

I have found “How Charts Lie” by Albert Cairo as an insightful dive into how to critically consume data we interact with on a daily basis. Much of his insights stem from a lot of data and charts I am familiar with, as he uses examples from recent popular media. Some of his suggestions I have heard before, such as vetting data sources and to critically think about what the data is not showing. Additionally, I have heard of how people are able to misrepresent a good data source, but never explored an example in depth. Cairo walks through a great of example of how this is actually done when referring to a chart created by the Council of Conservative Citizens, in which they misrepresent percentages of a victim’s race broken down by a violent offender’s race. While they do use the Bureau of Justice as a data source, Jared Taylor manipulates the data by modifying the way in which percentages are calculated to help him tell his own narrative. This is one of Cairo’s most damning examples as to how misconstrued data be a matter of life and death as this chart is cited by terrorist Dylann Roof, who murdered 9 people at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015. Cairo also cites many maps created around the 2016 presidential election, in which individuals on both sides of the aisle cite to further their political agendas. He shows how many of them work to do this by excluding data or designing them to be misleading. These maps can influence political decisions, both at a large scale and that of the individual when they enter the voting booth. It’s important to view them as potentially divisive pieces of media when consuming them, and use them as examples of how

the method in which we present data can be used for personal gain or to try to achieve a certain reaction from the consumer.

Furthermore, Cairo is very good at teaching via example- something that makes the book quite readable and able to communicate what not to do when constructing your own charts. I find that a lot of his insights will stay with me when trying to communicate my findings. I want to make sure to include all pieces of relevant data, and not let my biases influence what I end up producing when conducting statistical analysis and constructing charts and graphs. I plan to be transparent by citing and making sure to link to my data sources and iterate any of the limitations that my data may have when presenting my findings. I also plan to put thought into how exactly trends are displayed on my charts, such as following some of Cairo's suggestions when it comes to showing axis scales and starting values. I hope that these insights, as well as the ones I will gain from reading the rest of the book, will help me to be successful in this course and future experiences with data.