

Reclaiming the Beautiful Name of Karen

by [Jeff Plude](#) (October 2022)



Bakside (Karen Bjølstad), Edvard Munch, 1893

What's in a name? Shakespeare famously said, or rather Juliet says about her beloved Romeo, whose last name is the name of her family's enemy. She tries to convince herself that his name could just as well be another name because he'd retain the same qualities, that a person's name could be "nor hand nor foot / Nor arm nor face [nor any other part of a man]."

But a person's name, as Shakespeare well knew, since he created so many memorable characters with distinctive monikers—Hamlet, Ophelia, Iago, Cordelia—is inextricably bound with the person it represents. With a different name, whoever it is would indeed be a different character. In fact a not particularly discerning reader will see that as soon as Romeo shows himself, when he can no longer contain himself and speaks from his predawn hiding spot below his beloved's balcony, Juliet equates his voice with his name.

*My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words
of thy tongue's uttering, yet I know the sound.
Art thou not Romeo and a Montague?*

She well knows that it is her Romeo, the one and only, her true love. And by any other name he would not be her Romeo.

Well social media and its horde have taken one of the most lovely names in the world, Karen, and turned it into some racist epithet to mock white people. Forgive me if I take this all a little personal, but my wife's name is Karen. And I'm writing this around the time of her birthday. And indeed she would not be my wife if she weren't named Karen, as Shakespeare so well knew, and anybody else who's ever been in love well knows. That's why lovers used to carve their names on trees, spray-paint them on walls, scribble them all over notebooks. There's a spark of magic in a name, especially a loved one.

And though Karen has now become associated with infernal,

shrewish white women, there are a good many black women of a certain age who are named Karen. In the 1960s when my wife was born, Karen was one of the most popular names for baby girls, so there's an age-related factor to its abuse.

Karen, in fact, is a sort of sacred name, or carries a sacred meaning. It's a Danish name that comes from the Greek, *καθαρωσ* (*katharos*). It's related to the English name Katharine and it means "pure, clean." It's used this way in the New Testament. John uses it in chapter 13 of his Gospel when he relates the story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper to show them that those who want to be lead need to serve rather than be served. When Peter initially objects to Jesus washing the apostle's feet as if the Son of God were a slave, Jesus admonishes him that this is exactly what he and the others ought to do—minister to others as if the apostles were servants. Jesus tells him metaphorically that those who are "clean" (*καθαρωσ*) don't need to be washed because they are already "clean" (*καθαρωι*). Then in the next verse, referring to Judas—whom, John tells us at the beginning of this chapter, Satan has already influenced to betray his master—Jesus says that not all are "clean" (*καθαρωι*). Of course he means clean in the sense of being clean of their sins, that is, redeemed by their faith in Christ.

But it isn't only certain perennially aggrieved black people who wield Karen like a mob of junior high school punks. Nor is it only their woke white enablers.

Some on the right now flippantly and smugly refer to somebody as a "Karen." I've seen it brandished in articles on one prominent conservative website I used to read that features a number of millennials. One of those writers is a product of a bible college, no less (she's named Kylee, by the way, which sounds very snowflakey to my ears). Another is a contributing editor of a conservative Catholic journal (his name is Casey, a name that often signifies a woman these days). This can be written off, of course, as a juvenile attempt by the young

pariahs, given their political apostasy, to seem as hip as their liberal cohorts in the Twitverse. But that it's racist in origin or just plain rude seems to never cross their cyber-infected minds.

So how did my beloved's name come to stand for a middle-aged white woman who feels entitled and asks to talk to the manager or calls the police on black men no matter how respectable those men may appear to or actually be? Black people have apparently used different names over the years to refer to white women who supposedly oppress them by wielding their white privilege and making false accusations. Apparently Becky was used in this way in the nineties.

But "Karen" became an unofficially sanctioned meme on Memorial Day weekend in 2020. Weirdly, the two people involved have the same last name. One was a black guy, a comics and science writer, birder, and gay activist named Christian Cooper; the other was a white woman named Amy Cooper who was a department head for a large investment company. They had a confrontation in Central Park in the wooded Ramble section over her cocker spaniel. He asked her to leash the dog but she refused, so he started calling to it with treats that he apparently carries with him for that purpose. He videoed her yelling at him. She called 911 to report that a black man was threatening her and her dog. She then leashed it, but the Coopers both left before the police showed up.

Now I'm with Christian Cooper in part. I hate when so-called responsible dog owners let their pets run free to charge and nip at anybody they like. I used to occasionally take walks in the same area when my wife and I lived in Manhattan and have seen dogs roaming around without leashes, which is against park regulations. I recall one or two times that I said something to the owner. It was to no avail, but I didn't start carrying bait. It's unclear whether Christian Cooper did this to keep the animals from attacking him or just to be obnoxious. It's probably some of both.

But Amy Cooper was now about to pay for her sin at the social-media witch trial. Mr. Cooper's busybody sister posted the video on Twitter and called her a "Karen" and it went viral. And with the swing of the cancel ax, Ms. Cooper's life was instantly cut off. She was immediately and duly fired from her job and doxxed. She received death threats, fled not only her home but the country, was charged by the New York City Human Rights Commission, and says she felt like killing herself.

Two other circumstances conspired to catapult the Karen slur to the top of the woke sludge pile. This was also the same day that George Floyd was arrested by policemen in Minneapolis and he resisted and one of the cops kneeled on his throat and ended up suffocating him and there were riots. The cop was way out of line to be sure and was convicted and sentenced to over twenty years in prison, and police in general are far from unqualified saints. However, what was lost in this whole macabre incident is that Floyd was far from a saint himself, except to the demagogues who tried to make him into one. But according to the new order of things all black men and women are prima facie not guilty no matter what they actually do; or are absolved as a summary judgment for wrongs done to them as a people centuries ago, or a half century ago, because of "systemic racism." The motto of the new secular political dispensation is: Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith Black Lives Matter.

To make matters worse this was when the Covid internment was at its most draconian. So all the dispossessed were staring through the screens of their digital devices at the Coopers-Floyd mayhem in unison. One thing was clear to the reeducated—they were the exact opposite of the prudish and privileged Karens, the menace of the not-so-free world. Most important of all was that the viral prisoners now had a name, a face, a personality that identified the enemy. That makes the handlers' mission much easier.

It's not surprising to me that the most ridiculous of all

official responses came from San Francisco, a place my wife and I lived in for six years. Riding the “Karen” hate wave, the city board of supervisors passed a law that further punishes people who supposedly make false reports to the police based on race. How exactly that would be ascertained was apparently not even considered, or most likely was considered unnecessary, since a white person in SF is by definition racist. The measure was given the cute acronym CAREN—Caution Against Racially Exploitative Non-Emergencies. How clever, classless, and free! (as John Lennon once sang). It was proposed, of course, by a young black supervisor named Shamman Walton. His first name is not to be confused with *shaman*, which only has one paltry *m*, but I think it suits him perfectly. Both *Merriam-Webster* and *American Heritage* define the word as a medium or priest who uses magic or sorcery, among other things, to control events. And control is what the Karen insult is all about.

The puerile nature of the “Karen” nonsense seems to know no bounds in digital Never Never Land. Such a woman, we’re told, has a certain look that goes with the attitude—a bob haircut (but from what I see on the internet it can be any style except curly hair), certain clothes, etc. But one of the more serious ramifications for even woke white women is that many of them now express reluctance to report a legitimate threat from a black man for fear of being branded a “Karen” and digitally stoned.

For the real women named Karen like my wife, the whole ugly trend sometimes hits much closer to home. She overheard two young black women clerks at a retail store who were told to do something by their fiftyish white blond manager say: “I can’t stand her. She’s such a Karen.” Even worse, my wife’s youngest sister, a fifty-five-year-old single “Gigi” with two illegitimate grandchildren, regularly posts videos on TikTok to her mostly black viewers, and one of them was a skit with a black guy about “Karens.” Another older white woman who is

conservative was recently complaining to my wife at a gathering about those “Covid Karens.” To her credit, after she realized my wife’s name was indeed Karen, she apologized and said she hoped she didn’t offend my wife.

My wife was gracious about it. She told the woman that she didn’t appreciate her name being used that way, and that was the end of it. But I wondered: Why do people on the right mindlessly use a word parroted by self-righteous liberals and their political masters—one that was created by racists to mock and browbeat white people? To them I say: you don’t sound au courant or cool. You sound clueless.

And please, don’t resort to the freedom-of-speech defense. Just because you *can* say something doesn’t mean you *should*. As the apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians: “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.”

There even seems to be some confusion how the smear is used. According to the illogic of the name-calling trolls, a “Karen” can sometimes be a vaccine opposer (like Jenny McCarthy) or a mask enforcer (like a woman in the grocery store aisle). However, many black men also refuse to be vaccinated. Weirdly “Karen” can even refer to a man—Elon Musk, for instance, was called a “Space Karen” (and in turn has used the tired trope, like against Elizabeth Warren, whom he called “Senator Karen”). After all, just because you’re a racist is no reason not to be gender inclusive, if you believe in something as quaint as gender. Trump was called the “Karen in Chief” in *The Atlantic* by some clever scribe who appears, from his profile photo, to have the semblance of a man. But one shouldn’t reasonably expect the developmentally arrested to effectively exercise the grown-up faculty of reason, much less civility.

Last year there was even a feature film, if you can call it that, with the captivating title of *Karen*. You guessed it—the villain is a woman with that name below all names who inflicts all her white rage against the protagonists, a beatific black

couple. But no worries. They end up exterminating her at the end and take her place on the neighborhood homeowners association. On Rotten Tomatoes *Karen* received 2.3 stars out of 10. Presumably the reviewers weren't all racists.

So the self-righteous campaign against the maligned name of Karen blazes on in the name of the Holy Social Justice War. According to one baby-naming site, the name Karen has now sunk to the eight-hundred-and twentieth-something most popular name for a girl. It had been declining through the years, but the BLMers and their fellow travelers have now beaten it underground.

All I know is that over four decades ago when I was about Romeo's age I first laid eyes on my Juliet, "two of the fairest stars in all the heaven." Only her name was Karen. All these years later it's still celestial music to my ears. On my list it will always be number one.

[Table of Contents](#)

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