



# **Eradication: Ridding the World of Diseases Forever?**

*Nancy Leys Stepan*

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The dream of a world completely free of disease may seem utopian. Yet eradication, used in its modern sense to mean the reduction of the number of cases of a disease to zero by deliberate public health interventions, has been pursued repeatedly. Campaigns against yellow fever, malaria and smallpox have been among the largest, most costly programmes ever undertaken in international public health. But only one so far has been successful – that against smallpox. Are such costly programmes really justifiable? In 2007 Bill and Melinda Gates surprised the world with the announcement that they were committing their Foundation to eradicating malaria. Polio eradication is another of their priorities. This book places these ambitious goals in their broad historical and contemporary context. Eradication is the first comprehensive account of the major disease-eradication campaigns from the early twentieth century right up to the present. Its narrative follows the life and times of the American arch-eradicationist, Dr Fred Lowe Soper (1893–1977), who was at the centre of many of the campaigns and controversies surrounding eradication in his lifetime. Eradication is, of course, only one approach to improving people's health, and debates and quarrels between proponents of Primary Health Care approaches to ill-health versus the eradicationists' approach have often been intense. Nancy Leys Stepan, known for her authoritative books in the history of medicine, suggests that today the two approaches may be complementary rather than in conflict. This book is written for the general reader interested in the urgent problems of health and disease around the world, as well as for specialists in the field.

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