

# A Means to an End

## Women in 19th Century England and Its Colonies

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### Key Terms

- Patriarchy: A social system where women and children are ruled by men at a political and personal level.
- Colonialism: A country takes control of another country to use its resources and people to gain money.

### Thesis

Men had a legal advantage over women and used women for their gain in England and its Colonies in the 19th century. However, women in England's Colonies suffered more at the hands of English men than English women did.

### Abstract

- I researched women's rights and exploitation within marriage and society in 19th century England and its Colonies.
- My research is based on two novels: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*.
- The main female characters of both stories, Jane Eyre and Antoinette Mason are both married to the same man - Edward Rochester. My goal was to use academic articles to find out how English and non-English women were treated in 19th century Colonial Patriarchal English society to understand why Rochester treats his two wives differently.
- I applied my research to shed light on the similarities and differences between how English and non-English women were treated by English men in the 19th century.



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### Approach

I used the Omni and JSTOR databases to find academic articles for my research. I used a combination of search terms ("Marriage in 19th Century Britain") and search operators ("England AND Colonialism") using the Advanced Search feature. I used "OR" to expand my search and "AND" to narrow it. For example, I searched "(Bronte OR Jean Rhys) AND Patriarchy" so I could find journals that speak to Patriarchy in either novel, as I needed information for both novels to complete my research. One of the most important concepts I found in my research is from Alexandra Neel: women in 19th century British society were taught that they were "owned for [their] own good" and that the English used laws to control women and people without full English blood (172).

### Findings & Conclusion

I applied my research in order to illuminate the idea that while Rochester treats both of his wives badly, he treats Mason worse because she is non-English. Colonial and Patriarchal English laws encouraged men to treat women terribly and did not hold men accountable for their actions. I found that English laws were set up in a way that men owned women as well as their money, children, and all assets. My conclusion is that in 19th century England, English men are winners, English women are losers, and non-English women never stood a chance. What I learned from doing this research is that it is important to learn about Colonial and Patriarchal systems of the past to know how to make a better, more inclusive future for all.