

## **On Racism, Homophobia, the West and Africa**

**By Norm R. Allen Jr.**

Today there is much understandable and well-intentioned concern about persecuted LGBTQI people in Africa. However, what accompanies much of this outrage is racist and condescending finger-pointing on the part of White Westerners.

Obviously, many White Western do-gooders are of the same mindset possessed by Albert Schweitzer, who viewed the African as his “junior brother.” These patronizing know-it-alls seem to believe that, like White knights in shining armor, they can simply swoop down on Africa and save LGBTQI people from their savage African tormentors. (What is worse, downright racist comments can be found by many White LGBTQI people in comments sections on numerous LGBTQI Websites. Everything is denounced, from alleged African intellectual inferiority to alleged inferior African culture.)

This insulting view rears its ugly head all throughout Western society. For example, there is never a shortage of Hollywood films glorifying heroic White people bent on saving helpless Blacks, such as the figures depicted in the film “Mississippi Burning.”

White LGBTQI people in the West imagine themselves to simply be looking out for their sisters and brothers in Africa. However, they continually ignore those courageous LGBTQI activists in Africa who repeatedly warn them that their “help” could actually exacerbate their plight.

For example, many African LGBTQI activists have told their White Western counterparts that a boycott of African goods and services would only increase homophobia throughout Africa. Yet White LGBTQI activists in the West continue to advocate boycotts. They are obviously more obsessed with their own sense of outrage than they are with improving the circumstances of LGBTQI people on the African continent.

Complicating matters is the fact that White do-gooders do not have a great track record when it comes to ostensible efforts to liberate African people. Only

Africans suffering from historical amnesia would be so gullible as to blindly embrace paternalistic White do-gooders from the West. Africans have fully earned the right to be suspicious of any Greeks (or other Whites from the West) bearing gifts.

Any effort in the West to help liberate LGBTQI people in Africa should be led by Black LGBTQI leaders. After all, African Americans helped lead the fight against apartheid in South Africa.

On August 9, 2014, Rep. Karen Bass, ranking member of the House Subcommittee on African, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations, met with Black LGBTQI people in Los Angeles to discuss ways in which African American LGBTQI people could (finally) respond in a major way to the ongoing persecution of their people in Africa. This belated response is an excellent opportunity for African American LGBTQI people to start leading the fight against homophobia in Africa.

Many White LGBTQI leaders in the West are simply too shallow and intellectually unsophisticated to understand how race complicates the issue. Indeed, race always trumps everything.

White LGBTQI leaders in the West have correctly charged that, in many respects, homophobia has been exported to Africa by evangelical American preachers. Moreover, they have rightly maintained that these Western Christians are interfering in African affairs and using Africans to advance the interests of Western conservative Christianity.

Why, then, should they be surprised when White LGBTQI people also are viewed suspiciously by many Africans, especially when these otherwise progressive Westerners do not seem to be reluctant to make blatant or thinly disguised racist comments about African people and African cultures?

Many White progressives tend to believe that genuine racism and paternalism can only emanate from conservatives or reactionaries. However, history is full of examples showing otherwise. For example, leading Black intellectuals such as George Padmore, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Hubert H. Harrison and Margaret

Walker wrote about their disillusionment with the Marxist movements in their day. However, then, as now, many White progressives just did not get it.

Ironically, many White LGBTQI people in the West rightfully complain that many people in mainstream society will not listen to their concerns. Yet, they arrogantly try to lead efforts to combat homophobia in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Arab world, all the while looking down their noses at non-Western peoples in general.

There are many ways that White Westerners can help LGBTQI people in Africa. For example, they can raise money for African LGBTQI people that are refugees, or that are seeking refugee status. However, this racist paternalism has got to go! Africans are junior brothers and sisters to no people, and it is time that even well-meaning White LGBTQI people in the West understand this simple fact.