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| **Highlighted Text- Origins of the Utopian Idea** | **Reader Annotations** |
| **T**he western idea of utopia originatesin the ancient world, where legendsof an earthly paradise lost to history (e.g., Edenin the Old Testament, the mythical GoldenAge of Greek mythology), combined with thehuman desire to create, or recreate, an idealsociety, helped form the utopian idea. TheGreek philosopher Plato (427?-347 BC) postulateda human utopian society in his Republic,where he imagined the ideal Greek city-state,with communal living among the ruling class,perhaps based on the model of the ancientGreek city-state of Sparta. Certainly theEnglish statesman Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) had Plato’s Republic in mind when hewrote the book Utopia (Greek ou, not + topos,a place) in 1516. Describing a perfect politicaland social system on an imaginary island, theterm “Utopia” has since entered the Englishlanguage meaning any place, state, or situationof ideal perfection. Both the desire for anEdenic Utopia and an attempt to start over in“unspoiled” America merged in the minds ofseveral religious and secular European groupsand societies.The 19th-century utopian sects can tracetheir roots back to the Protestant Reformation.Following the early Christian communities,communal living developed largely within amonastic context, which was created by SaintBenedict of Nursia (480?-543?AD), whofounded the Benedictine order. During theMiddle Ages a communal life was led by severallay religious groups such as the Beghardsand Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit. Inallowing the sexes to live in the same community,these societies differed from the earlierCatholic and Orthodox monasteries.The Protestant Reformation, which originatedwith the teachings of Martin Luther(1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564),changed western European societal attitudesabout the nature of religion and work. Lutherbroke with the medieval conception of labor,which involved a hierarchy of professions, bystressing that all work was of equal spiritualdignity. Calvin’s doctrines stressed predestination,which stated that a person could notknow for certain if they were among God’sElect or the damned. These theological idealsabout work were stressed in the variousAmerican religious utopian societies.In the wars and general disorder followingthe establishment of Protestant sects innorthern Europe, many peasants joinedAnabaptist and millenarianist groups, some ofwhich, like the Hutterian Brethren, practicedcommunal ownership of property. To avoidpersecution several of these groups immigratedto America, where the idea of communal livingdeveloped and expanded.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Rustin Quaide is a historian with the National Registerof Historic Places, Washington, DC. | What words come to your mind when you think of the word utopia?Why do you think Eden is a utopian society? What happened to Eden? Did it stay utopian?What do you think Plant meant by communal living? Analyze the definition of utopia. What is ironic about a utopian society based on the term’s definition?Describe the 19th century utopian sects. Highlight any terms that you are unfamiliar with while you were reading. Do you think the article does a good job with providing context clues? Why or why not? |