

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with John Watson

PERSON

Watson, John , 1940-

Alternative Names: Watson, John , 1940-;

Life Dates: May 21, 1940-

Place of Birth: Chicago, Illinois

Residence: Daly City, California

Occupations: Biochemist; Biochemistry Professor

Biographical Note

Biochemist and biochemistry professor John A. Watson was born on May 28, 1940 in Chicago, Illinois, the first of eight children. His mother, Catherine P. Berkley-Watson, was a homemaker and his father Hosea Watson, worked as postal service supervisor. Watson grew up in Chicago's south side, attending Oakland Public Elementary School and graduating from Parker High School in 1957. After studying at the University of Illinois Navy Pier, he was hired by the American Institute of Baking, where he worked as a research assistant in nutrition research. It was there that his interest in biochemical studies truly crystallized. Watson returned to college to receive his B.A. degree in biology with an option in biochemistry from Illinois Institute of Technology in 1964. After receiving fellowships from the University of Illinois, Chicago Medical Center and Brandeis University, Watson earned his Ph.D. degree in biochemistry from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1967.

In 1970, Watson was hired by the University of California, San Francisco as an assistant professor of biochemistry and biophysics. His research focused on biological pathways, particularly on the regulation and importance of cholesterol in cellular operations. He demonstrated that the lack of control of cholesterol synthesis is not a marker for cancer cells, that essential non-sterol isopentenoid synthesis is a post-transcriptionally regulated process, and that

excess mevalonic acid production in fruit fly cells is shunted and broken down through a novel pathway. Watson became a full professor of biochemistry in 1984 and professor emeritus of the University of California, San Francisco in 2001.

Watson holds memberships in numerous renowned professional societies, including the American Association of Oil Chemists, the National Institute of Science, and the American Heart Association. He is also a founding member of the Coalition for the Advancement of Blacks in Biomedical Sciences. Winner of the 1985 Henry McBay Outstanding Teacher Award from the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCChE) and the 1994 Lifetime Mentor Award from the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), Watson has been recognized for his work as a research scientist as well as an educator.

John Watson is married to Valerie M. Watson, and they are the parents of four adult children: Lisa, Susan, Katherine, and John.

John Watson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 7, 2011.

Related Entries

Watson, Hosea [CHILD_OF]
Father

Watson, John [GRANDCHILD_OF]
Grandfather (P)

Watson, Susan [PARENT_OF]
Child

Watson, Gayle [BROTHER_OF]
Sibling

Watson, Elliot [BROTHER_OF]
Sibling

Watson, Stanley [BROTHER_OF]
Sibling

Watson, Robert [BROTHER_OF]
Sibling

Watson, Cheryl [BROTHER_OF]
Sibling

Watson, Lisa [PARENT_OF]

Child

Watson, Roger [BROTHEROF]
Sibling

Berkley-Watson, Catherine [CHILDOF]
Mother

Watson, Gerald [BROTHEROF]
Sibling

Watson, Katherine [PARENTOF]
Child

Berkley, Joseph [GRANDCHILDOF]
Grandfather (M)

Watson, John Malik [PARENTOF]
Child

Cornelius-Berkeley, Ellen [GRANDCHILDOF]
Grandmother (M)

Woodland-Watson, Althia [GRANDCHILDOF]
Grandmother (P)

University of Illinois Abraham Lincoln School of Medicine [STUDENTOF]
Ph.D. Biochemistry

Illinois Institute of Technology [STUDENTOF]
Biology with Biochemistry option

University of Illinois at Chicago [STUDENTOF]
Chemistry

Parker High School [STUDENTOF]
High School

North Kenwood/Oakland Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
K-8 Diploma

UC San Francisco [EMPLOYEEOF]
Professor and Accoc. Dean

Brandeis University [EMPLOYEEOF]
USPHS Postdoctoral Scholar

American Inst. Banking [EMPLOYEEOF]
Research Assistant

American Association of Oil Chemists [MEMBEROF]
Member

Sigma Xi, The Scientific Res. Soc. [MEMBEROF]

Chairman

American Society of Biological Chemists and Molecular Biologists

[MEMBEROF]

Chair, Committee on Minorities

American Heart Association [MEMBEROF]

Committee Member

Tissue Culture Association [MEMBEROF]

Member

UC San Francisco Academic Senate [MEMBEROF]

American Association for the Advancement of Science [MEMBEROF]

National Organization for the Professional Development of Black

Chemists and Chemical Engineers [MEMBEROF]