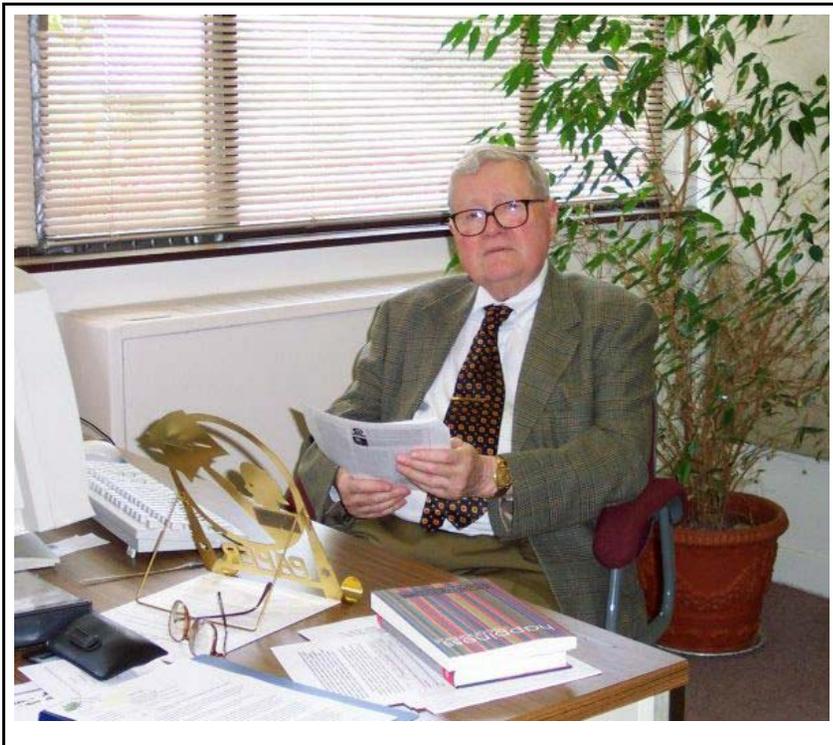


GORDON TULLOCK



1922-2014

Professional Positions:

- 1947 Practiced law for four months.
- 1947-1956 Various Far East positions in Foreign Service
- 1956-1958 Research and Writing Various Projects
- 1958-1959 Post Doctoral Fellow, University of Virginia
- 1959-1962 Asst. & Assoc. Professor, University of South Carolina
- 1962-1967 Associate Professor, University of Virginia
- 1967-1968 Professor of Economics and Pol. Science, Rice U.
- 1968-1972 Professor of Economics and Public Choice VPI&SU
- 1972-1983 University Distinguished Professor VPI&SU
- 1983-1987 Holbert R. Harris University Professor, GMU
- 1987 Philip Morris Visiting Distinguished Scholar, Baruch U.
- 1987-1999 Karl Eller Prof. of Econ. and Political Science, U. AZ
- Fall 1999 Professor of Law and Economics, GMU
- Summer 2008 Retired from GMU

Honors:

- 1982 First recipient of the Leslie T. Wilkins Award, presented for "The Outstanding Book in the Field of Criminology and Criminal Justice," by the Criminal Justice Research Center, Albany, New York.
- 1985 Honorary Doctorate of Letters, Basel University
- 1992 Honorary Doctor of Law, University of Chicago
- 1993 Adam Smith Award, Association of Private Enterprise Education, Washington, D.C. in April.
- 1993 An award dinner to honor the Works of Gordon Tullock was held at the conference of the Western Economic Association.
- 1996 Member of the American Political Science Review Hall of Fame
- 1996 Award for Outstanding Contributions in the Field of Law & Economics by George Mason University Law School.
- 1998 Distinguished Fellow, American Economics Association

Offices Held:

President, Public Choice Society
Founder and Editor, *Public Choice Journal*
President, Southern Economic Association
President, Western Economic Association
Secretary, Public Choice Society
Member, Board of Directors American Political Science Association
Founder and President, Henry Simons Society
Academic Advisor, Hong Kong Center for Economic Research
Founder, *International Journal of Bioeconomics*
President, International Bioeconomics
President, Atlantic Economic Society
President, Association of Private Enterprise Education

A Short Overview of his Contributions¹

Gordon Tullock was one of the founders of public choice, a scholar who along with Downs, Buchanan, Olson, Riker, and Arrow established the core concepts that produced the field. In many practical respects, he may be regarded as the most important of the founders because of his role as founding editor of the journal public choice and his role as what Peter Bernholz refers to as the “flying ambassador of public choice.”

Tullock’s work in political economy predates his famous book with Buchanan, the *Calculus of Consent*, but it was that book that put Tullock on the course to becoming one of the preeminent contributors to the public choice literature.

Tullock deserves credit for stimulating that book to be written according to the preface. Tullock had “prepared and circulated a mimeographed research paper entitled ‘A Preliminary Investigation of the Theory of Constitutions,’ which contained the first elements of the important central analysis now covered in Chapter 6” (Buchanan and Tullock 1962, p. viii). Chapter 6 includes the most cited and taught material from the *Calculus*. It is arguably the core chapter of that important work, the book that launched the field constitutional political economy.

His largest impact as a solo author is associated with his two papers on rent seeking (Tullock 1967, 1980). The first points out that competition over scarce resources is not necessarily a good thing. Resources that are consumed in conflict are lost forever, rather than devoted to the production of useful goods and services. This idea was generalized in his work on the law (1971), anarchy (1972), and revolution (1974). His 1980 piece provides a versatile game theoretic framework for thinking about rent-seeking contests, which has come to be known as the Tullock contest success function.

These ideas and models defined the rent-seeking research program, which by now includes several thousand theoretical and applied papers (Buchanan, Tollison and Tullock 1980; Congleton, Hillman and Konrad 2008; Congleton and Hillman 2015). That work also played a role in the development of the literatures on contest theory and conflict.²

¹ For more detailed overviews of his work, see Congleton (2004, 2012, 2013). See Brady and Tollison (1994) for a collection of Tullock essays and Fishback and Libecap (2012) for a collection of essays in Tullock’s honor. The introductions to both of the latter two volumes also include useful overviews of his work.

² For overviews of the contest and conflict literatures, see Konrad (2009) and Garfinkel and Skaperdas (1996).

His impact on the field of public choice is substantially broader than his own research contributions, which number in the hundreds, because of his founding and editing of the journal Public Choice, and through his attendance at public choice meetings and seminars around the world.

In the early days, Tullock (and the economics department at VPI) subsidized the journal. And, in contrast to most editors today, Gordon was normally the sole referee on pieces published in “his” journal, excepting technical pieces for which a specialist’s opinion seemed necessary.³

Although most of the very best pieces in public choice appeared in major economics and political science journals, **most secondary and tertiary pieces were published in Public Choice.**

As a consequence, the field of public choice was substantially defined by his editorial decisions. Those whose works in his opinion made contributions were published, and those that did not were not. There were few other outlets for public choice pieces outside of his journal, especially for those whose vision of public choice was similar to Gordon’s. Naturally, it was the persons that published in Public Choice who could afford to specialize in that discipline and so attended the meetings of its American and European societies and thereby became established scholars in the field. **In this manner, Tullock not only defined the field, he populated it.**

Among his colleagues and admirers, he is also known for his efforts to use the rational choice model to understand the **law, science, dictatorship, anarchy, and biology** (1994).

A long series of papers and books examine how institutions affect incentives for individual decision-making, a significant subset of which involve conflict and the reduction of conflict.

His textbook with Richard McKenzie (1975) includes romance as well as crime, governance, and revolution as cases in which the rational choice methodology can extend our understanding.

In conversations at public choice and other conferences he would constantly challenge any theory that lacked clear rational choice foundations, often simultaneously creating admirers and detractors .

Nonetheless, Tullock regarded the homo economicus model to be only a partial explanation of individual and group behavior. People are 5% altruistic (1981) and nonpecuniary benefits (deference, power, and longevity) also produce relevant benefits for decision makers.

Gordon retired from academia in the Summer of 2008, and died November 2, 2014.

Most of us attending the conference knew Gordon personally. We’ll all remember him for his humor, his accessibility, his friendship, and his tendency to insult his friends--partly to keep us all just a bit off balance. It is his accessibility and humor that accounts for the wealth of Gordon Tullock stories that circulate among his friends.

For those of you more interested in his research and in personal accounts, some short memorials have been published in the current issue of Public Choice.

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³ Tullock was one of the formateurs of the American Public Choice Society. See Tollison (1982) for a short overview of the founding of the Public Choice Society and journal. He mentions that one issue a year was reserved for the more mathematical work of the Carnegie-Rochester branch of public choice. Tullock edited the remaining issues. Peter Bernholz (2002) notes that Tullock played an important role in efforts to establish a European Public Choice Society and regularly attended the meetings for its first three decades.

Unlikely Origin of a Scholar

Gordon Tullock was born in Rockford, Illinois on February 13, 1922 to George and Helen Tullock. His father was of Scottish ancestry and his mother was Pennsylvania Dutch. His higher education was obtained at the University of Chicago and its law school. Gordon began his under-graduate education at the University of Chicago in 1940, and after three years of undistinguished military service (Tullock's word), returned to Chicago where he received his Doctorate of Law degree from the University of Chicago Law School in 1947. The University of Chicago allowed two years of undergraduate courses to be combined with four years of formal law. Tullock completed this program in five years.

The baccalaureate degree which required payment of a five-dollar fee would have been awarded after two years at the law school, but Tullock's decision not to pay this small sum created the basis for endless speculation regarding his credentials as well as fueling the myth of the self-taught economist.

Tullock's short legal career was initiated and completed with a small but expensive downtown Chicago law firm. Tullock handled what he described as two rather simple cases. One case he won when he should not have won. The other he lost when he should have won. In both cases the expected probability of success was so low that he was dispatched with little instruction by the senior members of the firm. To make matters a bit worse, in the case he won, the client had been told by a senior attorney not to pursue the case and the senior attorney thought that Tullock had done something improper. In the case he lost, Tullock not only lost, but was reproached by the court.

The combination of these two cases led Tullock to believe that he would be better off in another profession. He had passed the Foreign Service examination before completing law school, so after five months as a law clerk, Tullock decided to build upon his interests in foreign affairs by pursuing a career in the diplomatic service. After a two-month initiation course at the Foreign Service Institute (part of the U. S. Department of State) in Washington, D.C., he received an assignment as vice consul at Tientsin, China, where, in his own words, was in charge of "odds and ends." In this assignment his report and cable writing duties further acquainted him with economics.

Tullock's transition from the State Department to an academic career was influenced by the associations he had forged while at the University of Chicago. Colin Campbell was one of the first people to recognize Tullock's scholarly potential. Tullock first met Campbell one Christmas when Campbell, then a doctoral student in economics at the University of Chicago, was visiting his fiancée, whose brother was a friend of Tullock. Tullock's collaboration with Campbell produced three papers, two on Chinese monetary history (Tullock and Campbell 1954, Tullock 1956) and the other on the Korean monetary system (Tullock and Campbell 1957). It is important to note that Tullock's work with Campbell came into being because of Tullock's observations of events around him, and at this time Tullock was not theorizing himself in a formal way or developing his new approaches to economics.

In 1956, Tullock left the State Department to pursue several research and writing projects. One of these projects was for the Princeton Panel (a subsidiary of the Gallop organization). During this period, Tullock met Karl Popper and assisted him in writing the postscript to *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Popper's influence was considerable

on Tullock's views of how to conduct research. Consequently Tullock became an advocate of statistical testing although he never did the testing himself. Indeed, Tullock's two works, *The Organization of Inquiry* (1966) and *The Logic of the Law* (1971), advanced hypotheses which Tullock hoped would be tested by others.

In 1958 Tullock was awarded a research fellowship by the Thomas Jefferson Center for Studies in Political Economy and Social Philosophy at the University of Virginia.

Tullock had first met G. Warren Nutter when both were members of the student debate team at the University of Chicago. Nutter introduced Tullock to James M. Buchanan at the annual meetings of the American Economic Association in Philadelphia in December 1957. Tullock gave Nutter and Buchanan copies of his manuscript on bureaucracy which both then read before they decided to offer Tullock the post-doctoral fellowship. From this association with Buchanan which began in Charlottesville, came *The Calculus of Consent*. Tullock went on to write many important articles and books.