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# Ancient Sparta Showed That Women's Rights Are A Function Of The Economy

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## Introduction

Many readers of ROK may believe that feminism, with its supposed goal of achieving equality between men and women by promoting women's rights, is a relatively new concept that was developed after the Industrial Revolution. However, at least one attempt to implement women's rights occurred in antiquity, in the land of ancient Sparta.

The very name Sparta makes one think of the epitome of manliness; a society composed of tall, muscular, and highly disciplined soldiers. The Spartans were ruthless warriors who despised weakness and cowardice. Given Sparta's penchant for manliness, it may come as some surprise to learn that Sparta, of all the Greek city-states, had the most liberal civil laws when it came to the rights of its women.

In Spartan society, women could own estates, travel freely without male escort, and even initiate divorce. These rights were far from the historical norm. Indeed, one may see many parallels between women's rights in Ancient Sparta and those found in the modern developed world.

Given how the manosphere, and by extension ROK, finds many laws related to feminism and the sexual revolution to be harmful to society, it is imperative that those involved in the manosphere understand how such laws came into practice in the first place. The implementation of laws supporting

women's rights is a function of the economy, and come into existence only through economic necessity. Spartan civilization provides a perfect example of this.



## **The events that led to the implementation of women's rights in Sparta**

Spartan civilization was warrior-based, meaning that little effort was put into developing agriculture and art, and much effort was put into pillaging and stealing lands and wealth from other civilizations. When the Spartans conquered an enemy, they enslaved the populace and turned their lands into plantations. The enslaved people were expected to provide produce and goods to their Spartan masters. Slave revolts were common, and Sparta needed a large standing army in order to quell any rebellions that might occur.

When Sparta conquered the neighboring territory of Messenia in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the first step in granting women more legal rights was taken. Sparta gained the valuable assets of fertile land and slaves by conquering Messenia, but Sparta faced new challenges through this victory. With such a large slave population, Sparta needed a much larger army to make sure the slaves didn't rebel against their masters.

By increasing the size of their army, there were fewer Spartan men on the home front to manage estates and the non-military and other economic aspects of Spartan civilization. Because of this, it became an economic necessity to grant women more political freedom so they could take the place of men by managing the estates and civil affairs of Sparta.

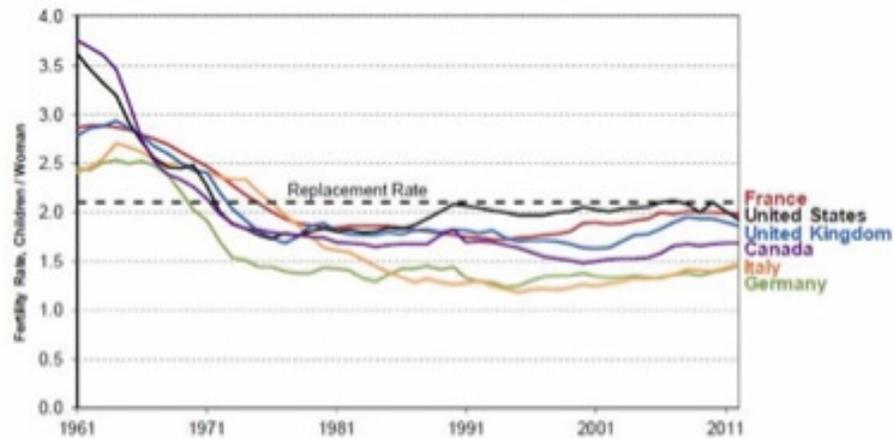
After the conquest of Messenia, the Spartan constitution was reformed so that women could have formal titles to property, as well as the legal rights, training and capability to do with land as Spartan men did. This was to provide an incentive to Spartan women to maintain the estates, because it is hard to motivate someone if they cannot profit from the fruits of their labor.



## The decline of women's rights in Sparta

However, the rights women acquired did not last forever. These rights, which provided women with the necessary tools to successfully run estates, also increased the opportunity cost of having children. With women having more freedom than ever before, they ended up producing fewer children. By the early 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Sparta's population was one-fifth of what it had been 200 years prior, an astonishing reduction. It is interesting to note that this is also the case in the modern developed world, where birth rates have been below replacement levels for decades.

Exhibit 2  
Low Birthrates in the "Western World"



Source: World Bank, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention As of 12/31/12

This shocking drop in population resulted in a smaller army, as fewer men were being born. Sparta's military was weakened. With Sparta's defeat by Thebes in 370 B.C., the Messenians revolted and defeated the Spartans. This defeat caused the Spartans to lose a significant amount of territory, as well as the large slave population they depended upon for their material well-being.

Because of this loss, there was no reason to maintain the constitutional reforms that gave Spartan women their rights, and by the time of the Romans (post-146 B.C.) Spartan women were again solely known for their domestic virtues and roles in religious ceremonies. Sparta even established a magistrate that oversaw the behavior of women, which would have been unthinkable during the Spartan occupation of Messenia. By this time, women's rights in Sparta were finished.

## What Can We Learn From Spartan History?

One of the most important things we can learn from Spartan history is that women's rights were historically enacted not out of ideology, but rather out of economic necessity. There is a direct causation between the capture of

Messenia and the rise of women's rights, as there is a direct causation between the loss of Messenia and the revoking of women's rights.

Keep in mind it was Spartan men who held governmental power, and it was Spartan men who gave women their short-lived economic and societal influence. They did this for shrewd economic purposes, and were not driven by ideology, even though the Spartan men were very democratic and considered themselves as "*homoioi*," or the "equal ones," and therefore did not lack ideology.

Clearly, women's rights in ancient Sparta was self-defeating, as the reduction in population weakened the army that held up the economic system in the first place. Hopefully, we can learn from history and try to correct the mistakes of the past.

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