Roosevelt, “The New Nationalism”
Wilson, “Benevolence or Justice
Wilson, “Restoration of Competition, Not Regulation of Monopolies”
Cooper, “The New Freedom”
Study Questions

A Harvard educated “rich kid,” devoted family man, recovered neurasthenic, accomplished writer, conservationist, and lover of the West, Roosevelt brought with him to the presidency the concerns of a progressive New York governor. He won some major victories against the trusts but wanted more. By 1910, fed up with Taft’s alliance with the conservative “Stalwart” faction of the Republican Party, TR stepped forward to claim the leadership of the “Insurgent” Republicans, who also were in the process of giving up on Taft. The Osawatamie speech in August 1910 can be taken as the first salvo in his campaign for the Republican nomination in 1912. In that election, now as the candidate of the new Progressive or Bull Moose Party, he went up against a Princeton educated Southern Democrat who had been a reform governor of New Jersey. Compare their visions for America.

1. What did TR mean to convey when he titled his speech “The New Nationalism.” Why (besides the fact that he was participating in a commemoration of John Brown’s anti-slavery crusade) did he invoke the memory of the Civil War? What lessons does he pull from Lincoln? Is there something important missing from his memory of what the Civil War could have accomplished? What does this tell us about Roosevelt’s sense of who was part of “the nation?” Does he have any message on the issue of race in America?

2. How does Roosevelt define the problems facing the country in 1910? What do citizens (or at least those who enjoy full citizenship) have a right to expect? What does he mean by a “square deal?” Does it seem square to you?

3. This is 1910, a high point in class animosity. How does TR approach the question of class in America? What are the duties and rights of capital and labor? What moral lessons does he offer to both? Where does he stand particularly on the right way to deal with corporate power?

4. What specific reforms does TR include in the laundry list of progressive issues he runs over? What dangers on the left and right does he caution against?

5. Why does TR call for a “New Nationalism?” Who or what are the “enemies” of national unity and high moral purpose? What reforms in the role and structure of the central government does his nationalism demand? What old traditions
and habits, what old centers of power in the state, does he condemn as contrary to national unity and efficiency? Was Roosevelt in favor of “big government?”

6. What in Roosevelt’s vision does Wilson attack as he outlines his “New Freedom” in opposition to TR’s “New Nationalism?” Freedom for whom, and from what? What fundamental differences in views the “trusts,” on human nature and government, does he convey when he refers to TR’s program as a “blind alley?”

7. What fatal flaw does Wilson see in Roosevelt’s policies toward control of the big corporations? What does he convey by juxtaposing “benevolence” and “justice?” Regulated competition and regulated monopoly? How does he frame an appeal to labor? Do you see a promise in Wilson’s program for Black Americans? Do Wilson’s criticisms of TR seem fair?

8. How does Wilson propose to control big business? In whose interest does he claim to speak? Which approach seems sounder to you? Which did we follow? If you had been there in 1912, would you have voted for Wilson? for TR? Why or why not?

9. Why do you suppose one historian of progressivism referred to Wilson’s election as a “lost promise?” Was there a reference to Croly there, as well as to TR’s vision of a more centralized, positive government?”