Croly, *Promise of American Life*
Ryan, *A Living Wage*
Diner, “*Progressive Discourse*”

Study Questions

1. For Teddy Roosevelt and others, Croly’s *Promise* expressed the central vision and program of progressivism. What is the promise of American life as he describes it? What does Croly see as “exceptional” about America that gives it “a character all its own?” Do you think that Croly gives a fair account of the way America’s institutions have given its citizens prosperity, liberty, and equality? Who counts as “American?” How does Croly see conditions changing in his own time? What does he mean when he calls (22) for a “partial revision of some of the most important articles in the traditional creed?” What connection does he see between “liberty” and “individual competition” as practiced in the 19th century and the new industrial poverty? How does this new “social problem” undermine the promise of American life? What new role does he give to the national government? Who in 1909 might have recoiled against Croly’s call for “a constructive national purpose?” Why do you think his call for reform of institutions appealed to Roosevelt?
2. Father John Ryan attacked the social question from a different angle, one that resonates strongly with a movement underway right now in Santa Barbara and across the USA. How does Ryan define and justify a “Living Wage?” What does Ryan include in the category of a “decent livelihood?” Why is this a right? What does his call for a living wage imply for a traditional liberal conception of property rights? Does Ryan sound to you like a socialist? Does Croly? Why or why not? What would you call these people?

3. Diner’s important chapter on the “progressive discourse” shows how the progressive effort moved up through the nation’s political system from urban to state to national-level reforms. It also teases out important differences between the two branches of progressivism advocated by Roosevelt and Wilson in 1910-12, leading up to the election of 1912, which Wilson won without a majority of the popular vote. Would Croly and Lippman have been pleased by Wilson’s election? How was this election both a key turning point that produced major steps in the construction of a regulatory state, and also perhaps what one historian has called—in a reference to Croly’s call for national purpose—a time of “Lost Promise?”