

Data as a Narrative: Teacher's Guide

Graph A misconception: Total (Caput Mundi) versus percent growth (Gotham)

Percent growth is often misleading, and you'll see it all the time—especially as advertisers try to overstate the benefits of their products. This is because small numbers can have a very large percent growth without increasing by much in total. The Bangladesh-born population in NYC has increased by a large percentage but still remains a small minority among foreign-born New Yorkers.

Graph B misconception: Percent of the city (Caput Mundi) versus percent share of the country (Gotham)

While the “Caput Mundi” graph is easily understood, the “Gotham” graph puts the same values into the context of the U.S. as a whole. Therefore, by looking at both you can see that though Caribbean immigrants are a proportionally small group among foreign-born New Yorkers, these numbers are still a very large share of the rest of the country, where Caribbean-born Americans are relatively rare. A nice flipside to this is Latin American-born immigrants – since there are many in other parts of the country, the large total in NYC is only a small fraction.

Graph C misconception: Part (Gotham) vs. whole (Caput Mundi)

While the total population of the city dropped rapidly during the 1970s, the immigrant population remained on a steady increase. Looking at both graphs, one can conclude that the drop in population was a result of a large amount of American-born New Yorkers leaving, not because of a decrease in immigration.