



## Utopian Communities, 1800-1890

Guide for Curriculum Unit 89.01.04  
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This curriculum unit is designed for American history students and ninth-grade World History students; it is intended to take up ten to fifteen class periods. One goal of this unit is to increase student awareness of the practical idealism of men and women of the past. It is designed to be used in conjunction with a unit I wrote in 1987 (Volume 2) entitled, "Utopian Communities." This unit should challenge students to analyze, think, and write more critically, while examining utopian writings of thinkers and leaders in the nineteenth century.

Initially, students will be expected to design a plan for an "ideal" community, including a map, and basic rules for the community members to follow. Later, students will compare their ideas and work within classroom "community" groups to formulate rules and policies acceptable to all within the group.

The content of the unit introduces students to the nineteenth century reform movements in the United States and the sectarian groups, such as the Shakers, which influenced the communitarian movement in America. The bulk of my material compares two experiments in communal living prior to the Civil War. The first, led by British industrialist and social theorist Robert Owen, was called "New Harmony," located in Indiana. Owen believed that a changed environment would ultimately result in changed lives; all that was necessary was proper education within an orderly environment. The second experiment was a religious enterprise led by John H. Noyes, whose followers were known as "Perfectionists," and who believed that through practicing "Christian communism," believers could reach a state of moral perfection. By comparing the two communities, one secular, one sectarian, students should come to appreciate the complexity of community life and possible implications for community life today.

Students should come to conclude certain reasons for communities to organize, the role of effective leadership, and economic and social life to the success of a small community. Ultimately, what were the reasons for the downfall of these communities and communitarian life in the nineteenth century?

(Recommended for United States History, grades 10-11, and Western Civilization, grade 9)

### **Key Words**

*Communism Communistic Societies Utopian Communities American History Social Movements Nineteenth Century*

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