Developing Your Working Thesis

A good thesis…

…is based on extensive reading

…is based on and gives an answer to a good question

…is one clear subject/idea

…invites and allows disagreement

Take several natural steps in narrowing down your subject…

…start with the list of topics allowed, see lecture on *Guided Research*

…select a general topics like biographies, or women in the Civil War

…then select a specific topic like spies during the war

…then you can select to study Lafayette C. Baker, Union spy

…or, if interested in owmen, you could compare several female spies

Now you are close, but you need to keep reading

…a good thesis also tells the reader how you will interpret the topic

…a good thesis tells the read how you will cover your topic—a roadmap for research

And you come up with a working thesis something like:

> The remarkably able Union spymaster, Lafayette C. Baker, became indespensible to the Union cause, yet he faced constant political interference. His secret missions for General Winfield Scott, his work with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, is expertise in the search for Lincoln's assassins, and his suspicions of President Johnson detail a life of commitment and trumoil.

Lots of work yet to do, but the above statement is debatable, is based on reading, takes one clear position (you are to prove Baker was sucessful, but a political pawn), and lawy out some sign posts of evidence you will cover in your argument.