

How questions of racial, sexist bigotry have come to overshadow James Watson's career

I'm thrilled that Christie's decided to auction off [James Watson's Nobel prize](#) on a Thursday, *DNA Science* posting day! I've got some great quotes to add to the chatter.

Dr. Watson shared the Nobel prize with Francis Crick in 1962 for deducing and describing the [three-dimensional structure of DNA](#), assembling clues from the experimental findings of many others. He went on to launch the human genome project at the National Institutes of Health, and is today Chancellor Emeritus of the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory.

But Dr. Watson is also known for outrageous comments that insult anyone with dark skin, a fondness for the same sex, mental illness, a genetic disease, or two X chromosomes. Laura Helmuth excellently summarizes some of his comments at [Slate](#).

I first heard Dr. Watson speak when I was in grad school, and too sleep-deprived to remember anything. Shortly after Francis Crick died in 2004, I decided to interview Dr. Watson while he was still around. So I spent 14 hours on Amtrak during a single day going from Schenectady, New York to Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory on Long Island, when I was writing for *The Scientist*. He was prompt, polite, and charming. And then I asked my first question.

"Dr. Watson, which do you think was more significant, deducing the structure of DNA, or sequencing the human genome?"

He sat back, smiled, and stroked his chin, seemingly deep in thought. It wasn't a bad question to start. A pause, then ...

"Ricki, do you consider yourself a girl or a woman?"

I never could get him to answer questions about science seriously, and I wonder now if that's why I can't find my piece at *The Scientist* website. I might have killed the story, which was to be a Q+A, before my editor had a chance to do so. And his comments were too misfired to make it into my [human genetics textbook](#).

Read full, original article: James Watson on "Genetic Losers"