

# The History Corner: The 70th Anniversary of a Masterpiece

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In May of 1938, an advertisement appeared in Psychological Abstracts announcing the publication of a new book by the Appleton-Century Company. Slated to appear in June, *The Behavior of Organisms: An Experimental Analysis* would be the next installment in the famed Century Psychology Series edited by Richard Elliott of the University of Minnesota. The author of *The Behavior of Organisms* was a relatively new assistant professor at the University of Minnesota, B. F. Skinner. This 457-page masterwork would become a seminal part of the behaviorist movement. In it, Skinner discussed over a decade of research on influencing behavior. The terms operant conditioning, reinforcement, and punishment would become synonymous with Skinner.

Skinner listed some of the myriad applications that he envisioned developing from his work including animal training, teaching machines, behavior therapy and other behavior management techniques. The ideas he proposed have found their way into many different fields. Especially notable is the growth of applied behavior analysis.

*The Behavior of Organisms* was finally published in September of 1938. Apparently 800 copies were printed but not all of them were bound (Knapp, 1995). First printings of *The Behavior of Organisms* can be identified by their black cloth cover. Later reprintings were bound in green or tan covers. ?

Further reading:

Knapp, T.J. (1995). A natural history of *The Behavior of Organisms*. In J.T. Todd & E.K. Morris (Eds.), *Modern perspectives on B.F. Skinner and contemporary behaviorism* (pp. 7-23). Westport, Conn.: Greenwood.