**Going from topic to thesis question, research questions**:

**Topic**: exploitation of immigrants in meat-packing

**Background**: I have read about this topic in the famous Upton Sinclair novel *The Jungle* (1906), and again in *Fast Food Nation*, where Eric Schlosser details the historical arc from that era, through the slow but successful rise of the unions until meat-packers could have middle-class lives and send their kids to college, to the deliberate “union-busting” tactics of the big-ag companies in the 1980s, particularly IBP (Iowa Beef Packers) and ConAgra. Then Schlosser describes how the meatpackers began to focus on migrant labor, the lowest-skilled and often illegal immigrants who suffer essentially the same exploitation as Upton Sinclair’s novel depicted (except back then the immigrants were mostly from Eastern Europe). This made me wonder if the process could be reversed in our day, and the exploitation ended again, through a return to union organizing or some other way.

**Thesis question**: How might immigrant workers in the meat-packing industry gain back the rights that were lost in the 1980s union-busting era?

**Research questions:**

Is it still mostly immigrants doing this work, even in our “jobless recovery”?

Is the exploitation really as bad as Schlosser says?

What do the meatpacking companies say in their own defense?

Has there been any progress since *Fast Food Nation* came out (2001)?

Is it the same nation-wide, or worse/better in some areas?

What legislation covers this kind of thing?

Are there any legislators currently working on protecting meatpacking workers?

Are there any unions covering these workers?

Is meatpacking any better in any other countries?

If so, how are the workers’ rights protected: unions, government regulations & real inspections?

Is there still a danger to our food supply’s safety because of working conditions, as in Upton Sinclair’s time?