

Current Comments

Expansion of Citation Classics - 250 unique commentaries per year

Number 1

January 1, 1979

In this first Current Contents[®] (CC^{*}) issue for 1979, Citation Classics begins its third year. Starting with this issue, each Current Contents edition (with the exception of the new CC/Arts & Humanities) will contain a Citation Classic appropriate to that edition.¹

Citation Classics provides authors of highly cited works an unusual opportunity to retrospectively comment on their research. This personal approach to the history of science allows them to discuss the roles they and their co-authors played in the evolution of their milestone reports. We ask them to explain why their papers proved to have such high impact and as a consequence, were so highly cited. In short, Citation Classics presents the human as well as the technical side of science history.

Until now, we published the same "classic" in all editions of *Current Contents*. This approach had some virtues in that it gave readers exposure to other fields. But many readers outside the natural sciences felt that their fields were not adequately represented.

When we began *Citation Classics* in 1977, we asked authors of the 500

most-cited papers to submit commentaries. It should have been obvious that a preponderance of these papers would come from the life sciences. This is in line with what we have learned about most-cited authors and papers. While the basic physical and chemical sciences were well represented, certain disciplines were severely underrepresented. For example, of the 52 Citation Classics published in 1977. 37 were from the life sciences. Ten were from physics and nonbiological chemistry. Clinical medicine was represented by only three classics. Articles representing engineering, the applied sciences, and the social and behavioral sciences were not featured at all. Two classics in 1977 were statistical works of interdisciplinary interest. Figure 1 is a category list of the Citation Classics published in 1977.

That citation counts are higher in some disciplines and lower in others is no surprise. I've discussed this point almost *ad nauseam*.³ Suffice it to say here that absolute citation counts cannot be the exclusive criterion for selecting classics (or anything else). In particular they militate against the selection of important works in disciplines where citation frequencies are "naturally" lower.⁴

In 1978 we selected papers with this in mind. We featured eleven articles from the social sciences, seven from clinical medicine, and five from agriculture (botany, etc.). In Figure 2 there is a categorical listing of all 1978 classics. In 1979, the presentation of a different *Citation Classic* in each *CC* edition will ensure that all fields are adequately represented.

To date, we have invited over 1.000 authors to submit commentaries for publication. Nearly 40% have done so. But, the publication of only 52 classics per year has resulted in a considerable backlog. We apologize to those authors who have been waiting to see their commentaries in print, Now, in addition to providing commentaries of more particular interest to our readers. the publication of a different classic in the six CC editions will allow us to get manuscripts into print faster. During 1979, we will publish about 250 to 300 unique contributions.

Of course, some classics will be of interest to investigators in more than one discipline. These will appear in more than one edition.

While author commentaries will be especially selected for each edition of *Current Contents*, readers will not be left uninformed about classics presented in the other editions. As part of the new format for *Citation Classics*, a page of *CC* will list the classics appearing in each of the six editions.

As our backlog of classics diminishes, we will be inviting new authors to submit commentaries on both new and old papers that emerge in our studies. However, we have yet another backlog of *Citation Classics*. Commentaries must be solicited from persons who were not authors of the 600 papers for which we received no response. While most citation classics authors are still alive, many are deceased or unable to contribute for a variety of reasons.

During the course of the year to come, we will be publishing lists of classics not previously mentioned in our citation studies. We will indicate those papers where the authors have not responded to our requests for commentaries. We hope that readers who were closely associated with the authors or field will volunteer to fill the gap. By mid-year, we plan to summarize our progress. We hope you'll agree that expansion of Citation Classics adds a new dimension to our coverage and appreciation of the history and sociology of science.5

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- Figure 1: Citation Classics from 1977, arranged by category. Under each category classics are arranged by journal title.

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Figure 2: Citation Classics from 1978 arranged by category. Under each category classics are arranged by journal title.

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