



Chronicling 100 Years of the U.S. Economy

January 2021

Volume 101, Number 1

Top Influencers

The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) and its journal, the *Survey of Current Business*, are respected sources of data on the health of our national economy due in large part to the individuals who influenced BEA and its predecessor agencies over the past century. From economic theory to the mechanics of producing reliable statistics, their contributions helped make BEA and its accounts the reliable, authoritative sources of economic data they are today. The *Survey* has chronicled the evolution of BEA's output for almost a century.

As we celebrate the centennial of the *Survey*, some of these top influencers will be profiled on the [centennial website](#). This month, we present economist **Zvi Griliches**.

Zvi Griliches

A Major Contributor to Productivity Measurement

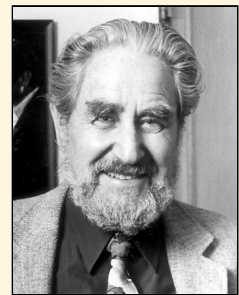
By *Mariam Tekle-Haimanot*

Zvi Griliches, a Holocaust survivor, was born in Kaunas, Lithuania, on September 12, 1930. He was a renowned empirical economist and scholar whose life and career covered numerous fields of economics. As an economist, he recognized the importance of measurement. He studied the methodologies that underlie the estimates of technical change, real output, and productivity.

Griliches had a significant impact on the real gross domestic product estimates produced by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. He also influenced the way that various government statistical agencies measure prices of products whose quality changes over time, such as pharmaceutical drugs, computers, and housing.

In his 1994 presidential address to the American Economic Association (AEA), Griliches emphasized the importance of data sources and methodologies, making them as important as the econometric techniques and theory they applied. He stated,

“The major message that I will be trying to convey is that we often misinterpret the available data because of inadequate attention to how they are produced and that the same inattention by us to the sources of our data help to explain why progress is so slow. Other fields of empirical economics are also struggling against limitations imposed by the available data. Great advances have been made in theory and in econometric techniques, but these will be wasted unless they are applied to the right data.”



Zvi Griliches

Griliches was a professor at Harvard University from 1969 until his death. He was the recipient of the 1965 John Bates Clark Medal, awarded by the AEA every 2 years to the economist “who is judged to have made the most significant contribution to economic thought and knowledge.” He went on to serve as the AEA president in 1993 and was a member of the National Academy of Sciences. He had an interest in the genealogy of his family and in numismatics. His genealogy research enabled him to connect with members of the Griliches family around the world who had also survived the Holocaust.

Griliches died in Cambridge, MA, on November 4, 1999. In 2005, the Zvi Griliches Research Data Center was established in his memory at the Samuel Neaman Institute for Advanced Studies in Science and Technology in Israel.

For more on Griliches, see “[Zvi Griliches and His Contributions to Economic Measurement](#),” published in the January 2000 *Survey of Current Business*.



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apps.bea.gov/scb
scb@bea.gov
(301) 278-9004