

The Diffusion of Innovations Among the American States
Jack L. Walker, Jr. *American Political Science Review* 63, 3 (Sept. 1969): 880–899.

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Jack Walker was the author of three of the 100 most cited articles in the history of the *APSR*.¹ Nowhere is his creativity and imagination more on display than in his Diffusion article. Comparing these allows some conclusions about why Diffusion had such a great impact and illustrates the thinking of a great scholar, mentor, and colleague.

Jack was a contributor to many fields. After I invited Jack to give a lecture some years ago, a colleague stopped me to say how glad he was that a theorist was visiting. Another thanked me for inviting in a state politics expert; a third was thrilled to have an interest-group scholar; and a fourth, an agenda-setting pioneer. His first big splash in the profession came when he was just two years into the tenure-track, when he took on some of the biggest establishment figures in the discipline with his provocative Critique of the Elitist Theory. It was combative, addressed major issues of power, and was perfectly timed to coincide with the rise of a new more critical form of pluralist analysis (graduate students take note: it was also a revision of an essay he had drafted for his qualifying exams). His second major contribution was Diffusion, also written as an assistant professor. His third major article, Origins and Maintenance, took aim at a major theme in the literature on group mobilization, suggesting important ways that elite-level actors, including the state itself, affect social mobilization. Figure 1 shows the citations to these three articles. The continuing upward slope evident for Diffusion and Origins make clear that these articles still attract significant attention even decades after their original publication.

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

As influential as Critique and Origins and Maintenance have been, Diffusion is clearly in a different class. What makes this so? Unlike the other two articles, Diffusion is neither critical nor combative. Rather, it launched an entirely new field of research. Table 1 shows how many citations to these articles were published in journals in various disciplines.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

Jack oversaw an internship program in Lansing when he was an assistant professor and noted that lawmakers often asked agency officials if other states provided precedents for programs under review.² He was struck by the rise of national professional communities, experts who had intense communications within networks of expertise rather than within the local political environment. This concern with “knowledge communities” informed his later work on lobbying as well. It typifies his approach to political science since he took an idea that had barely been noticed by others, but which was there for all to see. It had wide-ranging applicability and implications, as the subsequent literature demonstrated. The work has been cited in 34 different

¹ In addition to Diffusion, his Critique of the Elitist Theory of Democracy (60, 2: 285–95) and The Origins and Maintenance of Interest Groups (77, 2: 390–406) were 59th and 95th respectively.

² Interview with Jack Walker published in *Current Contents* Feb. 11, 1985.

disciplines, and it is almost as widely used outside of political science as within our discipline. Within political science, the article led to some controversy and methodological critique (something Jack never minded!), and generated an entire new field of research which remains vibrant today (in fact, three other articles on diffusion, by Mohr, Gray, and Berry and Berry, are on the *APSR* 100+ list). Of course, not everyone who has cited Diffusion has probably read it carefully; as the first cite in its field, it appears often to be used as a simple reference to justify an assumption that diffusions do, in fact, spread rapidly. In fact, Jack was just as interested in those innovations that did not diffuse and in those states that were proud to be laggards.

One sign of Jack's creativity comes from remembering that all this stemmed from a Department Head's assignment to supervise an internship program in the state capital. With nothing else to do between meetings, he developed an entirely new research paradigm. The list of scholars having published three articles in the list of top *APSR* citation-getters includes such luminaries as Warren Miller, Don Stokes, Ron Inglehart, Phil Converse, and others.³ No one appears on this list four times. If Jack had not been killed in a car accident sixteen years ago, in the prime of his career, maybe he would have broken that tie.

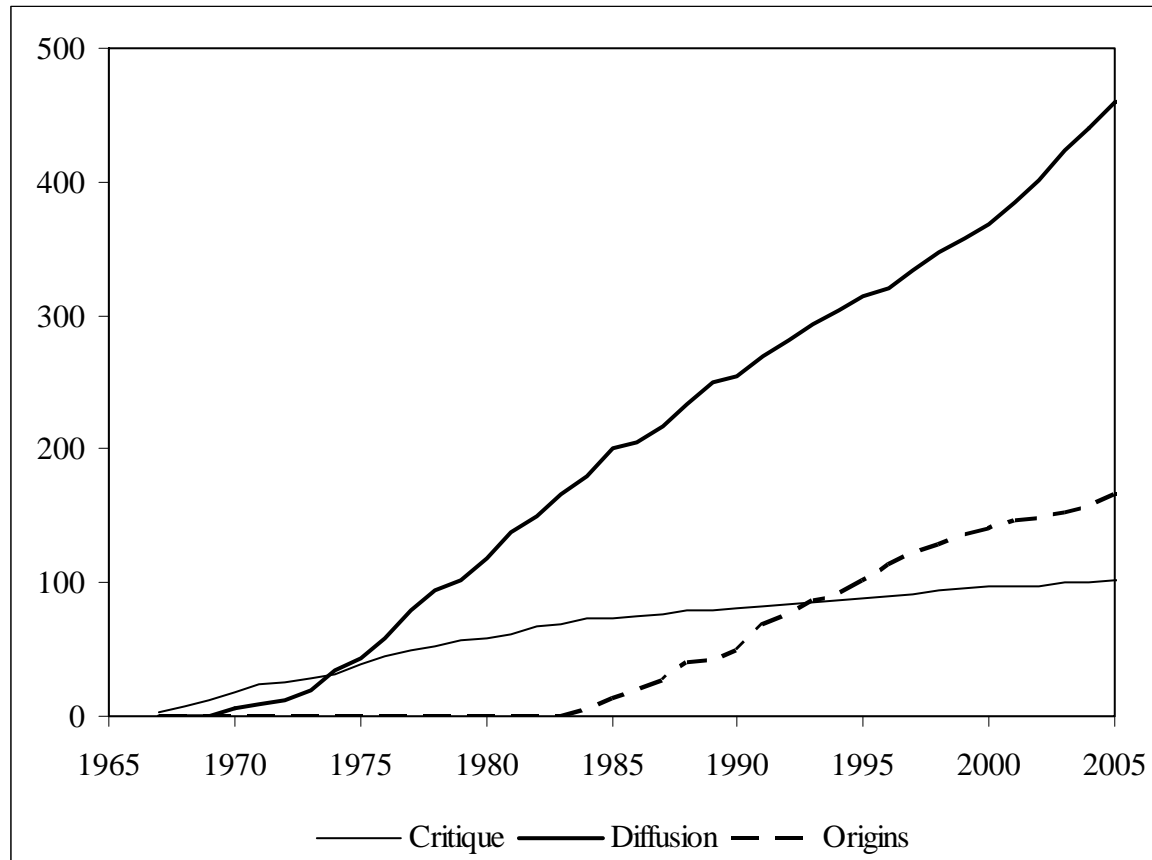
³ As Jack (a former Michigan Department Head) might have said, MGoBlue.

Table 1. Citation Patterns for Three Articles by Jack Walker.

	Critique	Origins	Diffusion
Total Citations	102	167	464
Cites in Political Science Journals	82	97	271
Sociology	9	38	51
Economics			21
Health			21
Law		11	18
Education			16
Business			16
Geography			16
Other Disciplines (fewer than 9 cites each)	11	21	34
Number of Disciplines where Cited	10	14	20

Source: Calculated from ISI Web of Science, April 17, 2006.

Figure 1. Cumulative Citations to Three *APSR* Articles by Jack Walker.



Source: Calculated from ISI Web of Science, April 17, 2006.

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