

This report aims to argue that the eradication of the smallpox disease was one of the greatest unifying actions of the world and helped usher in a new global mindset. It has in the past been compared to the United States putting a man on the moon, but this report will argue that it was a much more momentous event. The eradication of smallpox not only united the entire globe in a single effort and set the president for further global health efforts, but it also made international travel much safer and more accessible.

This lecture given by Heather MacDougall centered on the events leading to and the ramifications of the eradication of smallpox. Smallpox was a threat for a very long time, killing nearly a quarter of all who contracted it. Early treatments of inoculation frequently did not help and only further spread the disease. It was discovered that injections of cow pox could prevent individuals from contracting the disease. As world travel greatly increased the possibility of recurrent outbreaks the world took the mission to eradicate smallpox everywhere, not just in their country. After a few technical hiccups, they succeeded.

The readings to accompany MacDougall's lecture contained the report to the World Health Assembly advocating the eradication of smallpox via working with local governments around the world. It notes that the technology is sufficient for producing and distributing the vaccine and argues that eradicating the disease is much cheaper in the long run. Also in the readings was the World Health Assembly's declaration of the global eradication of smallpox which states "the world and all its people have won freedom from smallpox". The final reading, entitled "The Speckled Monster" gives a more detailed history of the disease and the efforts that went into eradicating it.

One of the points stressed in MacDougall's lecture is that smallpox was a global disease. It had plagued humanity for such a long time that it had spread nearly everywhere. This is also echoed in the declaration from the World Health Assembly in description of the disease as "a most devastating disease weeping in epidemic form through many countries since earliest times". To eradicate it in just one country was not enough as seen by the outbreaks in North America well after they had rid the

continent of it. The initial report on smallpox says “the disease can be exported to countries already free of it”. To get rid of this disease a truly global effort was required. This required the cooperation of all countries, despite tensions being high during the cold war. This global effort, including the establishment of the WHO and its powers, set the precedent that disease outbreaks are a global problem. This can be seen in modern responses to the ebola and zika outbreaks.

The vaccine for smallpox was published in 1796, so why then did it take until 1980 to fully eradicate it. Technology was a limiting factor for sure, the method of freeze drying vaccines was a major gateway. This did not stop individual countries from eradicating it within their own borders. One of the major instigators for the eradication of smallpox was a number of outbreaks in North America due to individuals returning from abroad. The Speckled Monster mentions an outbreak in Seattle due to infected soldiers returning home after World War II. With the development and wide spread use of international flights disease could easily jump between countries. By showing that it could eradicate the smallpox disease the world made international travel much safer. Individuals can now travel anywhere in the world and not worry about catching smallpox from the locals and bringing it back home. Tragically the same cannot be said for all diseases, but we have shown that by working together it is possible. The WHA announcement summarizes this well by saying “[the world’s] collective action [has] freed mankind from this ancient scourge and, in doing so, [has] demonstrated how nations working together in a common cause may further human progress”.