

Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism

Are you ready to embark on a journey through the fascinating history of American utopianism? Join us as we explore the concept of a perfect society, the dreams of idealistic individuals, and the various attempts made to create a "paradise on earth." From the early settlement experiments to the social movements of the 19th century, this article will delve deep into the captivating story of utopian ideals and their pursuit in America.

The Origins of Utopianism

A utopia is a vision of an ideal society, a place where peace, prosperity, and harmony prevail. The roots of American utopianism can be traced back to the early European settlements in the New World. The Pilgrims who arrived on the Mayflower in 1620 sought religious freedom and the opportunity to build a society based on their spiritual beliefs.

Over the centuries, numerous utopian communities emerged across America, each with its own vision of an ideal society. Whether rooted in religious principles, social equality, or communal living, these experiments aimed to create a utopia where everyone could live harmoniously together.

 Paradise
Now: The Story
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Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism

by Joseph F. Kelly (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

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Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Word Wise : Enabled
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America's Most Famous Utopian Communities

One of the earliest and most well-known utopian communities was the Shakers. Founded in the late 18th century, the Shakers believed in communal living, simplicity, and celibacy. Their beautiful architecture, exquisite craftsmanship, and unique approach to gender equality still fascinate people to this day.

Another significant utopian community was the Oneida Perfectionists, established in the mid-19th century. Rejecting traditional marriage and advocating for complex mating practices, the Oneida community sought to create a society of unlimited love and mutual cooperation.

The transcendentalist movement, led by prominent figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, also had a profound impact on American utopianism. Their ideas of self-reliance, individualism, and spiritual enlightenment inspired countless individuals to seek utopian ideals.

Challenges and Downfalls

Despite their noble aspirations, utopian communities often faced numerous challenges that ultimately led to their downfall. Internal conflicts, economic struggles, and the difficulty of sustaining idealistic principles in practice proved to be major hurdles for these communities.

The Brook Farm experiment, for instance, founded by Transcendentalists in the mid-19th century, aimed to create a self-sustaining agrarian commune where

individuals could pursue intellectual and manual labor. However, financial difficulties and lack of agricultural knowledge ultimately led to its demise.

The rise of industrialization and capitalism in the late 19th century also presented challenges to utopian communities. The allure of individual wealth and the increasing emphasis on personal success often overshadowed collective ideals and made it difficult for utopian communities to thrive.

The Legacy of American Utopianism

Although many utopian communities failed to achieve their goals, their legacy and influence remain deeply ingrained in American culture. The ideals of communal living, social equality, and spiritual fulfillment continue to inspire individuals and shape our understanding of a better society to this day.

Moreover, the spirit of utopianism can be seen in various social and political movements throughout American history. From the fight for civil rights to the counterculture movements of the 1960s, the pursuit of a better world has always been a driving force behind these social changes.

The story of American utopianism is a captivating journey through the dreams and aspirations of individuals seeking a better world. From the early settlement experiments to the rise and fall of various utopian communities, the pursuit of a perfect society has left an indelible mark on American history.

While many of these attempts may have faltered, their spirit lives on, reminding us of the power of imagination, idealism, and the ongoing quest for a better future. As we navigate the complexities of our modern world, let us not forget the lessons and inspirations we can draw from the fascinating story of American utopianism.



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For readers of Jill Lepore, Joseph J. Ellis, and Tony Horwitz comes a lively, thought-provoking intellectual history of the golden age of American utopianism—and the bold, revolutionary, and eccentric visions for the future put forward by five of history’s most influential utopian movements.

In the wake of the Enlightenment and the onset of industrialism, a generation of dreamers took it upon themselves to confront the messiness and injustice of a rapidly changing world. To our eyes, the utopian communities that took root in America in the nineteenth century may seem ambitious to the point of delusion, but they attracted members willing to dedicate their lives to creating a new social order and to asking the bold question What should the future look like?

In *Paradise Now*, Chris Jennings tells the story of five interrelated utopian movements, revealing their relevance both to their time and to our own. Here is Mother Ann Lee, the prophet of the Shakers, who grew up in newly industrialized Manchester, England—and would come to build a quiet but fierce religious tradition on the opposite side of the Atlantic. Even as the society she founded spread across the United States, the Welsh industrialist Robert Owen came to

the Indiana frontier to build an egalitarian, rationalist utopia he called the New Moral World. A decade later, followers of the French visionary Charles Fourier blanketed America with colonies devoted to inaugurating a new millennium of pleasure and fraternity. Meanwhile, the French radical Étienne Cabet sailed to Texas with hopes of establishing a communist paradise dedicated to ideals that would be echoed in the next century. And in New York's Oneida Community, a brilliant Vermonter named John Humphrey Noyes set about creating a new society in which the human spirit could finally be perfected in the image of God.

Over time, these movements fell apart, and the national mood that had inspired them was drowned out by the dream of westward expansion and the waking nightmare of the Civil War. Their most galvanizing ideas, however, lived on, and their audacity has influenced countless political movements since. Their stories remain an inspiration for everyone who seeks to build a better world, for all who ask, What should the future look like?

Praise for Paradise Now

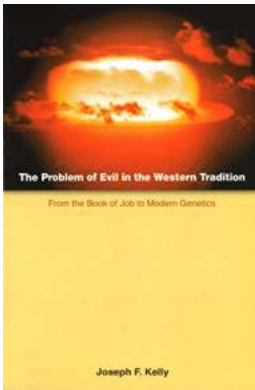
“Uncommonly smart and beautifully written . . . a triumph of scholarship and narration: five stand-alone community studies and a coherent, often spellbinding history of the United States during its tumultuous first half-century . . . Although never less than evenhanded, and sometimes deliciously wry, Jennings writes with obvious affection for his subjects. To read Paradise Now is to be dazzled, humbled and occasionally flabbergasted by the amount of energy and talent sacrificed at utopia's altar.”—The New York Times Book Review

“Writing an impartial, respectful account of these philanthropies and follies is no small task, but Mr. Jennings largely pulls it off with insight and aplomb.

Indulgently sympathetic to the utopian impulse in general, he tells a good story.


His explanations of the various reformist credos are patient, thought-provoking and . . . entertaining.”—The Wall Street Journal

“As a tour guide, Jennings is thoughtful, engaging and witty in the right doses. . . . He makes the subject his own with fresh eyes and a crisp narrative, rich with detail. . . . In the end, Jennings writes, the communards’ disregard for the world as it exists sealed their fate. But in revisiting their stories, he makes a compelling case that our present-day ‘deficit of imagination’ could be similarly fated.”—San Francisco Chronicle



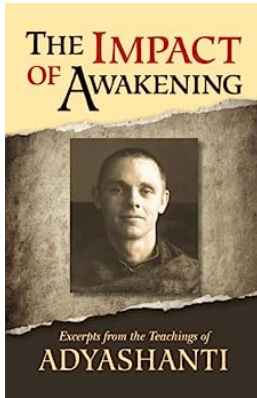
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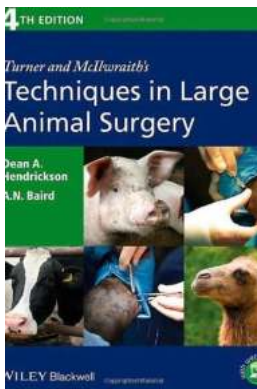
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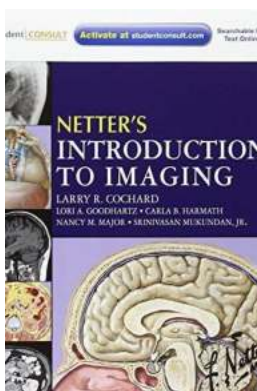
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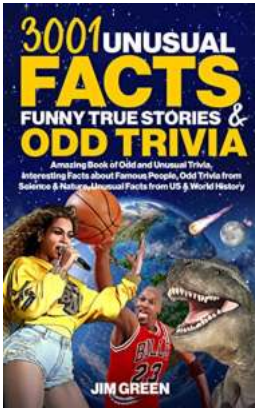
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