“Understanding is a kind of ecstasy.” Karl Sagan

“Knowledge is of two kinds: we know a subject ourselves or we know where we can find information upon it” Samuel Johnson

The Assignment:
The research paper will explore some aspect of Brooklyn, for example, a neighborhood, a landmark, a site, a structure, an institution like Brooklyn College. You might prefer to do a survey of, conduct interviews about, or do an oral history of a specific group of people, a neighborhood, a block, a school, a religious institution, etc.

The paper should be a minimum of 7-8 pages of text, exclusive of title page, table of contents, tables (unless you are tabulating the results of your research), footnotes, endnotes, bibliography, and any graphics.

Common Types of Student Research Papers:
Student research papers are usually one of three kinds:
• an informative research paper, which presents facts objectively by reviewing all of the available material or the most respected authorities on a subject.
• an investigative research paper, which sets out to answer question or resolve an issue, with no preconception,
• an interpretive or argumentative research paper selects data or evidence to support the writer’s viewpoint or hypothesis.

The Research Process:
The researcher is a detective, discovering and uncovering facts and putting them together in a meaningful way to arrive at the truth. It is an exciting experience if you choose a topic that attracts or intrigues you.

Is there a question, an issue, or an interest you would like to know more about? Do you have an interpretation of a controversy that you would like to work out? Is there something/someone little known or unknown that you think deserves to be known?

Your Audience or Reader:
You are an expert and are writing for an educated reader who is not an expert in your subject, like the other students in this class and the instructor.

Primary and Secondary Sources:
The sources of any research are of two kinds:
• Primary sources involve a first-hand knowledge or experience of the subject. These include surveys you conduct, lab experiments you conduct, the raw data from other people’s experiments and surveys and interviews, field notes, interviews you conducted or listened to on tape, letters, diaries, autobiographies, newspaper, art works, performances you attended, eyewitness accounts, and historical documents.
• Secondary sources are not first-hand, though they may be based on first-hand knowledge. These include the written or oral reports of other people’s activities and ideas, scholarly articles and books, articles about other people’s surveys, lab reports, etc., biographies, reviews, criticism, and novels, plays, and poems (unless your topic is the writer of the novels, plays, or poems).

Your research paper must include primary sources.

(Over)
Possible topics:

A neighborhood
Coney Island, Brooklyn Heights, Redhook, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Flatbush, DUMBO, Weeksville

A building or institution
Erasmus Hall: its history from its founding in 1787 to landmark
Controversy at the Brooklyn Museum
The development of the Brooklyn Academy of Music
Plymouth Church and Its Role in the Abolition Movement

A famous or noteworthy site
Greenwood Cemetery
Prospect Park
Brooklyn Navy Yard

The history of Brooklyn
How Brooklyn came to merge with New York City in 1898
The *Brooklyn Eagle*: voice and spirit of nineteenth century Brooklyn
The *Brooklyn Eagle*’s portrayal of African Americans
The Battle of Brooklyn
The Draft Riot of 1863
The Italian or Jewish or Scandinavian or Irish immigrant in Brooklyn
The early history of Brooklyn as early villages

A structure
The opening of the Brooklyn Bridge
The Brooklyn Bridge as engineering marvel
The roller coaster and Coney Island

Trials, scandals, and controversies
The Beecher-Tilton adultery trial, 1875
Dr. Mary Dixon Jones’s trials for manslaughter and libel against the *Brooklyn Eagle*, 1890.
The Maybee murders, 1883
The Atlantic Yard development

Brooklyn College
Student Political Activism in the 1930s
Student response to the Rapp-Coudert Committee
The early years
The basketball scandal
The Chemkit scam

Miscellaneous suggestions
The portrayal of Brooklyn in movies
A sports team—e.g., Brooklynites’ relationship with the Dodgers, the history of Ebbets Field

Oral history
Explore some aspect of the immigrant experience: Why did these individuals immigrate? What did they expect to find, and what did they find? What are their relationships like with their parents or with their children?

What did a neighborhood or a block or a building used to be like? What do the inhabitants think caused the changes? How do they feel about the changes?

What is happening with your high school graduating class? Has their attitude toward their high school experience changed since graduation? How have the dreams, goals, expectations they had when graduated been met? How do they see the future?

Is there a difference in the attitudes of younger and older African Americans or immigrants or your family members or any other group you can think of?

Note: Some of these topics are very broad and need to be narrowed, considerably narrowed. They are intended to stimulate your thinking. And as always in this class, you may choose a topic not on this list, even one not remotely similar to any of them. What matters is that the topic interests you and is an appropriate research topic. You will submit your topic for approval.