Pericles Essay, Research Paper

Ancient Greece had many ups and downs in it s very long history. As a growing civilization it earned numerous allies as well as enemies. One of these great enemies were the Persians. Although the Persians were very powerful adversaries, the Greeks defeated them and at that point the era of classical Greece began. The Delian league which was created to unite all states and protect them from intruders had turned into an empire. This empire was governed by Athens. As peace and harmony was restored in Greece, the city of Athens was about to experience it s greatest epoch. A time filled with power and great social and political wealth. All of which was the product of a great man s work. His name was Pericles.

Pericles was born in the year 495 B.C. into a very noble family. He was the nephew of Cleisthenes who founded Athenian Democracy. Pericles lived his whole life in a political environment. When he became involved in Athenian affairs, he received a very good reputation. In 462 B.C. he began to dominate the politics in Athens as a key leader in the democratic movement. Not only was he a great orator, Pericles was a patriot to his country. He had two main plans: to produce a strong democratic reform and an even stronger empire. Under the guidance of Pericles Athens was mainly governed by the democratic assembly and by the council. This assembly was not just a group of people who represented the government, thus it consisted of all male citizens. The citizens of Athens were the democracy. Although she still wasn t a full democratic state because women, foreigners, and slaves were not included. Pericles also changed the rules of citizenship. Before, anyone who was born of at least one Athenian parent was known as an Athenian citizen, but Pericles changed that. He established laws which demanded that a child can only become a citizen if both of his parents were full Athenian citizens.

Athenian democracy differed from that of other surrounding empires. First of all, Pericles gave opportunities to every citizen to participate in the political affairs of his empire. This can clearly be seen in an excerpt from Pericles funeral speech for War Dead when he said “Our form of government is called a democracy because its administration is in the hands, not of a few, but of the whole people. In the settling of private disputes, everyone is equal before the law. Election to public office is made on the basis of ability, not on the basis of membership to a particular class. No man is kept out of public office by the obscurity of his social standing because of his poverty, as long as he wished to be of service to the state.” Pericles was a great leader who wanted all Athenian citizens to have a part in this great city/empire.

Not only did Pericles have a great impact on Athenian democracy he was also one of the key reasons why Athens experienced such a fertile period of intellect and glory. The people lived in harmony, and the metropolis were composed of exquisite Greek structures and other art forms which can still be seen today. Athenians were proud and loyal to their city-state. Some even a bit contemptuous. At that time Athens was the perfect place to live in. It was a great honor to be an Athenian citizen. In one of his excerpts from his funeral speech for Athenian War Dead, Pericles says it best when he said “In short, I assert that the city of Athens, taken all together, is a model for all Greece”.

By the year 432 B.C. Athens and it s surrounding areas consisted of around 150,000 Athenians, not to mention the number of slaves and other ethnic groups from all around the Mediterranean. It was at that point the most populated city-state in Hellas. During the age of Pericles, Athens became a great power. Almost everything one can associate with Greek culture took place throughout Pericles time. Whether it be art, architecture, philosophy, poetry etc. That is why this period was and still is known as the Golden Age. Pericles and his democratic reforms had great influence on classical Greece. But like always all good things must come to and end. Pericles died in the year 429 B.C. With all the fame and fortune Athens received from the rest of the world, other city-states became jealous, one of them being Athens arch-rivals, the Spartans.