



Ethel Tobach
(November 7, 1921 - August 15, 2015)

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The death of Ethel Tobach, one of the last remaining giants of 20th century comparative psychology, brings to a close an important era in our science. She was born in Ukraine and moved to Philadelphia as a child with her mother following the death of her father. She later moved to New York City where she flourished as a pro-union, peace-, and social-activist. Although she was a pacifist, in her 20s she joined the Women's Army Corp during WWII working at a Long Island Psychiatric facility. She was educated at Hunter College (BA 1949, Phi Beta Kappa) and received her PhD at New York University in 1957 under the supervision of T. C. Schneirla. She later joined the Department of Animal Behavior at New York's American Museum of Natural History to work with Schneirla. She had academic appointments at New York University, Hunter College of City University of New York, and Yeshiva University.



Figure 1. Attendees at the 1st meeting of the International Society for Comparative Psychology in Toronto, Canada (1983). *Back row:* ?, Charles Tolman (Canada), ?, ? Everett Wyers (USA). *Front Row:* Gary Greenberg (USA); Jack Demarest (USA), Nancy Innis (Canada), Joe Erwin (USA); Ethel Tobach (USA); Tom Cadwallader (USA), Kiyoko Murofushi (Japan); Graziano Fiorito (Italy); ? (cut).

All who knew her acknowledged her several faces: scholar, scientist, peace- and social-activist. Despite being a caring and genuinely good person, she was well known to have a curmudgeonly side. That said, she mentored many students from high

school, college, and graduate school. I was fortunate to be one of those she “adopted” in this way following my graduate work in 1971. We worked closely together for many years including three field trips to Puerto Rico to study and collect *Aplysia* (a species of sea slug) for shipment back to her laboratory. In 1983 she and I founded the *International Society for Comparative Psychology* (ISCP) and held our first meeting in Toronto along with the Cheiron Society. (A photo of those in attendance accompanies this obituary.) She was the Society’s first president and subsequently its president emerita. She founded the *International Journal of Comparative Psychology* (IJCP). It was her brilliant idea to make the society truly international by holding our biennial meetings in countries other than the USA. To this end our meetings have been held throughout the world in many countries. While the nature of the meetings have changed somewhat, her vision for the ISCP still prevails and the society is healthy. She was honored and recognized for her work several times by APA divisions and the APA itself; she served as President of Divisions 6 and 48. Though she retired from the museum in 1991 as curator emerita, she remained working almost to the day she died.

Her laboratory work included research with rats, gerbils, spiny mice (*Acomys cahirinus*) and *Aplysia* (*Aplysia dactylomela* and *A. punctate*); though there were many other animal species represented in her work. Among her important publications are books she co-edited: *The Genes and Gender* series (Gordian Press, 1978-1980); *The T. C. Schneirla Conference* series (Erlbaum Press, 1984-1997); *Selected Writings of T. C. Schneirla* (W. H. Freeman, 1972); *Development and Evolution of Behavior: Essays in Memory of T. C. Schneirla* (W. H. Freeman, 1970); *The Biopsychology of Development* (Academic Press, 1971).

She was well known worldwide in the full scientific community and recognized as a tireless crusader for human rights and dignity. There are several biographies of Ethel available on the internet and I wrote a full obituary for a forthcoming issue of the *American Psychologist*.

Further Biographical Material

See full biografies of Dr. Tobach focusing on feminism and judaism in:

<http://www.feministvoices.com/ethel-tobach/>
<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/tobach-ethel>

A long interview on prejudice and comparative psychology in New York institutions:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oqf9PqKxw3c>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cz3xP_gMclk

Invited presentation at the 2014 ISCP meeting by Dr. Rubén Ardila:

<http://www.iccp2014.org/home-en/invited-speakers/ethel-tobach-investigadora-en-psicologia-comparada-activista-social-y-persona-comprometida-con-su-tiempo/>

Dr. Tobach articles in IJCP:

- Tobach, Ethel. (2006). Identity of Comparative Psychology: Its Status and Advances in Evolutionary Theory and Genetics. *International Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 19(2). Retrieved from: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0vv37459>
- Tobach, Ethel. (1993). A Note from the Editor about "Final solutions: Biology, Prejudice, and Genocide". *International Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 6(3). uclapsych_ijcp_14358. Retrieved from: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3890j3fd>
- Tobach, E. (1987). Book Review: Historical Perspectives and the International Status of Comparative Psychology. *International Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 1(2). uclapsych_ijcp_13316. Retrieved from: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1ts260m4>