UNITED ORDERS

“United orders” refers to the cooperative enterprises established in LDS communities of the Great Basin, Mexico, and Canada during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in an effort to better establish ideal Christian community and group economic self-sufficiency. The roots go back to Joseph Smith’s 1831 revelations outlining the law of consecration and stewardship as the foundation for the ideal community. Economic goals of consecration included relative income equality, group self-sufficiency, and the elimination of poverty (see Economic History of the Church). Under this plan, the head of each family would consecrate or deed all real and personal property to the Presiding Bishop of the Church and would receive, in turn, a stewardship, or “inheritance,” from consecrated property. Thereafter, Church members would consecrate annually all surplus production from their stewardships to the bishop’s storehouse. This system functioned briefly in a few LDS communities in the Midwest during the 1830s; in the Great Basin, Church members prepared deeds of consecration in 1855–1858, but they were never acted upon.

During the 1860s President Brigham Young reemphasized economic cooperation and self-sufficiency, and a network of more than 150 cooperative mercantile and manufacturing enterprises was established in the region (see Pioneer Economy). Designed to promote unity and to reduce dependence on non-Mormon merchants and traders, the cooperatives did not require consecration of property but issued and sold shares of stock and paid wages and dividends. Among the most successful cooperatives was the Brigham City Mercantile and Manufacturing Association, which operated forty departments and encompassed the economic activity of the entire community. President Young saw this cooperative movement as an important step toward the ideal society but recognized that a more comprehensive system was necessary to reach his political and economic goals.

Three events undoubtedly influenced Brigham Young to introduce the United Order system in 1874. First, completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 led to an influx of Gentiles into the territory. The accompanying individualistic and competitive attitudes and institutions of nineteenth-century American capitalism seriously threatened to erode the bonds of selflessness and cooperation that held the LDS social fabric together. Second, congressional bills designed to reduce LDS political and economic power and individual rights led to persecution, including the arrest of Brigham Young in 1871. Third, the Panic of 1873 brought depression to Utah’s mining industry and loss of jobs and markets to Mormon laborers, farmers, and merchants. Faced with general
disruption of social, political, and economic life, Brigham Young introduced The United Order of Enoch.

He organized the first united order at St. George, Utah, on February 9, 1874. The last known Church-authorized united order was organized at Cave Valley, Chihuahua, Mexico, on January 9, 1893. In the interim more than 200 united orders were organized in LDS communities in several mountain states, including Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Arizona, and Nevada, mostly in 1874 and 1875. This ambitious attempt to establish a utopian society was both a direct response to the forces that threatened LDS economic and political independence and a final effort by Brigham Young to build the ideal community envisioned by Joseph Smith (see CITY PLANNING).

Brigham Young saw the united order as an intermediate step between the cooperatives of the 1860s and Joseph Smith’s ideal community based on consecration and stewardship. Though they differed from one another in form, nearly all united orders were organized as voluntary producer cooperatives where, rather than working for fixed wages, members shared the net income of the enterprise. United orders used two main types of producer cooperatives. In the St. George type, members contributed their economic property to the order and received dividends and labor income according to the relative amounts of capital and labor contributed. A governing board directed the enterprise.

The second category of united orders was communal. Members contributed all their property to the order, shared more or less equally in the common product, and functioned, ate, and worked as a well-regulated family. This system is called the Orderville type, after the most famous of the united orders. Established in southern Utah in 1875, the Orderville united order attained almost complete self-sufficiency. It produced its own food, fuel, fiber, and nearly all needed manufactured items, some of which it exported to other parts of the territory. The most successful of the communal-type orders, it disbanded in 1885. In addition to Orderville, communal united orders were established in several LDS communities in southern Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and Mexico.

The few united orders that were not producer cooperatives were patterned after the Brigham City united order (formerly the Brigham City Mercantile and Manufacturing Association), a joint-stock company with significant cooperative characteristics. The Brigham City-type united orders were intended to strengthen and reinforce existing cooperative arrangements. Such orders did not require consecration of all one’s property and labor but operated much like a profit-sharing capitalist enterprise, issuing dividends on stock and hiring labor. There was no necessary connection between owning stock in the united order and working for the order, although workers were encouraged to take part of their wages in stock. Several Brigham City-type united orders were established in northern Utah and southern Idaho. Wards in larger cities in the territory used a modified Brigham City plan in which members pooled their capital to establish a needed cooperative or corporate enterprise. These enterprises were similar in many respects to stake welfare projects organized in the twentieth century as part of the Church welfare system.

Brigham Young believed that pooling capital and labor would not only promote unity and self-sufficiency but would also provide increased production, investment, and consumption through specialization, division of labor, and economies of scale. In spite of some notable successes, however, the united order movement was relatively short-lived. Most of the St. George-type orders never fully operated or operated only briefly. When President Young died in 1877, most of the united orders had already failed. Some, like those in Orderville and Brigham City, functioned successfully for a decade, and a very few continued in some form into the 1890s. At least one, a joint enterprise of the Logan Second and Third wards, survived into the twentieth century, selling out to private interests in 1909. Many factors combined to hamper the united order movement, including uncertainty as to operating rules, influx of immigrants with no capital to contribute, internal disputes, difficulties surrounding legal incorporation, and persecution and federal prosecution of united order leaders.

In spite of the short life of the movement, the united order was important to the development of LDS pioneer society and economy in several ways. First, the united order was an important vehicle for colonization of the inhospitable southern part of the Great Basin, where cooperation and organization were essential for survival. Second, the united order provided a mechanism through which Church leaders were able to promote eco-
nomic self-sufficiency. The diversification of Utah’s economy that resulted from this process helped Utah avoid the mineral-based economic colonialism experienced by other mountain states during the late nineteenth century. Finally, for Latter-day Saints of the time, the united order was a symbol of separateness from the world, a means of maintaining group identity in a hostile society, and a way of meeting their religious commitment to individual and group perfection. Today, the united order experience remains in Mormon historical consciousness as a symbol of the more perfect society that Latter-day Saints believe will one day be achieved.

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was first organized in the United States. It is now known worldwide as one of the most distinctive and successful religions organized in America. Its members acknowledge that its American origins made possible much of its contemporary success. They also believe that the United States of America is a divinely blessed land of promise and that it will continue to play a pivotal role in important events of the Restoration and the last days.

Role in the Restoration of the Gospel. Latter-day Saints believe that the United States was divinely prepared as a suitable place for the prophesied RESTORATION OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST. Their scriptures teach that God kept the Americas hidden from the rest of the world until the time had come when he could accomplish his purpose and prepare the way for the American Republic (2 Ne. 1:8–9), that COLUMBUS was inspired in his discovery of the Western Hemisphere (1 Ne. 13:12), and that the Lord governed and controlled the settling of the continent (1 Ne. 13:13–19). The War of Independence, the ultimate victory of the colonies, the establishment of representative political institutions, and the peace and prosperity that prevailed in early nineteenth-century America were all divinely inspired and guided.

By 1820, at the time the Restoration commenced, political domination of the American continents by European nations had ceased. The established state religions that had prevailed in the majority of the English colonies had been replaced by constitutional guarantees of the separation of CHURCH AND STATE. Representative political institutions and a commitment to individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom of assembly sustained unprecedented religious toleration and a spirit of inquiry. Economic arrangements largely free of the direction of governments or guilds contributed to a sense of freedom and a cascade of innovations. A vast, sparsely inhabited continent encouraged mobility and attracted the restless and those seeking a new life. This combination of conditions provided fertile ground for establishing a new church and enabling it to grow and flourish.

A Promised Land with Responsibilities. Latter-day Saints view the American continent as a land “choice above all other lands” (1 Ne. 13:30). It is the land in which the NEW JERUSALEM will be established (3 Ne. 20:22). It is also a land whose security, prosperity, potential, and stature are conditioned by the actions of its inhabitants. Further, the land of America was designated to be a land of liberty for the Gentiles. It has been a land of liberty for the righteous. The Book of Mormon teaches that no king shall be raised up here and that those who seek to establish a king in this land shall perish (2 Ne. 10:11).

Latter-day Saints believe that the United States is guaranteed protection against all other nations only on the condition of righteousness. It is a blessed land for all the inhabitants of the earth who will act righteously, but it is, and will be, cursed to those who will not act righteously (2 Ne. 1:7; Ether 2:9–12).

Not only is the United States a land of great promises, it is also a land with special responsibilities. It serves as a standard of liberty to the world, as a warning to oppressors, and as a star of hope to the oppressed (cf. O. Hyde, JD 6:368). The United States has a mission to be a benefactor to all nations. Moreover, it is to provide an example of