

Mugabe's divided legacy

Although once widely celebrated for his role in fighting the white supremacist regime in his homeland, Robert Mugabe, who died in Singapore on Friday, had long become a deeply divisive figure. Born in 1924 in what was then Rhodesia, Mugabe went on to co-found a resistance movement against British colonial rule, and was jailed for 10 years between 1964 and 1974. When Mugabe was elected President of the newly liberated, independent Zimbabwe in 1980, his friend and long-term supporter, President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, congratulated him, but added this advice: **'You have inherited a jewel. Keep it that way.'** He ruled Zimbabwe for nearly four decades before he was forced out in a military coup in November 2017. [The Independent](#) reports that he always portrayed the redistribution of land as the central task of his mission to undo the racist inheritance of colonial rule, and the economic crisis that followed as a Western conspiracy. To his foes, it was a lawless grab for power and wealth that nearly destroyed the country. When white-ruled Rhodesia became Zimbabwe in 1980, white people, who made up just 5% of the population, owned nearly three quarters of agricultural land. It was an imbalance that all sides agreed had to change but without agreeing exactly how. The issue was to form the basis of Mugabe's infamous falling out with British Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1997 and the invasion of white-owned farms three years later that sent the economy into a tailspin. The reports notes that Mugabe inherited the 'bread basket' of Africa but, by the time he was done with it, Zimbabwe was a basket case, wracked by hyperinflation and industrial collapse, no longer able to keep the lights on.