

Wide sargasso sea  
presents an  
interesting slant on  
the character of  
bertha mason....



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The paper " Wide Sargasso Sea - Bertha Mason as a Victim of Racial Oppression" is a great example of a literature book review.

The novel Wide Sargasso Sea penned by Jean Rhys was published in 1966 as a prequel to the novel Jane Eyre written by " Charlotte Bronte" in 1847 (Bloom, 2007, p245). It is the most successful novel of Rhys that consists of three parts and each of these parts is written using the narrative voice of different characters of the stories. The novel basically deals with the theme of racial discrimination and the roughness of displacement and integration. It deeply and sensitively describes the cultural barriers that exist between the whites and the blacks and explains the insecurities and adjustment problems that commonly arise when the people from different cultures are set to live together and use to hold certain prejudice for each other. Rhys touchingly describes the intricate relations of oppressor and oppressed through the depiction of the marital relations of the main character Antoinette that has been drawn from the character of Bertha Mason in Jane Eyre.

The novel has been plotted in Jamaica and depicts the time after the liberation of the slaves in the Caribbean. That was the depressing era when the tension over the issue of the racial inequity and hatred was on the peak level in the Caribbean. The main character of the story is a lady Antoinette who spent her childhood in the West Indies and frequently faced the problems related to ethnic prejudice and shrewdness. She neither succeeded to adjust among the white Europeans nor among the black Jamaicans whom she belongs but due to her white Creole heiress she remained different to them as well. Antoinette was the first wife of Mr. Rochester given the name of Bertha Mason in Bronte's Jane Eyre.

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Antoinette got married to a white man. She had the dream of having a happy married life but all of her dreams were ruined when his husband betrayed her having his own personal reason. After the marriage, he realized that her wife belongs to an impure ethnicity and is not acceptable as a white lady. He started sexually abusing her and when they went for their honeymoon, Antoinette saw the dark side of their marital life but she has no other choice rather follow the ungenerous and unyielding demands of his husband. Surprisingly Antonito behaved in a strange way and didn't protest on any of his act. She felt herself all alone in the world and her depression reached the extreme level and finally their marriage was ended.

The character of Antoinette depicts an interesting slant on the character of Bertha Mason. Bertha was an infamous woman and after her marriage with a white man, she also became a victim of racial discrimination because she had to face the abusive attitude of her husband who regards her impure and member of a low-class race. Her character explains how ethnic identities and complexes remain attached to the person and influence his or her behaviors throughout life. Throughout the story, the novel took different turns while describing the story of Antoinette however in all of the parts the focus remains on the racial discrimination and every part contains some dialogues and expressions regarding the attitude of whites towards the blacks and the racial discriminations that remain exist in the society throughout the life span of the Antoinette (Martin, 1996, p78).

The breakup of the marriage of Bertha and Mr. Rochester depicts the miseries of racial oppression faced by the non-white women at that time.

Bertha's husband always disrespects and disregards her. The sexual

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obsession, unsympathetic attitude and brutal behavior of his husband were also backed by the racial discriminations that he had for the nonwhites. The most important factor behind the unhappy married life and its breakup was the mixed ethnicity of Bertha that finally took her towards an intensely depressing situation where she loses everything in her life including all the close relationships.

The novel not only described the story of Antoinette but it is an attempt to reconstruct the character of Bertha to explain how the European colonialism to the African's land take these people towards the point where they found no way to move forward or to go back to their past. It happened because the colonized people find it difficult to adjust in the new situation but at the same time, it becomes impossible for them to return to their past lives because the European occupation of their land changed everything that they use to live with earlier (Sandra and Susan, 1979, p243).

Having little choices in front of them, the Africans search for their identity and struggle for dignity and honor in the colonized society that they never succeed to secure. The colonized people become unacceptable for both of the societies. They become unable to fit in the newly established colonizer's society neither they find their ways towards their traditional society because the colonialism ruins all their heritage and traditions. These problems were encountered by black men as well as women, however; the women faced a high level of miseries because in the male dominating society they have to face even more problems than man due to their racial identities.