

Frank S. Freeman

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In his essay on “The Cornell Tradition,” the eminent historian Carl Becker, characterized a Cornell professor as “a man who thinks otherwise”; Frank Samuel Freeman, a member of the faculty for almost four decades, was such a man. In the sphere in which he did most of his scholarly work, the study of individual differences in human abilities, Freeman was also a man ahead of his time. Thus he could not know that, in a volume recently published presenting new approaches and findings in research on human intelligence, his name appears among those acknowledged as the forerunners of the recent scientific advances in this domain.

Born in St. Louis on October 11, 1898, Freeman received both a bachelor’s and the doctorate degree from Harvard University. While in college, he married Esther E. Worthington, who only briefly survived him. After studying with Kurt Lewin in Berlin, and working as a psychologist in a children’s hospital in Massachusetts, Freeman came to Cornell in 1925 as an instructor in the Department of Education in the College of Arts and Sciences. In those days of E.B. Titchener, psychology was a pure science that had no place for anyone tainted by applied interests.

While in education, Freeman began a close association with Robert M. Ogden, who was influential in introducing Gestalt psychology and psychologists to America. During this time, Freeman collaborated with Ogden in the second edition of the latter’s book, *Psychology and Education*, which applied the principles of Gestalt psychology to education and learning.

Although Freeman did not become a member of the Department of Psychology until some years after Titchener’s death, it was in that discipline that he made his major scholarly contributions. His pioneering book on *Individual Differences*, published in 1934, still stands as a classic in the field and anticipates present conceptions of psychological development as a process of ongoing interaction between an active organism and its environment. A text on *Development and Learning* (1942) was a masterful and lucid compendium of research on development from birth through adolescence, integrating cognitive, emotional and social domains. Perhaps his best known work reflected his enduring interest and ability to move from science to application. Entitled *The Theory and Practice of Psychological Testing*, it presented its subject matter not merely as a technology but as an implementation of theoretical ideas evolving over time. The work went through several editions and translations, including Japanese.

Freeman’s writing was distinguished by its clarity, grace of style, and ability to make complex ideas readily understood. These same qualities characterized his teaching, but there he added a rarer and richer gift: any student

who showed a sign of curiosity or intellectual commitment might soon discover that he or she had acquired a wise, generous, albeit somewhat gruff and exacting mentor who opened new doors to learning through a delicate balance of challenge and support, seasoned by a redeeming dash of humor.

As a psychologist, Frank Freeman was also a leader in the development of his profession. Because of his experience as an accomplished clinician as well as a scholar, he was appointed as the first chair of the New York State Board of Examiners in Psychology. In recognition of that service, he was awarded Certificate No. 1 for the practice of psychology in New York State.

In addition, Freeman was an active participant in the workings of the University Faculty, serving on a number of boards and committees. He was also one of the founders of a teachers' union for Cornell faculty.

But those of us who had the good fortune to have known him as colleagues and students will remember him most for his commitment to scholarship, disciplined thought, and their dedicated transmission to the next generation.

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