

**Other Areas of Practice****Welcome to the Karen protection program | Marcel Strigberger**By **Marcel Strigberger**

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(August 21, 2020, 1:46 PM EDT) -- What's in a name?

The name Karen has gone in popularity for girls' names from number three rank in 1965 to rank 665 these days. Unfortunately, it has morphed into a metaphor for racism and white privilege. The name has been applied to women who made racist remarks or false accusations against people of colour. The list includes a "Whitefish Karen," "Kroger Karen" and the Queen of Karens, Amy Cooper; a.k.a. "Central Park Karen" who fabricated accusations against a Black man after he politely asked her to leash her roaming dog. I'm surprised we do not yet have a "COVID Karen."

The sullyng of this pretty name is most unfortunate.

There is even a Shamann Walton who is a San Francisco board of supervisors member who introduced "CAREN" which stands for *Caution Against Racially Exploitive Non-Emergencies Act*, to punish people who call 911 to make false racially biased complaints. Walton figures "Caren" is close enough to Karen. I suppose the optics are better than going with the word "Kaution."

Can a person's name play a role in the courtroom, influencing a verdict? Who knows? I can see certain names which may just tip the judicial balance. The first that comes to mind is Adolph. If I were representing this guy in an assault charge, I'd definitely get my full fee up front. I would do so even if he had an ironclad alibi, like at the time of the offence I was in South America.

I would have similar concerns with a client called Bates. I can just see the reactions on the jurors' faces as he takes the witness stand:

Lawyer: "Mr. Bates, what is your occupation sir?"

Bates: "No, I do not own a motel."

Nor would a Jean Valjean be without risk. I can see a judge on a shoplifting case hitting the guy with an additional 20 years of hard labour. Maybe not, but it would certainly cross the judge's mind. (Judge's mind: "I'll bet he also stole the bishop's silver candlesticks!")

At least these guys get a hearing. I'm thinking of that Shakespearean character in *Julius Caesar*, Cinna the poet. After Mark Antony riled up the crowd at Caesar's funeral, they scrambled looking for the conspirators, one being a different Cinna. Unfortunately, the mob soon came across the wrong Cinna, whom they summarily lynched. No trial. A Cinna by another name would have smelled better.

As a result Karens all over sensing the social pressures are not exactly waving around their name tags. Can they take legal action? I see a couple of avenues for relief.

The first thing that comes to mind is a class action against all the parents of Karens. After all most plaintiff lawyers would agree that it was reasonably foreseeable in the 1960s that naming a daughter Karen would one day be tantamount to naming a son Vlad. I can't think of a judge who would not

certify this application for a go, in a flash.

Or perhaps they can seek injunctions against organizations fanning the noxious Karen flames. Certainly, they can assail that Shamann Walton proposed *CAREN Act*, suggesting they call it something else, like the *Shamann Act*. This title could still reasonably maintain the integrity of the acronym. SHAMANN would stand for "SHaution Against Making a No No." I did say "reasonably" maintain. That, like CAREN" is close enough.

Or maybe they can seek some anonymity, something like witness protection. Call it moniker protection. The government can give all Karens applying an instant name change, one with an aura of benevolence. Possible suggestions are "Mother Teresa" or "Florence Nightingale," or "Glinda." OK, maybe not Glinda. She was too milk toasty. Most of us prefer the Wicked Witch of the West.

Whatever happens, something must be done for our good Karens. Otherwise it may not be too long before we see children's publications and puzzles similar to Where's Waldo. They'll be called something like, "Don't bother looking for Karen."

Cheers to the good Karens out there!

*Marcel Strigberger retired from his Greater Toronto Area litigation practice and continues the more serious business of humorous author and speaker. Visit [www.marcelshumour.com](http://www.marcelshumour.com). Follow him @MarcelSHumour.*

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