

The Passing of an Era

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us.123rf.com

On March 7 one of my favorite bloggers, Kevin Drum, passed away from a longtime fight with cancer.¹ To say he will be sorely missed is great understatement. From my limited perspective, his was the last of the original type of weblog, namely one written by a single person with multiple postings per day.² And his perspective was unique. It was the only blog I've seen that largely concentrates on data analysis of economics, science, medicine, societal trends, and on and on, in a clear, succinct, and informative manner. The text is further supported with simple graphs that provide visual clarity to the analysis.

Back in the early 2000s there was a slew of blogs stimulated by the novelty of the Internet, but also by the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the Bush-Cheney administration. One of the truly fascinating developments was the explosion of blogs during the occupation of Iraq written simultaneously by young Iraqis in Baghdad and American soldiers deployed a few miles away. Two are of special note: the young Iraqi woman, Riverbend, who produced extremely well-written English prose at *Baghdad Burning*,³ and the American soldier, “moja vera”, at *turningtables*,⁴ who wrote grammatically-challenged narratives that were nevertheless profoundly articulate. (The Riverbend link is still live, but there have been no postings for years.) In times past we had to wait for the end of a war in order to learn what the other side was thinking and experiencing, such as in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. To hear both sides as the conflict is unfolding is mind-bending.

An early insightful blog at the time was written by the late Mark Kleiman. But soon he, like others with day jobs, had to include additional writers to keep up the flow of postings. Mark claimed that eventually no blog could survive with a solo writer—it took too much time and effort.

Nevertheless Kevin Drum persisted from his California location. In those early days he was “Calpundit”.



In order to support his heavy blogging, Kevin joined the *Washington Monthly* staff in the spring of 2004 as part of the “Political Animal” team.

POLITICAL ANIMAL
By Kevin Drum, formerly of *Calpundit*

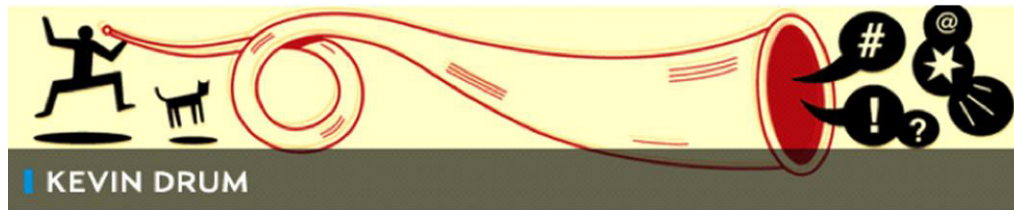
¹ <https://jabberwocking.com/health-update-100/>

² The role of such a blog may have been taken over by a Twitter account, but I consider that a different and less amicable animal. Tweets have to be brief and choppy. They do not provide the format for an extended narration that develops coherently a single idea with supporting graphics pleasingly arrayed.

³ <http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com/>

⁴ http://web.archive.org/web/20120115000000*/http://turningtables.blogspot.com/ (original defunct - <http://turningtables.blogspot.com/>)

He later joined the *Mother Jones* team to start his twelve-year time with them. With the change came another new logo:



In the spring of 2016, he made his final logo change at *Mother Jones*:



As I mentioned, Kevin’s forte was addressing topical issues from a numerical point of view. His ongoing graphs of the progress of the coronavirus throughout the world are a case in point. But he explored the basis for numerous assertions about society and the economy. One of his pet projects was debunking the idea that violent crime in the US is persisting or growing. He has plotted the decline of such violence since its peak at the end of the last century, and has convincingly claimed it is due to the demise of leaded gasoline in the 1970s. Even foreign countries that show a similar decline in violent crime from a peak turn out to have eliminated leaded gasoline about 20 years prior to the peak.

Kevin was also a great proponent of normalizing all monetary economical statements against inflation. Many alleged trends or crises vanish when inflation is taken into account. He has brought needed insights into taxation, employment, housing bubbles, incomes, trade, and numerous other economic areas. Certainly one can find information about all these subjects elsewhere, but they are scattered, often presented in arcane terminology, and at great length. It is difficult to find such brief, clear renditions all in one place.

It is a marvel that Kevin had been able to keep up such a prolific pace all these years, and especially during his heroic fight against the cancer. It is no easy feat to assemble and analyze data, present the results in simple graphs, and write a careful and accurate description of the subject. Now that is gone. Yet another painful loss in these wretched times.⁵ In any case, I am very grateful for the years we have had.

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⁵ See again “A Voice From the Past” (<https://josmfs.net/2024/11/06/a-voice-from-the-past/>).