandoned by his father, and the oldest son in the house without any real male [role models](#)¹¹, no other older men to [look up to](#)¹².

[00:04:04] Then something happened that changed Mugabe's life forever, an unlikely event, perhaps, for a man who would later become best known for forcing the white population out of his country.

[00:04:17] Father Loubière, the leader of the Jesuit group, died and was replaced by an Irishman, Father Jerome O'Hea.

¹¹ people to admire and try to behave like

¹² respect and be guided by

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[00:04:27] Not only did he accept the Mugabes back in the community, and, unlike the racism [underpinning](#)¹³ Rhodesian society at the time, he [preached](#)¹⁴ racial equality, but O'Hea took the young Mugabe, took young Robert 'under his wing.'

[00:04:44] To take someone 'under your wing', by the way, simply means to take care of them and look out for them.

[00:04:51] As well as giving him a good Jesuit education, O'Hea taught Mugabe about the Irish War of Independence and described how Irish revolutionaries had [overthrown](#)¹⁵ British colonial rule.

[00:05:05] Like O'Hea's homeland, Ireland, Mugabe's Zimbabwe, or Southern Rhodesia, as it was then, was under British control, so despite the pair being of very different ages, and of races that would not traditionally mix in Southern Rhodesia, the pair [found common ground](#)¹⁶ in their countries mutual [oppression](#)¹⁷ by the British.

[00:05:28] As a teenager, Mugabe was a quiet boy who preferred reading to making friends, and he spent more and more time with Father O'Hea, who had picked Mugabe out as an intelligent boy with a bright future.

¹³ being the basis of

¹⁴ publicly taught a message of

¹⁵ removed, got rid of

¹⁶ found that they had things in common

¹⁷ not fair or unjust treatment

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[00:05:43] O’Hea’s kind nature made such an impression on Mugabe that he said of him many years later: “He was a nice Irishman... Only an Irishman could do that; an Englishman couldn't."

[00:05:56] But Mugabe wouldn’t stay under Father O’Hea’s wing forever, and in 1941, aged 17, he began a teacher training course, and he graduated four years later in 1945.

[00:06:10] Perhaps influenced by Father O’Hea, the next stage of his life was spent teaching at [mission](#) schools in Southern and Northern Rhodesia.

[00:06:20] But he continued to be [devoted](#)¹⁸ to his studies, he graduated with a degree in History and English from the University of Fort Hare, a South African university known as a [breeding ground](#)¹⁹ for African-nationalism.

[00:06:34] And by 1954, he had completed a Bachelor of Education degree through distance courses, and in 1955 Mugabe moved to Northern Rhodesia, modern Zambia, where he started another distance degree, this time in economics.

[00:06:51] Clearly, he had a thirst for knowledge, but he wanted something more.

[00:06:58] To find that something, he would need to make the 7,000km trip to Ghana, on the west coast of Africa.

[00:07:06] It would be in Ghana that he’d meet his first wife, Sarah Heyfron.

¹⁸ dedicated, committed

¹⁹ the place where it was promoted

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[00:07:11] But Mugabe didn't come looking for love.

[00:07:14] He came to see what a newly liberated African state could look like.

[00:07:19] In 1957 Ghana had broken free from Britain and became the first sub-Saharan African country to become fully independent from the European colonial powers.

[00:07:32] Now free, it moved in an African-nationalist direction [underpinned²⁰](#) by socialist ideas.

[00:07:40] Mugabe was excited by the political freedoms there, and he [thrived²¹](#) in the decolonising world of Ghanaian society.

[00:07:49] It was in Ghana that Mugabe first began reading Marxist teachings, and he supported the Ghanaian efforts to make education available to all, and to [soften²²](#) the social class divisions that had existed under British rule.

[00:08:05] But when he returned to Southern Rhodesia in 1960, when he came home, Mugabe found a changing place.

[00:08:15] The colonial government had increased the white population and [displaced²³](#) thousands of black families.

²⁰ supported, based on

²¹ developed, was successful

²² make them less intense or severe

²³ forced them to leave their homes

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[00:08:21] The black majority were still hugely under-represented in politics.

[00:08:27] Any opposition was met with police [brutality](#)²⁴; African nationalist political groups were shut down.

[00:08:35] While Mugabe had been away in Ghana, an anti-colonial political movement had [sprung up](#)²⁵ in Southern Rhodesia but it had been quickly [outlawed](#)²⁶ by the colonial government.

[00:08:48] Building on this, in January of 1960 something called the National Democratic Party [the NDP] was established, which had the objective of improving black rights and representation in the country.

[00:09:03] It met the same [fate](#)²⁷.

[00:09:06] Several NDP leaders were arrested. There were protests outside the Prime Minister's office, and Mugabe joined in with them.

²⁴ violent or cruel behaviour

²⁵ appeared suddenly

²⁶ made illegal

²⁷ end

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[00:09:15] As he was respected for his life experience - his time abroad and his extensive university education, as well as his natural [charisma](#)²⁸, Mugabe was asked to speak to the crowd.

[00:09:29] [Unintimidated](#)²⁹ by the police presence, he explained how their Ghanain neighbours had become independent and were working to make their country a more equal place.

[00:09:42] And perhaps sensing the anti-colonial energy in the country, and getting a taste for what might be possible, Mugabe decided to give up his teaching career and [devote](#)³⁰ himself entirely to politics and activism - a decision that would change the course of his life, and Zimbabwean history forever.

[00:10:04] Now, Mugabe's rise to power was long, complicated, and included a vast [array](#)³¹ of alliances and deals with people across the [political spectrum](#)³² from a number of different parties that were constantly being [banned](#)³³, splitting up, and reforming.

²⁸ personality, charm

²⁹ without being afraid of them

³⁰ give, dedicate

³¹ variety, range

³² range of political views or opinions

³³ not allowed

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[00:10:20] But let me give you a little taste, some of the most important elements of it.

[00:10:26] The NDP, which, remember, was the National Democratic Party, became ZAPU, the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union, but ZAPU itself then split in August of 1963.

[00:10:41] The more **radical**³⁴ members of ZAPU, including Mugabe, formed the Zimbabwe African National Union - known as ZANU, so you had these two groups wanting similar outcomes but with differing views about how to achieve them.

[00:10:58] Both groups were a clear threat to the white minority government.

[00:11:03] In charge of Southern Rhodesia at this time was a man named Ian Smith, who led a party called the Rhodesian Front, which had won power in 1962.

[00:11:14] The Rhodesian Front wanted independence from Britain but it wanted to keep white -majority rule.

[00:11:21] Britain was prepared to give Southern Rhodesia its independence, but a key requirement for this was that it would **transition**³⁵ to black-majority majority rule.

[00:11:34] After Smith took over in 1964, in a bid to **suppress**³⁶ political opposition, ZANU was banned and Mugabe, as a key member of the party, was thrown into prison.

³⁴ expressing the belief that there should be extreme political change

³⁵ change

³⁶ put an end to

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[00:11:48] Then in 1965, [frustrated](#)³⁷ by Britain's refusal to allow Southern Rhodesia to become independent and maintain white minority rule, Ian Smith declared independence from Britain and renamed Southern Rhodesia as Rhodesia.

[00:12:06] The British government did not recognise the move, and this threw the country, which was, let's remember, not technically its own country, into political [turmoil](#)³⁸.

[00:12:17] This caused what had been, until then, a series of small civil [disobediences](#)³⁹ and [skirmishes](#)⁴⁰, small battles, to turn into a full-blown civil war.

[00:12:30] This war, the Rhodesian Bush War or the 'Second Chimurenga', was a [drawn-out](#)⁴¹ civil war that included many different fighting [factions](#)⁴², and lots of death.

[00:12:41] It lasted for 15 years, from July 1964 to December 1979, and involved [brutal](#)⁴³, often hand to hand combat and killed tens of thousands of Zimbabweans.

³⁷ annoyed and disappointed

³⁸ confusion, disorder

³⁹ acts of people refusing to obey the law

⁴⁰ small fights

⁴¹ lasting for a long time

⁴² groups

⁴³ very violent, cruel

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[00:12:56] Mugabe was one of the main anti-Smith, anti-colonial, leaders, and he continued to coordinate the war effort from jail before being released in November of 1974.

[00:13:09] By mid-1976 he had firmly established himself as the most powerful [guerrilla](#)⁴⁴ leader battling the white-dominated Rhodesian government.

[00:13:20] And by 1979, his [guerrilla](#) forces had gained the upper hand and surrounded several key Rhodesian cities.

[00:13:29] Smith and his government were forced to the negotiating table.

[00:13:34] By now Mugabe was publically calling for Smith's execution, and called for violence against white Rhodesians, who he called "blood-sucking [exploiters](#)⁴⁵" and "hard-core racists."

[00:13:48] By 1979, the writing was on the wall for Smith and white-minority led Southern Rhodesia.

[00:13:55] To see the writing on the wall, by the way, means to be aware of or [foresee](#)⁴⁶ something bad happening.

⁴⁴ related to sudden, unexpected attacks

⁴⁵ people who used others in an unfair way for personal gain

⁴⁶ know it before it happens

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[00:14:02] In April of 1979 there was a general election, and Abel Muzorewa, a [moderate](#)⁴⁷ black bishop, was elected Prime Minister of the newly named Zimbabwe-Rhodesia.

[00:14:15] This election, however, was [boycotted](#)⁴⁸ by both ZANU and ZAPU, the two main opposition parties didn't take part.

[00:14:24] What's more, the British government, led by Margaret Thatcher, said it would only recognise the new state of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia if ZANU and ZAPU participated in the elections.

[00:14:36] Now, I know there are a lot of names and [acronyms](#)⁴⁹ here, but if we skip to the end, this [culminated](#)⁵⁰ in something called the Lancaster House Agreement, and led to a general election in which all of the parties involved in the civil war took part.

[00:14:53] Mugabe stood as leader of ZANU, he survived two assassination attempts, and on the 18th of April 1980, after winning 63 percent of the vote, ZANU won the election, Southern Rhodesia finally [gained](#)⁵¹ its independence.

[00:15:11] Shortly after midnight, at the age of 56, Robert Mugabe became the first Prime Minister of a newly independent Zimbabwe.

⁴⁷ not extreme or radical

⁴⁸ they didn't take part in it

⁴⁹ words formed from the first letters of each word of a phrase

⁵⁰ reached the point of its highest development

⁵¹ got, won

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[00:15:21] In his victory speech, he said, “The wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten...It could never be a correct [justification](#)⁵² that because whites [oppressed](#)⁵³ us yesterday when they had power, the blacks must [oppress](#)⁵⁴ them today because they have power.”

[00:15:40] “Democracy,” he said, “is never [mob](#)⁵⁵ rule.”

[00:15:45] As you may know, especially towards the end of his political and earthly life, Mugabe’s actions were somewhat different from what he [preached](#) back in 1980.

[00:15:57] So, what was life like under Mugabe in newly liberated Zimbabwe?

[00:16:02] [Initially](#)⁵⁶, he [kept his word](#)⁵⁷, and invited the former leader of the Rhodesian military to stay on in his position.

[00:16:10] He respected the white parliamentary seats as outlined in the Lancaster House Agreement.

⁵² reason

⁵³ treated them in an unfair or bad way

⁵⁴ treat them in an unfair or bad way

⁵⁵ large, angry crowd

⁵⁶ at the beginning

⁵⁷ did what he had promised

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[00:16:16] And he formed a [coalition](#)⁵⁸ with ZAPU, which [drew](#)⁵⁹ its support from the minority Ndebele people, as opposed to Mugabe's Shona ethnic group.

[00:16:27] Like he had seen in Ghana, Mugabe tried to make Zimbabwean society more equal.

[00:16:32] He [oversaw](#)⁶⁰ massive increases in education and health spending.

[00:16:37] When Mugabe took over, Zimbabwe had just 177 secondary schools for a population of over 7 million people.

[00:16:46] By 2000 that number was 1,548.

[00:16:51] During that period, the adult [literacy rate](#)⁶¹ rose from 62 percent to 82 percent.

[00:16:57] Child [immunisation](#)⁶² grew from 25 percent to 92 percent.

[00:17:02] [Commendable](#)⁶³, [laudable](#)⁶⁴ achievements, of course.

⁵⁸ temporary alliance or union for political reasons

⁵⁹ had, obtained

⁶⁰ was responsible for

⁶¹ the percentage of the population that could read and write

⁶² the action of making them immune or resistant to disease

⁶³ deserving admiration, honourable

⁶⁴ deserving admiration, honourable

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[00:17:05] So what changed, why isn't Robert Mugabe [hailed](#)⁶⁵ as a visionary leader?

[00:17:12] Well, as the historian Lord Acton once wrote, "absolute power [corrupts](#)⁶⁶ absolutely".

[00:17:19] And this certainly applies to Robert Mugabe, as he started the [transition](#) from freedom fighter to [tyrant](#).

[00:17:27] This [transition](#) started pretty soon after he took power.

[00:17:32] In 1982, Mugabe forced the ZAPU leader, Joshua Nkomo, out of the [coalition](#), and fighting between the Shona and the Ndebele ethnic groups broke out.

[00:17:45] In what became known as the Gukurahundi, the 5th Brigade of the Zimbabwean army murdered 20,000 Ndebele people.

[00:17:54] Historians are almost certain the [atrocities](#)⁶⁷, this [genocide](#)⁶⁸, in effect, was done directly on Mugabe's orders.

[00:18:03] It was becoming clear to Zimbabweans that their new leader was willing not only to kill white people, but black Zimbabweans.

⁶⁵ admired, honoured

⁶⁶ causes people to behave in a dishonest way for personal benefits

⁶⁷ an extremely violent and shocking act

⁶⁸ the crime of killing a part of a national group

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[00:18:12] Then, a few years later in 1987, ZANU and ZAPU [merged](#)⁶⁹ to form ZANU-PF, and Mugabe changed the Zimbabwean [constitution](#)⁷⁰.

[00:18:23] On the 30th of December, Mugabe was made 'executive president', meaning he took on all the responsibilities of a head of state, head of government, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces in one role.

[00:18:38] In a single move, he had [taken out](#)⁷¹ his main political rivals and [consolidated](#)⁷² the power of the entire Zimbabwean state.

[00:18:47] It [granted](#)⁷³ him the powers to declare [martial law](#)⁷⁴, [bypass](#)⁷⁵ government, and extend his time in office for an [unspecified](#)⁷⁶ number of years.

[00:18:57] Zimbabwe had, effectively, become a one-party state.

[00:19:01] And Mugabe was the man at the top.

⁶⁹ joined together, combined

⁷⁰ the set of political ideas and laws according to which a state is governed

⁷¹ removed, got rid of

⁷² made it stronger

⁷³ gave

⁷⁴ rule by military authorities

⁷⁵ go round, avoid its control

⁷⁶ not known or stated clearly

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[00:19:05] It would be a position he held for 29 years and 325 days.

[00:19:12] So, how did things progress?

[00:19:15] Well, Zimbabwe was still, in theory at least, a democracy.

[00:19:20] There were more elections, and, [surprise, surprise⁷⁷](#), Mugabe would be elected again and again.

[00:19:26] In 1990 he was reelected in an election marked by [voter intimidation⁷⁸](#) and violence.

[00:19:34] He was starting to grow unpopular domestically, not just for his political choices but also for his romantic ones.

[00:19:42] See, it was around this time that he began an [affair⁷⁹](#) with his secretary, Grace Marufu, who was 41 years his junior, she was in her mid 20s while he was in his mid 60s.

[00:19:54] He would marry her in an [extravagant⁸⁰](#) ceremony in 1996, and she quickly became the least popular woman in the country.

⁷⁷ used to say in a joking way that it was not surprising at all

⁷⁸ making the people who voted be filled with fear

⁷⁹ sexual relation

⁸⁰ expensive and impressive

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[00:20:03] Firstly, she was a foreigner - she was born in South Africa - but she was also known for her [luxurious⁸¹](#) lifestyle at a time when Zimbabwean people were struggling to put food on the table.

[00:20:16] While regular Zimbabweans struggled to [get by⁸²](#) on a few dollars a day, there were reports that the President's wife had spent \$75,000 on luxury goods in a single Paris shop.

[00:20:30] But the [excess⁸³](#) wasn't limited to his young wife.

[00:20:34] In November 1998, there were riots when Mugabe gave himself and members of his government big [pay rises⁸⁴](#).

[00:20:42] Despite his questionable electoral wins, the ethnic [tensions⁸⁵](#), mass murder, and civil unrest in Zimbabwe, by the early 1990's Mugabe's international reputation was growing, and he was viewed as the most successful of all African liberation leaders-turned politicians.

⁸¹ expensive and very comfortable

⁸² manage to live with difficulty

⁸³ the action of spending more than necessary

⁸⁴ increases in the amount of money they were receiving

⁸⁵ periods of bad relations or hostility

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[00:21:02] By the time the 2000's came around, however, that reputation was beginning to [wane](#)⁸⁶, it was beginning to suffer.

[00:21:11] One of his main policies was land reform, where he had ordered the [seizure](#)⁸⁷ of farmland from white farmers and gave it to inexperienced black Zimbabweans.

[00:21:22] Without the knowledge of how to farm the land effectively, and in combination with severe drought, the inexperienced farmers were unable to produce enough food to feed the country, which caused food shortages and [famine](#)⁸⁸.

[00:21:37] There were also major foreign policy [missteps](#)⁸⁹, mistakes, including getting involved in war in Democratic Republic of the Congo.

[00:21:46] All of this [drained](#)⁹⁰ the country's [coffers](#)⁹¹, it was hugely expensive.

[00:21:51] By 2002, economic mismanagement left over half of the Zimbabwean population needing emergency food aid.

⁸⁶ become weaker

⁸⁷ taking by force

⁸⁸ a situation in which there wasn't enough food

⁸⁹ mistakes

⁹⁰ emptied

⁹¹ funds, amount of money

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[00:22:00] [Inflation](#)⁹² [skyrocketed](#)⁹³.

[00:22:03] And people - both Zimbabweans and the international community - began to notice Mugabe's increasing authoritarian behaviour.

[00:22:12] Although he was reelected again in 2002, Mugabe's position was now [tainted](#)⁹⁴ by voter intimidation and violence, and he was criticised by international observers. It was clear that he didn't quite practise the democratic views he [preached](#).

[00:22:29] And as the country's economy began to [unravel](#)⁹⁵, as it began to collapse, Mugabe [intensified](#)⁹⁶ his hold on Zimbabwe.

⁹² continuous increase in prices

⁹³ rose extremely fast

⁹⁴ affected (with a bad quality)

⁹⁵ collapse

⁹⁶ made it more extreme

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[00:22:39] Having long been [accustomed](#)⁹⁷ to using violent [means](#)⁹⁸ for political [ends](#)⁹⁹, Mugabe's ZANU-PF [stepped up](#)¹⁰⁰ its campaign of [abductions](#)¹⁰¹, murders and [intimidation](#)¹⁰².

[00:22:51] And with Mugabe more concerned about [silencing](#)¹⁰³ political opponents than governing, Zimbabweans suffered the [crippling](#)¹⁰⁴ effects of an economy [in freefall](#)¹⁰⁵.

[00:23:02] By 2007, TIME magazine described Zimbabwe's economy as suffering "1,700 percent [inflation](#), an 80 percent unemployment rate, and average life expectancy of 35, the lowest in the world."

[00:23:19] Yet in 2008, Mugabe ran for president again.

⁹⁷ used

⁹⁸ ways, methods

⁹⁹ goals, results

¹⁰⁰ made it more active

¹⁰¹ acts of taking people away by force

¹⁰² actions of filling people with fear

¹⁰³ keeping them quiet

¹⁰⁴ causing very serious problems

¹⁰⁵ getting worse and worse very quickly

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[00:23:24] But as the results were slowly released, it **emerged**¹⁰⁶ that, this time, Mugabe might have lost.

[00:23:32] He demanded a **recount**¹⁰⁷, for the **ballots**¹⁰⁸ to be counted again.

[00:23:36] Faced with **intimidation** and ZANU-PF approved violence in the streets, Mugabe's opponent - the former finance minister, Morgan Tsvangirai - withdrew from the race, saying that free and fair elections were impossible in Zimbabwe.

[00:23:52] Mugabe was, unsurprisingly, declared the winner.

[00:23:57] After international voices - including previously supportive African countries - called for a power sharing arrangement with Tsvangirai's MDC party, an agreement was made but quickly fell apart.

[00:24:11] Then MDC supporters and activists began to disappear, and international critics called for Mugabe to **step down**¹⁰⁹.

[00:24:20] Did he?

[00:24:21] Of course not.

¹⁰⁶ appeared, seemed

¹⁰⁷ the act of counting the votes again

¹⁰⁸ pieces of paper used to record people's vote

¹⁰⁹ leave his position

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[00:24:23] “I will never, never, never surrender,” Mugabe said. “Zimbabwe is mine, I am a Zimbabwean. Zimbabwe for Zimbabweans.”

[00:24:32] “Only God, who appointed me, will remove me.”

[00:24:36] He wouldn’t have to wait all that long...but first, there was time for another election.

[00:24:41] In May of 2013, Mugabe was again reelected in [suspicious¹¹⁰](#) circumstances, at the ripe old age of 89.

[00:24:50] With his health [deteriorating¹¹¹](#) and rumours about who would [succeed¹¹²](#) him, political [infighting¹¹³](#) broke out within the ZANU-PF [ranks¹¹⁴](#) as potential [successors¹¹⁵](#) tried to position themselves.

[00:25:03] Yet, Mugabe still [clung¹¹⁶](#) to power.

¹¹⁰ making people feel that something illegal was happening

¹¹¹ becoming worse

¹¹² take his position after his death

¹¹³ competition between people of his group

¹¹⁴ people who belonged to that group

¹¹⁵ people who could take his position after his death

¹¹⁶ held on, continued being in

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Robert Mugabe | Zimbabwean Liberator Turned Tyrant

[00:25:06] Finally, on November the 15th of 2017, the military [intervened](#)¹¹⁷ and put Mugabe under house arrest.

[00:25:15] The political pressure eventually became too much and Mugabe, Zimbabwe's only leader since its independence, finally [stepped down](#)¹¹⁸ on the 21st of November 2017, exactly a month before he would celebrate his 30th year as President.

[00:25:32] And it would be almost two years later, in Singapore on the 6th September 2019, aged 95 that he would take his last breath.

[00:25:42] So, what had Zimbabwe's great anti-colonial liberator turned [tyrant](#) left behind?

[00:25:49] A country [ravaged](#)¹¹⁹ by drought and starvation; a culture of political corruption, [abductions](#) and murders; a loss of faith in the [electoral system](#)¹²⁰; widespread poverty; [skyrocketing](#)¹²¹ [inflation](#); and the mass [exodus](#)¹²² of young Zimbabweans abroad.

¹¹⁷ became involved

¹¹⁸ left his position

¹¹⁹ having been greatly damaged

¹²⁰ method and rules of counting votes during elections

¹²¹ rising extremely fast

¹²² movement of a lot of people

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[00:26:06] After fighting so long and hard to win independence from the British, Mugabe had spent the majority of his time in office desperately trying to hold onto it - [consolidating](#)¹²³ power, [silencing](#) critics, and putting his own interests above those of the country he claimed to love and represent.

[00:26:26] He was a man who would stop at nothing to stay in control, and perhaps [ironically](#)¹²⁴ it would be his actions after he took office that [overshadowed](#)¹²⁵ his important role in the birth of Zimbabwe and its independence.

[00:26:41] So his legacy is, for much of the world, as a [dictator](#)¹²⁶ and a [tyrant](#), not as he used to be [affectionately](#)¹²⁷ called in better times, “Uncle Bob”.

[00:26:54] OK then, that is it for today’s episode on Robert Mugabe, the school teacher who became a revolutionary anti-colonial leader and then turned into an authoritarian [tyrant](#).

[00:27:06] I hope it was an interesting one, and whether you knew a lot about Mugabe and his life before today, or this was the first time you’d heard anything about him, well I hope you learned something new.

¹²³ making it stronger

¹²⁴ in a way that is interesting because of being very different from what we would expect

¹²⁵ caused it to be less important

¹²⁶ a leader with complete power, absolute ruler

¹²⁷ in a way that showed love or sympathy

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[00:27:17] As always, I would love to know what you thought about this episode.

[00:27:21] Have you ever been to Zimbabwe?

[00:27:23] Do you know any Zimbabweans who lived through the Mugabe dictatorship?

[00:27:27] Can you think of any other revolutionaries who were corrupted by power and became tyrants, or had similar [falls from grace](#)¹²⁸?

[00:27:35] I can certainly think of a few.

[00:27:37] I would love to know, so let's get this discussion started.

[00:27:40] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:27:49] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:27:54] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

¹²⁸ losses of positions of power or honour

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
From humble beginnings	from a low social class
Notorious	famous for something bad
Tyrant	a ruler who governed with unlimited power and was not just
Rigged	arranged in a dishonest way so that he could affect the result
Begrudgingly	without wanting to do it, reluctantly
Mission	an organisation with the goal to go out into the world and spread their faith
Protectorates	countries that were controlled by some other more powerful country
Disciplinarians	tough, strict teachers
Studious	enjoying studying, a good student
Shunned	pushed out, rejected
Role models	people to admire and try to behave like

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Look up to	respect and be guided by
Underpinning	being the basis of
Preached	publicly taught a message of
Overthrown	removed, got rid of
Found common ground	found that they had things in common
Oppression	not fair or unjust treatment
Devoted	dedicated, committed
Breeding ground	the place where it was promoted
Underpinned	supported, based on
Thrived	developed, was successful
Soften	make them less intense or severe
Displaced	forced them to leave their homes
Brutality	violent or cruel behaviour
Sprung up	appeared suddenly
Outlawed	made illegal

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Fate	end
Charisma	personality, charm
Unintimidated	without being afraid of them
Devote	give, dedicate
Array	variety, range
Political spectrum	range of political views or opinions
Banned	not allowed
Radical	expressing the belief that there should be extreme political change
Transition	change
Suppress	put an end to
Frustrated	annoyed and disappointed
Turmoil	confusion, disorder
Disobediences	acts of people refusing to obey the law
Skirmishes	small fights
Drawn-out	lasting for a long time

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Factions	groups
Brutal	very violent, cruel
Guerrilla	related to sudden, unexpected attacks
Exploiters	people who used others in an unfair way for personal gain
Foresee	know it before it happens
Moderate	not extreme or radical
Boycotted	they didn't take part in it
Acronyms	words formed from the first letters of each word of a phrase
Culminated	reached the point of its highest development
Gained	got, won
Justification	reason
Oppressed	treated them in an unfair or bad way
Oppress	treat them in an unfair or bad way
Mob	large, angry crowd
Initially	at the beginning

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Kept his word	did what he had promised
Coalition	temporary alliance or union for political reasons
Drew	had, obtained
Oversaw	was responsible for
Literacy rate	the percentage of the population that could read and write
Immunisation	the action of making them immune or resistant to disease
Commendable	deserving admiration, honourable
Laudable	deserving admiration, honourable
Hailed	admired, honoured
Corrupts	causes people to behave in a dishonest way for personal benefits
Atrocity	an extremely violent and shocking act
Genocide	the crime of killing a part of a national group
Merged	joined together, combined
Constitution	the set of political ideas and laws according to which a state is governed
Taken out	removed, got rid of

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Consolidated	made it stronger
Granted	gave
Martial law	rule by military authorities
Bypass	go round, avoid its control
Unspecified	not known or stated clearly
Surprise, surprise	used to say in a joking way that it was not surprising at all
Voter intimidation	making the people who voted be filled with fear
Affair	sexual relation
Extravagant	expensive and impressive
Luxurious	expensive and very comfortable
Get by	manage to live with difficulty
Excess	the action of spending more than necessary
Pay rises	increases in the amount of money they were receiving
Tensions	periods of bad relations or hostility
Wane	become weaker

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Seizure	taking by force
Famine	a situation in which there wasn't enough food
Missteps	mistakes
Drained	emptied
Coffers	funds, amount of money
Inflation	continuous increase in prices
Skyrocketed	rose extremely fast
Tainted	affected (with a bad quality)
Unravel	collapse
Intensified	made it more extreme
Accustomed	used
Means	ways, methods
Ends	goals, results
Stepped up	made it more active
Abductions	acts of taking people away by force

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Intimidation	actions of filling people with fear
Silencing	keeping them quiet
Crippling	causing very serious problems
In freefall	getting worse and worse very quickly
Emerged	appeared, seemed
Recount	the act of counting the votes again
Ballots	pieces of paper used to record people's vote
Step down	leave his position
Suspicious	making people feel that something illegal was happening
Deteriorating	becoming worse
Succeed	take his position after his death
Infighting	competition between people of his group
Ranks	people who belonged to that group
Successors	people who could take his position after his death
Clung	held on, continued being in

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Intervened	became involved
Stepped down	left his position
Ravaged	having been greatly damaged
Electoral system	method and rules of counting votes during elections
Skyrocketing	rising extremely fast
Exodus	movement of a lot of people
Consolidating	making it stronger
Ironically	in a way that is interesting because of being very different from what we would expect
Overshadowed	caused it to be less important
Dictator	a leader with complete power, absolute ruler
Affectionately	in a way that showed love or sympathy
Falls from grace	losses of positions of power or honour

We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

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Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com