Abstract
The 30th anniversary of the World Health Organization's (WHO) official certification of smallpox eradication was marked by a slew of events hailing the campaign's dramatic tale of technological and organizational triumph against an ancient scourge. Yet commemorations also serve as moments of critical reflection. This article questions the acclaim showered upon smallpox eradication as the single greatest public health success in history. It examines how and why smallpox eradication and WHO's concurrent social justice-oriented primary health care approach (following from the Declaration of Alma-Ata) became competing paradigms. It synthesizes critiques of eradication's shortcomings and debunks some of the myths surrounding the global eradication campaign as a public health priority and necessity, and as a Cold War victory of cooperation. The article concludes with thoughts on integrating technical and social-political aspects of health within the context of welfare states as the means to achieving widespread and enduring global public health success.

Keywords