

# John B. Watson

The Following Text Excerpt from *PERSONALITY*, 3rd Ed., Jerry M. Burger

As a child growing up in Greenville, South Carolina, John Broadus Watson exhibited two characteristics that would later come to shape his career - he was a fighter and a builder. He once wrote that his favorite activity in elementary school was fighting with classmates "until one or the other drew blood." But by age 12 he also had become something of a master carpenter. Later, during his first few years as a psychology professor, he built his own 10-room house virtually by himself.

Watson's lack of enthusiasm for contemporary standards also surfaced early. In grammar school, "I was lazy, somewhat insubordinate, and, so far as I know, never made above a passing grade." He also found that "little of my college life interested me I was unsocial and had few close friends" (1936, p. 271). Watson bragged about being the only student to pass the Greek exam his senior year at Furman University. His secret was to cram the entire day before the test, powered only by a quart of Coca-Cola. "Today," he reported years later, "I couldn't to save my life write the Greek alphabet or conjugate a verb" (1936, p. 272).



Watson began his doctoral work in philosophy at the University of Chicago, in part because Princeton required a reading knowledge of Greek. He soon switched to psychology, where, unlike his classmates, he preferred working with rats instead of human subjects. "Can't I find out by watching their behavior," he asked, "everything the other students are finding out?" (1936, p. 276).

Watson joined the faculty at Johns Hopkins University in 1908, where he began his quest to replace the psychology of the day with his new behavioral approach. His views received a surprisingly warm welcome from many scholars and academics, and in 1912 he was invited to give a series of public lectures on his theory at Columbia University. He published an influential paper, "Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It," in 1913 and his first book in 1914. Within a few years, behaviorism swept over the discipline. Watson was elected president of the American Psychological Association in 1915. Watson the fighter had taken on contemporary psychology and won, while Watson the builder had constructed an approach to the understanding of human behavior that would change the discipline of psychology for many decades to come.

But his academic career was cut short in 1920. Watson suddenly divorced his wife of 17 years and married Rosalie Rayner, with whom he had

conducted the Little Albert experiments. The scandal that surrounded these actions forced Watson out of an intolerant Johns Hopkins and into the business world, where he eventually settled into a successful career in advertising. After writing a few popular articles, and a book in 1925, Watson severed his ties with psychology while still in his early 40s. But more than 60 years later, the foundation he build for the behavioral approach still stands.

---

---

r e l a t e d | l i n k s :

Link #1

More Links

---

---

<--- Return to Who's Who

---

---

---