

Reading the Future: “Futurama” and the New York World’s Fair 1939-40

I. “Futurama” Booklet – A Primary Source

The “Futurama” souvenir brochure from the 1939-1940 World’s Fair was given out as a sort of advertisement to visitors to the fair. This is a primary source. It comes to us unedited and unexplained. It is up to us (as history detectives) to figure out what it means.

<http://bit.ly/2dX5Jnq>

●Look over the Futurama booklet (pp. 112-121 in the Course Pack). We will look at the first pages together.

Work in groups.

1) Who is the author of the "Futurama" booklet? Does the authorship make you trust it as a (primary) source more or less? Why?

2) Which type of source (Futurama booklet, videos, online maps) is more appealing to you? Which source is the most accurate? Which kind of source do you think most people in the U.S. use to understand the past? (Also, are there any limitations to this kind of knowledge?)

3) What is the vision of the future for cars and highways in the brochure and video clips / online resources from Futurama? Do the videos and photos in the brochure look like real highways today? Did the vision of the future in 1939 come true or not? Try to decide as a team.

Reporting Out – One person on each team should be ready to report your group’s answers to the class for these questions.

(~15-20 minutes)