

ATHENS

OR

SPARTA

How did Athens and Sparta treat women and slaves?

"Welcome back! I sure enjoy speaking with you and helping you become enlightened about life in Athens. I bet you are starting to see that Athens' way of life is clearly superior to that of those horrid Spartans. So, you want to hear about our non-citizens? Well, don't let this area of our civilization shock you. After all, most civilizations around the world have people who aren't considered citizens!

Here in Athens we have two groups of people who don't qualify for citizenship: women and slaves. I hate to say it, but women in Athens are treated much differently than men. Take my wife for example -- she is not allowed to inherit my property when I die, nor is she ever allowed to own property. She is never allowed in the Assembly and certainly isn't allowed vote. This is okay, right? Oh, and there are only a few jobs open to women here in Athens. Some women -- but only important ones -- are allowed to be a priestess in a temple. A priestess is a female priest. What else are women restricted from, you ask? Don't get mad at me because I don't make the rules, but women aren't allowed to leave their homes without a male companion! Crazy, right?

We also have slaves here in Athens, but we treat them very, very well! Slaves do most of our farming work since men are often engaged in educational or political matters, but they can also do household work or can serve as a clerk in an office. But, these jobs are only for the lucky ones. What happens to the unlucky ones? They work underground in the silver mines."

"Aren't you a little shocked to hear how the Athenians treat their women? They talk about how superior they are with their art and education, then they don't even let women leave the house alone? Please! In Sparta, women are equal citizens to men. Women can own property and are even allowed to speak to their husband's friends -- something forbidden in Athens! Do you want to know something really interesting? Say a Spartan man is away at war for a long time. Do you know what his wife could do? She could marry someone else while he is away at war! I think it's fair to say that we treat women much better than Athens!

What about slaves, you ask? Well, yes, we have slaves. But, we don't call them slaves. We call them helots. Earlier I said we treat our helots very well -- but some say we are very mean to them. Put yourself in our shoes for second -- how would you treat people you just conquered? We want to be nice to them, but many people are afraid they will revolt, so we have to keep them in line! In fact, one time we told the helots to round up their best fighters. We told them that if these fighters fought for Sparta, then all helots would go free! Do you know what we did? We killed all of them! Good luck leading a revolt against us without your best men! Some call this a trick, but we call it genius! Helots are allowed to marry. In fact, we encourage it! Helots who marry and have children mean more helots to take care of Sparta! We let helots sell their crops and even buy their own freedom. See, we aren't all bad!"

Name _____

Period _____

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How did Athens and Sparta treat women and slaves?

How did Athens treat women and slaves?

In the space provided, can you explain how Athens treated its women and its slaves?

How did Sparta treat women and slaves?

In the space provided, can you explain how Sparta treated its women and its slaves?

UNDER WHICH SYSTEM WOULD YOU RATHER LIVE? BACK IT UP WITH AT LEAST 3 EXAMPLES FROM THE TEXT!