University of the People

HIST 1421 Greek and Roman Civilization

Unit 3 Written Assignment 3

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Athens could not effectively handle the Peloponnesian War, do you agree? Why/why not? Support your answer with sources and evidence by providing details and examples.

I agree that Athens could not effectively handle the Peloponnesian War, which ultimately contributed to the downfall of its democracy. The Peloponnesian War, fought between Athens and Sparta from 431 to 404 BCE, was a protracted conflict that drained Athens's resources and undermined its political stability.

One of the primary reasons for Athens's inability to effectively handle the war was its overextension of military and economic resources. As Kagan (2003) explains, "Athens's commitment to the war effort was so great that it exhausted its financial reserves and imposed heavy taxes on its citizens and allies" (p. 157). This strain on resources led to discontent among the Athenian population and its allies, weakening the city-state's ability to sustain the war effort.

Furthermore, Athens's strategy during the war was often flawed and misguided. According to Cartledge (2009), "Athens's decision to launch the ill-fated Sicilian Expedition in 415 BCE was a strategic blunder that diverted resources from the Peloponnesian War and ultimately led to a disastrous defeat" (p. 231). This costly mistake not only depleted Athens's resources but also damaged its military reputation and morale.

Additionally, internal political divisions and instability within Athens exacerbated the city-state's difficulties in handling the war. As Thucydides (1972) notes, "The city was torn by factional strife, with the oligarchic and democratic factions vying for power, further undermining Athens's ability to mount an effective defense against Sparta and its allies" (p. 412).

Is it correct to say that democracy in Athens was overthrown after the war?

It is generally correct to state that democracy in Athens was overthrown after the Peloponnesian War, although the process was not immediate and involved several stages.

After Athens's defeat in the war, the city-state was forced to accept the harsh terms of the Spartan-imposed peace treaty, which included the demolition of its defensive walls and the surrender of its navy (Kagan, 2003). These conditions left Athens vulnerable and weakened its democratic institutions.

In 411 BCE, during the final years of the war, a group of oligarchic conspirators known as the "Four Hundred" seized power and abolished the democratic system of government in Athens (Cartledge, 2009). This oligarchic regime was short-lived, however, as it faced resistance from the Athenian populace and was eventually overthrown.

Following the final defeat of Athens in 404 BCE, the Spartans installed an oligarchic regime known as the "Thirty Tyrants" to rule over the city-state (Kagan, 2003). This regime suspended democratic institutions and imposed a reign of terror, executing or exiling many Athenian citizens.

While democracy was briefly restored in 403 BCE, the damage to Athens's political and economic power had been done, and the city-state never regained its former glory. As Thucydides (1972) notes, "The defeat in the Peloponnesian War marked the end of Athens's golden age and the decline of its democratic system" (p. 589).

In summary, while the overthrow of democracy in Athens was not an immediate consequence of the Peloponnesian War, the city-state's defeat and the subsequent imposition of oligarchic regimes by external forces effectively marked the end of its democratic experiment, at least for a significant period.

**References**:

Cartledge, P. (2009). Ancient Greek political thought in practice. Cambridge University Press.

Kagan, D. (2003). The Peloponnesian War. Penguin Books.

Thucydides. (1972). The Peloponnesian War (R. Crawley, Trans.). Modern Library. (Original work published ca. 400 BCE)