

Political Issue C: Treatment of Non-Citizens

A city-state's treatment of its non-citizens will affect its stability and its ability to lead an alliance effectively. The representatives from Athens and Sparta will now describe their treatment of non-citizens, specifically women and slaves.

Athens

We Athenians have high regard for our non-citizens. We entrust our women with a great deal of responsibility. Married women are responsible for managing their households. That includes acquiring and training household servants, preparing meals, and sometimes nursing sick slaves. These women are also in charge of the care and education of their children—the future leaders of Athens. Many of our women also participate in religious festivals. Some even become priestesses with important jobs, such as looking after the sacred objects stored in our sanctuaries. We protect our women, making sure they each have a father, a husband, or a brother to look after them. Finally, since most citizens are too busy to perform common labor, we find it necessary to employ slaves. However, we value our slaves and treat them well. We allow many slaves to become educated, to practice trades, or to work independently of their owners. Some slaves can even earn their freedom. Our society has a tolerant and enlightened attitude toward its non-citizens. Join us, if respectable and honorable treatment of non-citizens is important to you.

Sparta

The Athenians claim they give their women great responsibilities. Well, in Sparta, women have more than responsibilities—they have rights, privileges, and freedom as well. The Spartan state provides an education for young girls in singing, dancing, and gymnastics. Unlike Athenian women, Spartan women do not need to be “protected” by male guardians. While we would never ask our women to become part of the army, we know that Spartan women are willing and capable of helping to defend our land if it is invaded. Furthermore, unlike Athenian women, Spartan women do more than just manage a household every day. While their husbands are off serving in our army for years at a time, Spartan women are home managing large estates, supervising dozens of slaves, and handling the family finances. Spartan women even have the right to own property in their own names. Of course, our women have one other important role to fill: they are expected to be healthy childbearers who can produce future soldiers for our state. As you can see, women in Sparta have more freedom than anywhere else in Greece. Finally, like Athens, we too, are forced to rely on non-citizens in certain areas. However, we don't engage in a slave trade, like Athens does. We rely on a group from the lower class—called the helots—to help us maintain a constant food supply. Our treatment of non-citizens is far better than that of Athens, making Sparta stable and better prepared to lead a strong alliance. Join us!

Critical-Thinking Question C: Now that you have heard the two viewpoints on treatment of non-citizens, do you want to remain with the league you chose, or change your alliance? What other city-states would also benefit by being a member of the league you chose?