Students will write a 6-8-page ORIGINAL, ANALYTICAL research paper.  In this paper, you will choose an event from the last 100 years that addresses a why question, or which seeks to explain an outcome of some significance over the last 100 years.  The paper must be based on at least 3-5 primary sources that offer insight into the question; three scholarly books and four scholarly articles.  This is not an easy assignment and you will work through several stages and drafts. Choose a question that deals with the part of the world you know/like best or are most curious about.  If you don’t have a favorite region or country, pick one and do it soon.  It is often easier to take one a narrow question rather than a very broad one.

 Some examples of broad questions that might be starting places to find a narrower puzzle:

Why did the US invade Iraq in 2003?

Why did apartheid end in South Africa?

Why did a communist party loyalist like Gorbachev carry out reforms that ultimately led to the end of the Soviet system?

Why did the US in 1991 allow Saddam Hussein to stay in power?

You should organize your paper in:

1. a clear introduction that presents the puzzling event/issue that you will explain and states your argument in brief;

2. supporting sections with evidence that develops your argument and considers alternative explanations, and;

3. a conclusion that summarizes your arguments and illustrates its significance (answering the “so-what” question).  In academia, we usually distinguish between “primary sources” and “secondary sources,” which are scholarly interpretations of topics.  You are required to consult secondary sources—scholarly books and journal articles—to help make sense of the original documents you work with.  They
are “secondary” (not “primary”) in the sense that they are twice removed from the actual events under consideration.  (Remember:  all primary and secondary sources should be cited in your paper and listed in your bibliography.  Your t.a. will tell you which citation style he or she prefers you to use.)  Be careful about internet sources.  For example, Wikipedia is not an entirely reliable source.

First Stage of the Paper—Your research project:  A one-page description of the paper’s topic along with an annotated list of possible documentary sources (no more than 1.5pages, typed, double-spaced.  This description should lay out in a sentence or two the question you will research for your final paper.  The list of sources should include possible documents (not databases or locations that file documents).  Each source should be annotated which means they should have one or two sentences explaining what the document is about.  Documents should be listed in bibliographical format (see above). This exercise should be taken seriously, although your choice of topic is not necessarily binding. In fact, the point of writing out topics in this fashion is to help you generate new ideas and refine your research plan.