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| **Highlighted Text- Origins of the Utopian Idea** | **Reader Annotations** |
| **T**he western idea of utopia originates  in the ancient world, where legends  of an earthly paradise lost to history (e.g., Eden  in the Old Testament, the mythical Golden  Age of Greek mythology), combined with the  human desire to create, or recreate, an ideal  society, helped form the utopian idea. The  Greek philosopher Plato (427?-347 BC) postulated  a 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 ancient  Greek city-state of Sparta. Certainly the  English statesman Sir Thomas More (1478-  1535) had Plato’s Republic in mind when he  wrote the book Utopia (Greek ou, not + topos,  a place) in 1516. Describing a perfect political  and social system on an imaginary island, the  term “Utopia” has since entered the English  language meaning any place, state, or situation  of ideal perfection. Both the desire for an  Edenic Utopia and an attempt to start over in  “unspoiled” America merged in the minds of  several religious and secular European groups  and societies.  The 19th-century utopian sects can trace  their roots back to the Protestant Reformation.  Following the early Christian communities,  communal living developed largely within a  monastic context, which was created by Saint  Benedict of Nursia (480?-543?AD), who  founded the Benedictine order. During the  Middle Ages a communal life was led by several  lay religious groups such as the Beghards  and Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit. In  allowing the sexes to live in the same community,  these societies differed from the earlier  Catholic and Orthodox monasteries.  The Protestant Reformation, which originated  with the teachings of Martin Luther  (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564),  changed western European societal attitudes  about the nature of religion and work. Luther  broke with the medieval conception of labor,  which involved a hierarchy of professions, by  stressing that all work was of equal spiritual  dignity. Calvin’s doctrines stressed predestination,  which stated that a person could not  know for certain if they were among God’s  Elect or the damned. These theological ideals  about work were stressed in the various  American religious utopian societies.  In the wars and general disorder following  the establishment of Protestant sects in  northern Europe, many peasants joined  Anabaptist and millenarianist groups, some of  which, like the Hutterian Brethren, practiced  communal ownership of property. To avoid  persecution several of these groups immigrated  to America, where the idea of communal living  developed and expanded.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Rustin Quaide is a historian with the National Register  of 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? |