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**The Interesting History Of Sparta**

**By Todd Demas**

When one studies the history of Sparta, it is difficult to conclude that this society was not one of history's strangest. Maybe due to design by a man names Lycurgus than through developing naturally.

In the last few centuries, quite a few societies have been constructed by committees, and there have been many more failures than successes. The history of Sparta can serve as an example of both a success and a failure, and it would be helpful to remember these ancient people whenever we opt to design anything, such as a business or family.

In a time when cities were typically surrounded by walls to protect them from the latest conquering horde, Sparta needed none. Each and every male citizen was trained literally from birth to be a hardened, world-class soldier.

In English, the term "Spartan" has connotations of discipline and frugality. A Spartan room, for example, might contain nothing but a table and chair. This is an accurate description of the Spartan way of life. In the mind of a historian, however, the meaning of "Spartan" leans more towards "brutal" and "militaristic." Sparta was a society designed to dominate its neighbors: A warrior culture.

Sparta was a considerable military power for over a thousand years. Their system of warfare based on hoplite spearmen was copied by every army in the Mediterranean region. Their soldiers' prowess was demonstrated most vividly in 480 B.C. at Thermopylae, a narrow stretch of land between cliff and sea where only 300 Spartan hoplites held off an entire Persian army numbering in the hundreds of thousands.

This power dearly cost the Spartan citizens, and their unusual society eventually garnered a more humble status as a Roman tourist attraction.

Sparta took common Greek practices to extremes, even ones which would seem brutal to modern people. For example, it was acceptable in most of Greece to abandon an unwanted newborn in the woods. There was a chance that someone would find and adopt such a baby. In Sparta, babies were a communal asset, unless they were considered a liability due to being somehow weak or deformed.

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These infants were thrown over a cliff!

Every day of a young boy's life was a struggle for survival. Boys lived as members of small bands, living off the land and raiding farms and villages. They were punished for stealing from other Spartans, but more for getting caught than for the act itself.

Surviving teenagers were each assigned a mentor/lover (homosexuality was considered necessary for a soldier far from home). They were put through a coming-of-age gauntlet during which a significant percentage were mortally wounded.

Marriage was a contract between two families. Young women were trained for marriage and child rearing as young men were trained for war. Women were responsible for controlling all aspects of sex and reproduction. This was often a jolting experience for the man who had seen few women during his

short life.

When it came time for war, Sparta was always ready. However, they were spread very thin. The number of slaves and serfs in the wide regions around Sparta was hundreds of times the number of Spartan citizens. Sparta controlled vast wealth, but its citizens never enjoyed any of it.

Eventually, all of Greece was absorbed into the Roman empire. They were spared most of the downsides of conquest faced by the "barbarians" of places such as Gaul. Romans respected Greek culture, and even believed that Rome was founded by Greeks. Therefore, they left Greek society very much intact, including Sparta.

The Spartan culture caused each of its citizens to become an awesome powerhouse of strength and discipline. Unfortunately, there just weren't enough of them, and there wasn't much variety.

However, Sparta was now just another state within a vast empire. Though its traditions were still alive, suddenly they were quaint rather than brutally effective.

Rome won over Sparta because Romans valued individuality and personal rewards as well as communal strength and power. Sparta's society had just a few fatal flaws. It was too elitist. People couldn't "join" Sparta: They had to be born into it. Spartan men had to be warriors before being husbands, merchants, or politicians. Other cultures were allowing different men to perform different tasks. Sparta's population began to shrink as soon as Lycurgus implemented his militaristic reforms, and it never recovered.

Of course, Rome was won over by a certain movement, and you probably know what it is (This would make a good article). Think about this also when you next decide to design something.

What does this all mean, and why should you care? History shows us what has been done right in the past, and what has been done wrong. There are quite a few lessons we might take away from the history of Sparta:

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To grow and expand, to gain control of assets, you need to be able to grow internally.

It's better to open your doors to diversity than to screen and weed people, or to stuff them into a mold. Think of some other regimes in the last hundred years or so that tried to do this, and what happened to them.

Wealth, power, and respect are all some people are looking for. Sparta had all of this, and for a long time. In the long run, however, these things amounted to only a few moments of glory and a place in the history books. Maybe you're looking for something more "in the moment".

When studying the history of this most interesting society, you must decide how to interpret it and its effect on society (if any). That, after all, is why the study of history is so important.

Todd Demas, author, writes for several history publications. If history fascinates you like it does us, see his work featured at

<http://www.azhistory.com>

### **Have You Tested Your Plot?**

**By Nick Vernon**

Creative Writing Tips -

Our plotting stage is our testing area.

Everything in the plot should be tested for its effectiveness before we put it into our stories. If you believe something in your plot could be better, make it better.

Figuring everything out in your plot will save you time rewriting later.

So how do you test your plot?

Start with everything that has gone into it.

For example... Are the events interesting? Does your plot contain problems for the character to solve? Have you given your character a goal? Is the conflict strong? Is the resolution of the conflict interesting? Is the character interesting? Is the setting of the story interesting? Will the incident or situation be interesting to your readers? Etc

Make a list of what your plot contains. Comb through it carefully and tick off each item. If you find that some things need to be worked on some more, work on them.

I know to some this might be tedious work, but...

## The Interesting History Of Sparta

"Every one-minute you spend in planning  
will save you at least three minutes in execution."  
Crawford Greenwald

Besides his passion for writing, Nick Vernon runs an online gift site where you will find gift information,  
articles and readers' funny stories. Visit

<http://www.we-recommend.com>

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