



Copeland's Cure: Homeopathy and the War Between Conventional and Alternative Medicine

By Natalie Robins

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Today, one out of every three Americans uses some form of alternative medicine, either along with their conventional (“standard,” “traditional”) medications or in place of them. One of the most controversial—as well as one of the most popular—alternatives is homeopathy, a wholly Western invention brought to America from Germany in 1827, nearly forty years before the discovery that germs cause disease. Homeopathy is a therapy that uses minute doses of natural substances—minerals, such as mercury or phosphorus; various plants, mushrooms, or bark; and insect, shellfish, and other animal products, such as *Oscillococcinum*. These remedies mimic the symptoms of the sick person and are said to bring about relief by “entering” the body’s “vital force.” Many homeopaths believe that the greater the dilution, the greater the medical benefit, even though often not a single molecule of the original substance remains in the solution.

In *Copeland's Cure*, Natalie Robins tells the fascinating story of homeopathy in this country; how it came to be accepted because of the gentleness of its approach—Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow were outspoken advocates, as were Louisa May Alcott, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Daniel Webster. We find out about the unusual war between alternative and conventional medicine that began in 1847, after the AMA banned homeopaths from membership even though their medical training was identical to that of doctors practicing traditional medicine. We learn how homeopaths were increasingly considered not to be “real” doctors, and how “real” doctors risked expulsion from the AMA if they even consulted with a homeopath.

At the center of *Copeland's Cure* is Royal Samuel Copeland, the now-forgotten maverick senator from New York who served from 1923 to 1938. Copeland was a student of both conventional and homeopathic medicine, an eye surgeon who became president of the American Institute of Homeopathy, dean of the New York Homeopathic Medical College, and health commissioner of New York City from 1918 to 1923 (he instituted unique approaches to the deadly flu pandemic). We see how Copeland straddled the worlds of politics (he befriended Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, and Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, among others)

and medicine (as senator, he helped get rid of medical “diploma mills”). His crowning achievement was to give homeopathy lasting legitimacy by including all its remedies in the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938.

Finally, the author brings the story of clashing medical beliefs into the present, and describes the role of homeopathy today and how some of its practitioners are now adhering to the strictest standards of scientific research—controlled, randomized, double-blind clinical studies.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Sen. Royal Copeland of New York is mostly forgotten as a politician, yet he was responsible for the inclusion, and legitimization, of homeopathic remedies in the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938. Robins, the Edgar Award-winning coauthor of *Savage Grace*, resurrects Copeland to tell of his lifelong struggle for the acceptance of homeopathy by the mainstream medical community. Placing the spread of painless homeopathy in the 19th century in the context of such brutal treatments as bloodletting, Robins then gives a detailed recounting of Copeland's early career as a homeopathic eye doctor, with descriptions of treatments that would make a doctor today blanch. Copeland's life story serves as a backdrop for the struggle that began in the 1840s between homeopathy and the fledgling American Medical Association, which mounted a campaign to stamp it out. Robins devotes her last three chapters to a history of homeopathy in the half-century since Copeland's death; it remains a popular alternative treatment, although homeopaths are still on the fringes of accepted medicine. Robins refrains from taking a stance on the legitimacy of the practice, which has yet to be tested in clinical trials. She confines herself to giving a thorough, if dry, account of homeopathy's role in the shaping of American medicine. B&w illus. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Booklist](#)

Few outside of the medical community may understand the difference between allopathic medicine and homeopathic medicine. It is likely that even fewer are aware of the history of homeopathy, or of where it stands in relation to, say, chiropractic or holistic medicine. Robins' comprehensive account lays all that out around the life and times of U.S. senator, doctor, and dogged champion of homeopathy Royal Samuel Copeland. Paying careful attention to detail, Robins explains the birth of the formal practice of homeopathy, which is based on the principle of like curing like, and the origins of its ongoing love-(mostly)hate relationship with allopathy, which is understood to be based on using opposites to treat illness and disease. Robins answers every point in support of homeopathy with an equally credible counterpoint in support of allopathy, referring final decisions to readers by quoting physician Jennifer Jacobs, coauthor of *Healing with Homeopathy* (1996), who says, "Ultimately all healing is a personal journey." *Donna Chavez*
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About the Author

Natalie Robins is the author of eight books, including *Savage Grace* (cowritten with Steven M. L. Aronson), for which she received the Edgar Allan Poe Award; *Alien Ink: The FBI's War on Freedom of Expression*, winner of the Hugh M. Hefner First Amendment Award; and *The Girl Who Died Twice: The Libby Zion Case and the Hidden Hazards of Hospitals*. She lives in New York City with her husband, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt.

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Michael Kautz:

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