

Lashley, Karl S.
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Karl Spencer Lashley, b. June 7, 1890, d. Aug. 7, 1958, was a pioneer neuropsychologist in the United States especially known for his opposition to theories localizing complex psychological functions in the brain.

Lashley's formative academic years were spent, first as a zoologist at the University of Pittsburgh, then (1912-16) in animal behavior under John B. Watson, the founder of behaviorism, at The Johns Hopkins University. In 1917, Lashley became associated with S. I. Franz at Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C., where he began his famous studies on brain function. This work culminated in a monograph published in 1929, Brain Mechanisms and Intelligence, in which Lashley proposed his theories of mass action (that learning involves the entire cortex) and equipotentiality (that parts of the brain can substitute for other, damaged parts). This matter of equipotentiality of cortex function is still a subject of ongoing research. Equally influential were his later papers, "The Problem of Serial Order in Behavior" (1951) and "In Search of the Engram" (1950). Less well known was Lashley's staunch support of sex research, such as that of his friend and colleague Alfred Kinsey; he funded Kinsey's work and publications. Lashley is best remembered for his brain research and his opposition to reflexology, the then-current explanation of behavior in terms of reflexes.

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Pribram

Bibliography: Beach, F. A., et al., The Neuropsychology of Lashley (1960); Turner, Roland, ed., Thinkers of the Twentieth Century, 2d ed. (1987).

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