

HPW9ESSAY

Describe the Zeitgeist in American psychology in the first two decades of the 20th century - how did that promote and support behaviorism?

In the first two decades of the 20th century the Zeitgeist in American psychology was favorable to the ongoing changes. Functionalism was maturing, while structuralism still maintained a strong but already not exclusive position. Psychology was moving toward increased objectivity in subject matter and methodology.

Animal psychology became one of the growing completely objective field of studies. Animal psychologists looked for ways to demonstrate the existence of mind in lower organisms and the similarities between animal and human minds. The notion of consciousness and the method of introspection were questioned by many. Animal psychology wasn't one of the most profitable fields of studies but the dedication of the few expanded the field greatly. By 1910 there were 8 comparative and animal psychology laboratories in the US. Many universities offered courses in the field. New research works on comparative and animal studies kept appearing in psychology journals.

John B. Watson became the leader of the new revolutionary movement called behaviorism. He brought together 3 major forces of philosophical tradition of objectivism and mechanism, animal psychology and functional psychology. He became the first psychologist to completely reject the concept of consciousness, pointing out its lack of value for behavioral psychology. The new field of studies had to stick to the objectives and focus on only what could be seen, heard, or touched.