**Black Gai-Jin or a social faux pas on the horizon**

He wanted a divorce. Not such an unusual request, but the circumstances were less run-of-the-mill. He was about one metre ninety tall, a tonne of real meat, an absolutely unpronouncable non-European and un-American first name as well as surname, black as soot and holding a Canadian passport. OK. Even such folk wish to get divorced sometimes. Rather less usual as the fact that he was married to a Japanese woman with one child born in Yokohama, the second in Yellowknife and all permenently residing in Prague. It was clear to me that the appropriate Prague District Court will be over the moon over its unquestionable local jurisdiction and mulled over whether to deal with it under Czech law… or some possible alternative.

I even tried to lighten the conversation with my client, and without properly weighing up the possible consequences, I asked him with a beaming smile from what country of origin he came to Canada. My tip was the Congo or some other Sub-Saharan country. „You know, we are Canadians going back several generations. My ancestor got there using the Underground Railroad. He was a slave who'd escaped.“ At once it was obvious that this topic of conversation was none too pleasant for my perspective client. My imprudent question produced an elephant-sized piece of dung whose odour was starting to waft across the meeting room. The fact is that most black Americans, or Canadians, find it extremely unpleasant to be reminded that their ancestors were slaves – it´s actually unpleasant even if they mention it themselves. How to wriggle out of this?

„Oh my, that´s amazing, you are basically living proof of American history!“ I cried out after a nanosecond of a pause in which my brain cells went into overdrive. Without giving my klient any chance to respond in any way whatsoever to my theory I fired off my incredible experiences from Hartford, a town in which Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote ´Uncle Tom´s Cabin´. I suggested to him that I consider him the embodiment of Uncle Tom, and that indeed explains why we are sitting here in the log cabin... My client´s eyes expressed amazement at first, thereafter understanding and, finally, a smile extended over his entire round face. It had clearly never occurred to him before to think of himself as part of the historical process and he that should be proud of it.

A crisis had been averted, the client wasn´t peeved. But if I hand´t genuinely visited Hartford, if I hadn´t visited the Stowe family house as well as Mark Twain´s opulent house nearby (likewise an outspoken opponent of slavery), if this part of American history wasn´t of particular interest to me, I´m not sure how this would have turned out. Well, I do know: I´d lose a client, which in any case would have been a pity – for him as well as me.

From which one should draw a lesson – if you ask something you must expect to receive an answer which is completely at odds with what you expected. The ability to instantly wriggle out of embarrassing situations is one of the prerequisite attributes a lawyer must have. If you fall short in this area I recommend that you rehearse diligently and/or choose an area of work where you safeguarded from direct contact with a clientele and current cases. Forming contracts and sending them to clients via email is exactly the work you are after.