

United States include African Americans, Indigenous Peoples, Latinos, and Asian Americans. There is a long history of racism in the United States. Some examples are the genocide and forced relocation of Indigenous Peoples, the enslavement of Africans, the practice of importing workers from other countries for difficult, dangerous, and low-paying jobs, including Africans in the 1700s, Chinese in the 1850s, and Mexican farm workers today; the expulsion of Mexican American citizens during the Great Depression; the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II; and the unequal treatment of African Americans, which was legal until the mid-1960s.

As a result of pervasive racism, many people of color experience extreme poverty, infant mortality, unemployment, and violence, and their level of educational attainment is lower than that of members of the dominant population. Racism is frequently based on a belief in the inherent superiority of one race over another. This belief in superiority is so ingrained in society that racism is perpetuated by a generally accepted, unconscious attitude that presumes a white cultural norm. Incidents of racial discrimination, such as that explained in Box 4.3, can deeply impact individuals and communities.

### Box 4.3 Becoming a Change Agent

Black lives matter, blue lives matter, or all lives matter.

In July 2015, motorist Sandra Bland was pulled over in Waller County, Texas, for failing to use her turn signal. The Texas State trooper, who pulled her over asked her to put out her cigarette. Bland questioned why that was necessary, and she was told to get out of her car. When Bland did not comply, the trooper tried to pull her out of her car. He pointed a Taser at her, and when she got out of the car, in the Dashcam video you can hear Ms. Bland saying that the trooper threw her to the ground. She was arrested for being “combative and uncooperative.” Three days after her arrest, Bland was found hanging in her cell. The authorities said it was suicide, but Bland’s family and friends stated that Ms. Bland would never kill herself. The Bland family filed a wrongful death lawsuit and won \$1.9 million. Sandra Bland was African American, and her arrest and treatment in jail have become part of the larger conversation about racism in the criminal justice system. People ask if Bland had been white, would she have been arrested at all. This is one of many questionable deaths of people of color within the criminal justice system that has sparked the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement discussed earlier in the chapter. People contrast numerous cases of white people with weapons, not being arrested or shot, with numerous cases of armed and unarmed people of color being arrested or shot and killed.

#### Analyzing the Situation

- Try to gather more information about the Bland case by conducting an Internet search. How do people on different sides of the case explain what happened?
- Research the issue of race and unequal treatment in the criminal justice system. What other things have happened that make people assert that racism is built into the system.
- Some people assert that the name “Black Lives Matter” and the Black Lives Matter movement are racist because all lives should matter. Others argue that this is an essential movement that social workers and others should support. Research both sides of this debate. What do you think about it?
- Does the treatment of people of color in the justice system seem equal or fair to you? If not, can you think of explanations other than racism that might explain the different treatment?
- Looking at the Explanations of Social Injustice in this chapter, which do you think might best explain what is happening in the criminal justice system in the United States?

#### What Can Social Workers Do?

Given your analysis, what might social workers do to address situations like the Bland case and prevent them

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### Box 4.3 (continued)

from happening again in the future? What interventions could you suggest at the individual level? The community level? The institutional level, such as the police or courts? The policy level, for example changes in local, state, or federal legislation?

#### What Can You Do?

What one step might you take now, alone or working with others, to reduce racism or another type of oppression? What are the barriers that might keep you from taking this step? What could you do to reduce those barriers?

**Sexism** is oppression that grows out of the belief that men are superior to women. Inequality has long been supported by belief in “natural” and inherent differences between the sexes. Women, considered the weaker sex, have been seen as unable to fulfill certain roles and have been expected to serve as the primary caregivers for children and other family members.

Two social conditions—the gender gap and the feminization of poverty—have resulted from sexism. The gender gap is the difference between men’s and women’s earnings. In 2016, for example, among year-round, full-time workers, a woman earned 80 cents for every dollar earned by a man (American Association of University Women, 2017). The gap in pay between men and women is even greater for women of color and for mothers. The term *feminization of poverty* refers to the fact that many more women than men live in poverty, as discussed in Chapter 3. Women are also more likely to be the targets of other forms of injustice, including domestic violence, rape, and sexual harassment.

**Homophobia** is a fear of homosexuality, or a fear of lesbians and gay men. **Heterosexism** is the institutionalized bias directed at gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and people who are transgendered. As with other types of oppression, heterosexism is seen in such acts as discrimination in housing and employment, which means that gay people are denied access solely on the basis of their sexual orientation. Homophobia is also seen in acts of violence in the form of gay bashing. Examples of institutionalized antigay bias include the exclusion of lesbians and gay men from the military and the refusal of most states to let lesbians and gay men marry and openly adopt children. As a result of homophobia, heterosexuals frequently view all aspects of gay peoples’ lives in relation to their sexuality. Today lesbians and gay men make up one of the few oppressed groups that still lack federal civil rights protection against discrimination.

**Classism** describes the institutional and cultural attitudes and behaviors that stigmatize the poor and place a higher value on wealthier people. The economic system creates and supports excessive inequality and does not meet the basic human needs of poorer people. Classist attitudes hold that the poor are less capable and less industrious than those who have more resources and that they are responsible for their own poverty. Americans rarely discuss class, and the term is often misunderstood. *Class* refers to more than just income; it also includes social status and power. People perceived to be lower class are treated differently, not only because of how much money they have but also because of how they talk, what they wear, where they live, and the type and extent of education they have attained.