Minority Groups in the Community

Outline

Exempted from "community Relations concepts"

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Learning Objectives

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By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Show how change generates tension as minority groups struggle for power.
- Identify key problem areas within each of the major racial groups.
- Explore some of the critical issues of minority groups.

- Explain why "justice" and services are different for the rich and the poor.
- Show how problems arise from different demographic groups in the community.

5-1 Introduction

Every metropolitan community in this country is experiencing the struggle for social reconstruction. This struggle is evidenced by shifts in the balance of power, massive voter registration drives, and improvement in the status quo for minority group members. With change, however, has come increased tension and conflict between the rising minority power structure and the establishment. The criminal justice system represents the established power structure, thus it will take the brunt of the conflict between the minority and the majority power struggles. Because the police are the ever-present representatives of the "opposing forces," they have become the "enemies" of many minority groups. Every police officer, court official, and correctional agent who does not follow the political line of minority pressure groups becomes suspect because to many minority groups, the police represent a "repressive system."

The system is, in fact, repressive, in that it represents the majority power structure of the community and of the country. Because the police do represent the majority, there are many minority groups who do not

perceive that there is equal justice under the law. Most minorities feel that they do not receive justice because individuals within the system discriminate against them as a matter of policy. Regardless of the source of discrimination, the alienation of races is subject to severe social pressures. These pressures are seen in the definitions of discrimination, prejudice, and bias.

5-2 Discrimination, Prejudice, and Bias

All of us discriminate in one form or another. *Discrimination*, as used here, however, means a showing of partiality or prejudice in the treatment of, specific action toward, or policies directed against the welfare of minority groups. When this discrimination becomes a prejudice, or a bias, it affects the function of the criminal justice agent in an adverse fashion.

Prejudice is an intolerance or hatred of other races; and, in milder form, it is an opinion held in disregard of facts that contradict it as a preconceived, unfavorable idea about a race. Prejudice is a severe form of discrimination, and it is manifested through biased actions of one person toward another or one race toward another.

Bias is the extension of discrimination to the point that the resulting attitudes affect work performance. Although discrimination may not be controlled completely, biased actions are a management problem. If not repressed and allowed to continue, bias will result in an agency that reflects hostile work habits. Bias evolves into hate, and, when this attitude prevails, the minorities in the community are the recipients of poor attitudes, indifferent services, and often insensitive or callous treatment from those who are hired to render public services. Police services especially suffer because hostile attitudes of citizens toward the police are as harmful to social order as is police malpractice.

The problem is of serious concern to the future of American cities because many of them have a minority population of more than 50 percent. In Long Beach, California, for example, 40 percent of the population is over 50 years of age, and racial minorities approach 35 percent. In the city of Los Angeles, about half of the population is comprised of racial minorities. This ratio is not unusual in major cities of the United States.

The viewpoint of most police departments is that professional officers cannot resolve the differences or diversity of the cultures. Professionals, however, must set the stage for improved relations between police and different cultures of the community.

The priorities for discussion are:

- Change and tension
- Minorities' struggle for power
- Economics: different justices for the rich and the poor
- Other key minority groups

5-3 Change and Tension: Minorities' Struggle for Power

American society, during its brief history, has been in constant change as one minority group after another has struggled to gain a foothold in the larger society. A minority is defined as a stable subgroup within a nation or society that has particular interests different from those of the larger group. A minority may be political, racial, economic, ethnic, etc. Racial minorities have found the struggle most difficult. These minorities, not in the main power structure, have struggled to gain power through increased voter registration and participation; changes in the law by challenging police action and court decisions; and, when these fail, through mass demonstrations. These efforts have been successful in some areas and disappointing in others.

Churches and social institutions have helped solve some of the problems of equity for minorities in the community. However, institutions such as schools and governmental agencies have been the most receptive to court orders in the sharing of power through economic independence. By sharing some power with minority groups, these agencies have been the leaders in integration efforts in this country.

Massive changes in minority rights have occurred since the end of World War II. The rate of change increased with the Vietnam War and the ensuing civil disturbances. Positive results of the disturbances might be debated because the main result was to strengthen the police system to control these outbreaks. Every major police agency in this country bolstered its heavy-hitting responses to civil unrest.

SWAT squads, large-formation maneuvers, and better intelligence were the end results of these disturbances. Because the police are taught to respond aggressively to this type of action, they have a tendency to view their position with greater authority. This authority is manifested in a response with weaponry that is tantamount to war. Thus, it is not too surprising that many relatively minor contacts end in conflict.

5-3a Search for a Scapegoat

Each side of the urban conflict is looking for a "scapegoat" to blame for its actions. The more radical minority groups view police and other agencies of the system as antagonists. Minorities are angered because they feel they are receiving inadequate protection and services. The police are the natural scapegoats.

Once scapegoating becomes popular, an entire segment of the community may expect unfair treatment from the police. Many minority groups *anticipate* harassment and verbal brutality. They feel that they are going to be the subjects of "rousts."

5-3b Police Find a Scapegoat

The police, in their frustration and inability to control crime, may find a scapegoat in minority populations. Racial minorities, because of their intense antagonisms, play right into the hands of those police agents seeking a scapegoat. One incident leads to another until there is almost no mutual respect or understanding between agents of the criminal justice system and minority groups.

5-4 Key Minority Groups

If one looks closely at the causes of minority frustrations, they would find that underlying conflicts in a community are motivated by far deeper causes than incidental police contact. Some of the many causes, such as economics, will be discussed later in this chapter. Most authorities, however, begin with racial problems. In this text, we have chosen to begin with the identification and discussion of problems of only the two largest racial minority groups.

5-4a The Black Minority

The beginning of the modern black movement for equality in the United States came in 1909, when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was formed. These groups focused on their publication, Crisis, edited by W.E.B. DuBois. The organization's demands were for equal civil, political, and educational rights and enforcement of the 14th and 15th Amendments.

Throughout ensuing decades, cases were pressed through the courts, often with the aid of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). These movements were interrupted by World War I, the Great Depression, and

World War II. After World War II, the movement grew as the result of massive movements of black populations from the rural South to northern cities to work in defense industries. With the population shifts, the problems became urban and much more acute.

In 1957, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was organized. This gave Dr. Martin Luther King a platform from which to begin a quest for equality. During the rallies of the early 1960s, Dr. King proposed a liaison with draft protesters, and the marches for minority civil rights became a cause for college students because they were of draft age. This coalition forced demonstrations that threatened the capability of the government to control.

The demonstrations escalated until thousands were being jailed for civil disobedience. By 1966, in the march from Selma to Montgomery, 3000 federal marshals were sent in to protect the marchers. In 1968, Dr. King was assassinated, and by 1975, the Vietnam War was winding down. The demonstrations moved from massive shows of disobedience to the gaining of new voter registrations and pursuing specific cases of discrimination through the courts.

The power ceded to black minorities up to then was focused in about twenty major cities of the United States. Traditionally, black populations have moved in to occupy economically depressed central-city areas with substandard housing, few services, and little hope for a better life. In turn, the "white flight" to the suburbs has left blacks in control of massive inner city liabilities, not the assets they had fought for.

There are many social and psychological reasons why black ideology and culture are different from their white counterparts. The reconciliation of these differences will not be easy. It is best expressed by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*, which was written more than a century-and-a-half ago. He indicated that the fate of blacks is, in a sense, linked to that of the Europeans. The two races are bound one to the other without mingling; it is equally difficult for them to separate completely, or to unite. The past hundred years have borne this out.

Joel Williamson, in his analysis of American racism, said, "Racism is essentially an abstraction. Race is a problem of the mind and not of the body. Ultimately, there is no race problem in the South, or in America, that we, both black and white, do not make in our own minds."

5-4b The Hispanic Community

Mexican-Americans' integration into modern society has not been an easy path. The Spaniards, who occupied Mexico, settled in the Southwestern area

of North America in the eighteenth century. Large land grants were made to families loyal to the crown in Mexico, and these families become the power structure of the territory. By 1836, immigration patterns of Anglos had caused the dissolution of the Spanish land grants, and a war was waged in South Texas. The Republic of Texas forces, after the campaign, were in a position to negotiate a settlement with the Mexican government.

Later, after an invasion of Mexico in 1846, the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe settled the boundary, and gave half of all Mexican holdings to the United States government. Mexican citizens were given the choice of citizenship in the United States or a return to Mexico.

Mexican-Americans began as agricultural workers, but evolved to blue-collar jobs by the 1950s. On the way, they suffered the same discrimination pattern as other minorities in this economic category.

Mexican-Americans, until the large influx of immigrants starting in the 1970s (and still continuing), were able to integrate into white neighborhoods. In California, there were Mexican-American families integrated into every neighborhood, there was little discrimination in schooling, and Mexican-Americans fit into the pattern of the white-dominated society. But with the large influx of immigrants during the past 30 years, newcomers have tasted the pangs of discrimination. Consequently, pressure during the past two decades has caused the "Chicano" to struggle for his rights, as other minority groups have had to do.

In later years, the La Raza Unita political action party has exercised its power in local city and country elections, and Mexican-Americans have become a political force in elections in states along the border. Nationally, the Mexican population is about 10 percent. In states of the Southwest, the population ranges from 15 to 25 percent.

Many families of Mexican descent have quietly integrated into the mainstream of North American cities. Although they have suffered economic deprivation, their social integration has been better than most minority groups. Police suppression of the Mexican-American is still present, as it is with every minority group that is poor and highly visible on the street.

5-5 Economics: A Different Justice for Rich and Poor

Minority groups are spurred on by hopes of upward economic mobility. Yet they are hampered the most by discrimination, inadequate skills, poor education, and few employment opportunities. Because of these deficiencies, they are the most likely to fall prey to the ups and downs of a capitalistic

economy. Thus, poor minority groups are most apt to reject "delayed gratification." On the contrary, they want gratification now, and they are unable to relate to the puritanical system that guides spending patterns in upper- and middle-class communities. Immediate economic gratification is a need of the minority community, and when the need is not met, there is dissatisfaction and conflict in the community. Part of this problem has been the immense amount of money funneled into welfare over the years.

5-5a Shift in Community Values

There are groups in the community that are shifting from rural to urban values, and are feeling restlessness and pressures from the change. The "white flight" to the suburbs has left much of the inner-city ghetto without social control and stability. A family caught in this situation places less emphasis on ethics and values. Hence, with less emphasis on value systems, it is difficult for individuals to feel moral obligations to a larger society.

The police, in doing their duty, become involved in confrontations and conflicting points of view with the poorest segments of the population. As pointed out, the poor have different expectations, aspirations, and value systems; and often have a conflict with existing laws. Thus, the stage is set for conflict along economic lines, which leads to a vicious cycle of "blaming."

5-5b The Poverty Syndrome

The poverty syndrome has a powerful psychological influence on how a person views society and how he views those who control society. The poor majority often resents those who control the systems of society. Those who are or who have been poor come from all races to contribute to this large segment of the community.

People who are poor are in contact with the criminal justice system more frequently. They are at times "street people," and are highly vulnerable to the suppressive impact of the system. As opposed to the middle class and the affluent, the poor minorities have grievances against agents of the system that are very real. The agents of the criminal justice system, in spite of the reality of the complaints of the poor, cannot exempt those who are poor from police, court, or correctional actions because of the nature of the law. The fact that the affluent get better justice cannot be denied. Yet, those in the criminal justice system cannot assume the burden or the blame for all inequities of society. Any change to remove these inequities must come from our legislators and from society as a whole.

5-5c How the Poor Fail to Get Equality from the Criminal Justice System

Inequities for the poor, such as fines or jail terms, are not likely to change. A very poor person driving an old car will be issued a citation to correct the defects of the vehicle. A person who drives a new car cannot empathize with this kind of violator. For example, most states have mandatory safety checks. In the "smog basins" of California, the poor, who drive older cars, are supporting an entirely new level of bureaucracy in the enforcement of the safety-check laws. The same is true of the arbitrarily established speed limit of 55 mph set by the federal government that is being imposed upon a system designed for a much higher speed. When the police enforce this speed law, they exact from a violator a fee often exceeding several days' pay for a poor person.

It is little wonder that the poor are critical of a system that imposes and satisfies its vengeance with penalties of money. A fine levied against a poor person has a different result from a fine levied against an affluent person. The police, courts, or corrections are not going to correct the problem. However, society might ease this situation if it felt the need.

5-5d Minorities of the Police Subculture

The police themselves are a minority, and like other minorities, their culture is influenced by the thinking of the dominant majority. Members of minorities who enter police work often identify with the police culture, and begin to look at the larger society as "them." Because of the isolation of the police subculture, they tend to express prejudice toward other minorities (the rest of society). If unchecked, these prejudicial attitudes can develop into discriminatory treatment of those groups that are not part of the police subculture.

Other agencies of the criminal justice system become cast in much the same social strata with their own grouping. Each group then accepts its own form of discrimination. The alienation experienced by these subcultures is not as deep as the alienation felt by racial minorities, but it is nevertheless real.

5-6 Hostile Attitudes versus Police Malpractice

In an overview of this relationship, experts say that hostile attitudes toward the police are probably as disruptive to order as police malpractice. Thus, prejudicial attitudes are shown not just by the police, but also are rampant in the community structure. There are many logical reasons

why this is a normal reaction to the power struggle in the minority community. Some of the main reasons for this antagonism follow.

5-6a Prejudicial Acts

There are, in fact, many acts of prejudice committed by both police and citizens. People tend to cast each other in a negative light without reference to facts when there is little or no positive interaction between the two forces. In other words, the police are human. Think about it; the more you know about a particular group of people, the less likely you are to make generalized prejudicial assumptions about them. This goes to the heart of community relations.

5-6b Self-Concept

The psychoanalytical theory of early childhood development emphasizes age maturity rather than social development. Thus, white supremacy, high status, and fair skin become a plus in society. In this context, the minority man may possess great masculine vigor; yet, to some degree he is rendered socially, politically, and economically impotent. The way a person views the community is affected by his or her self-concept.

5-6c Social Learning Theory

Under the social learning theory, it is said that a person can unlearn (although not easily) that which is learned. When one grows up in a culture of poverty, he learns the welfare syndromes, and he has a general distrust of authority figures. A "hate-the-cop" attitude is a natural result of this exposure. It becomes virtually impossible to change the value structure of an individual who has lived under these debilitating syndromes. Fortunately, more and more minorities are escaping the experience of these cripplers.

5-6d Stereotyping Self-Fulfilling

As the community assesses the behavior of police, the police in turn study the behavior patterns of the individuals in the community. Both groups, from their vantage points, make generalizations, one about the other. It is these generalizations that live far beyond the circumstances that caused them to be made in the first place. These generalizations are like a bad reputation that no one can live down. Stereotyping is self-fulfilling, and if

one concentrates on generalizations long enough, they tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies.

5-6e Minority Officer Recruitment

An example of the complexities of this issue is that it makes little difference to the community whether police officers are black or white. Black officers are often the hope and desire of a black community, but when the black officer moves in and enforces the law, he becomes a part of the oppressive power structure of the larger community. Shortly, the black police officer becomes "just another cop." Even worse, he is often labeled as an "Uncle Tom" and a traitor to the black cause.

A community in transition does not view the police as a necessary ingredient in its struggle for power and equality. Few minorities acknowledge that the police are the reason they are able to demonstrate at all. Without the intervention of the police to control both demonstrators and crowds, the right to demonstrate would have been destroyed long ago by mob or military actions.

Contrary to popular thought, the minority community does not dislike the presence of police. The main concern of responsible residents of a particular minority community is the lack of adequate police protection and services. What is considered "adequate" police protection in the minority community may vary from person to person, and there may never be agreement on what is fair, impartial, and concerned law enforcement.

5-7 Other Key Minority Groups

Unfortunately, crime rates are highest where minorities cluster. These minority areas are often, but not always, found in the inner-city areas. Most of the minority groups in high crime areas are also poor, and all are under-represented in the power structure of a community. Each of the groups selected for discussion here does not necessarily have deviant behavior that requires criminal justice attention, but all do have problems that require planning on the part of some segments of the criminal justice system. (See Table 5-1 for victimization rates.)

Race is one of the demographic rankings that distinguish groups in the community. Other groupings are also generators of tension between people, and in a multicultural society, these different groupings must be acknowledged. The groupings often lead to behavior that is illegal and police practices that are not uniformly applied. For example, the black

TABLE **5-1** Victimization Rates and Levels

	Number of Victimizations (in 1,000's)	Victimization Rates
Personal Crimes	18,984	93.4
Crimes of Violence	6,009	29.6
Rape	130	.6
Robbery	1,150	5.7
Assault	4,729	23.3
Aggravated	1,601	7.9
Simple	3,128	15.4
Crimes of Theft	12,975	63.3
Personal Larceny		
With Contact	637	3.1
Without Contact	12,388	60.7
Household Crimes	15,419	161.0
Household Burglary	5,148	53.8
Household Larceny	8,304	86.7
Motor Vehicle Theft	1,968	20.5

Source: *Criminal Victimization*, U.S. Department of Justice.

ghettos produce thousands of gambling arrests each year for persons who engage in penny-ante gambling. At the same time, just down the block, a white church may conduct its Wednesday night bingo games.

Church-run games are operated without fear of enforcement or interference, even though generally they are illegal. Thus, each minority group plays the other off against the system. It is not surprising that there are masses of people who have lost confidence in the system. It is also not too surprising that there are masses of people, who, through collective dissatisfaction with the system, turn to civil disobedience and terrorism to bring about social reform.

5-7a Correcting Social Inequities

The criminal justice system (within which the police are a minority in their own right) has little influence upon the correction of social inequities. Neither the police, the courts, nor corrections can alleviate ignorance, discrimination, slums, poverty, disease, and unemployment. Society has demanded of the criminal justice system, which is only one of many systems, that it placate and suppress the "revolutionaries," and main-

tain community harmony. It is good for politicians to have community harmony. It is, in many ways, quite surprising that our control apparatus functions as well as it does!

5-7b Shaping Youths' Values

Of all minority groups, the most important one is young people. Their importance is emphasized because they represent all segments of society. The future of this nation depends upon the values they are forming. They obviously will be the future decision makers of our society.

Traditionally, home, school, and allied social activities have created the value settings for the young. As communities urbanize or become metropolitan centers, the influence of the community expands to parks, playgrounds, Little League baseball, scouting, and even the police; all are involved in the stimulation of proper values in the young.

It is questionable whether youth in contemporary society is actually family-oriented because outside forces play such an intervening role in the shaping of values. Possibly the most important valuing conditioners in today's society are family, school, peer experience, and television exposure. Religion may not be discounted, but its role will be sporadic, and its influence may be limited.

5-7c Youth and the Law

The law, to a young person, is often considered a "necessary evil." They do not understand the law, nor do they usually wish to learn about it. Rebellion against most laws, and especially those concerning the control of traffic, generates much hostility and animosity among the young.

This hostility to law is naturally projected to police officers because they represent the negative forces that impose sanctions. It is often said that the young do not like the police, and the feeling is often mutual. The police must be sensitive to the value orientation of the young.

5-7d Hostility Modification

In the short term, the feeling of hostility toward the police is real. However, this hostility will usually modify as the person gains maturity. Before maturation takes place, the mutual feeling of hostility between youth and the police tends to create additional antagonism in their contacts.

This feeling, in the long term, serves notice to the police that their behavior should be exemplary because they are being watched with an eye of some mistrust. The suspicions of youth are important in keeping the

exercise of police power and behavior within legal bounds. The young serve as an equalizing or balancing force that keeps older and more conservative values from dominating the power structures of society.

5-7e The Jewish Minority

Jews do not constitute a race, per se, however, they are an ethnic unit that should be considered in discussing community relations. Dating from the Jews' Mount Sinai exodus and their exile in 605 B.C., no other identifiable ethnic group has been more discriminated against. This oppression has led the Jewish people into conflict throughout much of the modern world. Even today, considerable worldwide terrorism revolves around the approximately three million persons who are working to maintain the nation of Israel.

Although Jews hold a common heritage, a common history, and a common culture with the majority, their integration into contemporary society in some neighborhoods is still plagued with problems of anti-Semitism. Often, this discrimination, where it does exist, is quite subtle and difficult for the law enforcement officer to identify. Officers who are knowledgeable about and sensitive to both latent and overt anti-Semitism can do much to improve community relations in Jewish communities.

5-7f The Elderly

This is probably the second-largest minority with which the police will be concerned. The old and the poor offer a combination of concerns that are of importance to the police operation. Many need special assistance from the police.

Victimization surveys show that the elderly have a greater fear of being victims of crime than the general population. This is true, even though the rate of victimization is lower for them than for persons between the ages of 20 to 30. Police services must be designed to counter this fear of victimization. Thus, the elderly present a special responsibility for the police. The need may be a medical emergency, rather than crime-related, but the need is real. These special programs are discussed in Chapter 13.

5-7g The New Asian Minority

There are about 70,000 immigrants of Vietnamese descent who live within commuting distance of "Little Saigon," within the city limits of

Westminster in Southern California. This community is unique in that the people's residences are integrated into the Anglo community, and the business section serves as the community recreation and social center. However, the problems discussed below are rather typical of new Asian communities throughout the entire country.

Living in the United States causes the Vietnamese family to be different; the wife often has to become the breadwinner and support the family. The husband, who was the traditional head of the family in the homeland, is often relegated to a secondary role in earning power and influence in the family and community. Many Vietnamese males, much like the black and Hispanic husband, is relegated to blue-collar jobs. The Asian social order does not favor men taking orders from women. Many Asian women are reaching the supervisory level before the men. This situation can cause personnel problems in many industries. Also, Asians are new competition for jobs previously held by Hispanic and black laborers. This competition for jobs causes alienation between these minority groups.

Many Asians do not trust banks, nor are they interested in the government knowing too much about their business. Their behavior is understandable, considering their Asian experiences. There have been some cases of murder and extortion, much like the old Italian Mafia in some cities. Fortunately, these events have been fairly rare in this country. Many Asians just do not trust the police to protect them.

The influx of Asians into minority neighborhoods has created considerable social turmoil because of cultural differences, a varied work ethic, and religious intolerance. Many of the arson and assault victims of the 1992 South Central Los Angeles and Long Beach riots were Asians. Actions were directed against them by other minority and white hoodlums.

Chapter Summary

We do not know which are the most important minorities in contemporary society. We are not even sure who needs the most protection under the law. Racial minorities, because of their historical alienation from the larger society, are candidates for further assistance from the criminal justice system. However, in the past decade there has been a noticeable change of attitude among minority members who have become educated and moved into the socioeconomic middle class. In many cosmopolitan

areas, the issue of race seems to be of less and less importance as minorities begin to share in the good life enjoyed by the larger society.

By understanding the problems of each of the minorities, the criminal justice agent can respond with greater empathy and develop programs that will result in a better society in which all can live.

The two racial groups that were commented on in the first part of the chapter are but two of many racial groups with problems of discrimination. Each minority reacts to society in different ways because of discriminatory action by the criminal justice system.

It is impossible to segregate one race from another and to be explicit about the discrimination that occurs to each. Each race feels the pressures of society in a different way, and thus responds differently to those pressures. There is a tendency for a race that is the victim of discrimination to find a scapegoat for its frustrations.

For example, Asians, who are recent arrivals on the West Coast are looked down upon by both the Mexican-American and black communities. These minorities refer to the Asians as "them" and to themselves as "us." Thus, discrimination is not just the alienation of minorities from whites, but also a process of seeking scapegoats for each racial grouping.

Discussion Questions

1. Why are communities in a state of flux, causing minorities to constantly adjust to the changes?
2. How and why do minority groups tend to form into pressure groups in order to exert power more effectively?
3. Discuss whether or not a person can discriminate without becoming biased.
4. Why must professionals of the criminal justice agencies take the lead in developing improved relations between the criminal justice system and society?
5. How have the changes and resulting tensions been a constant feature of United States society?
6. Give examples of how scapegoating tends to be a popular choice of actions between minority groups in our society.
7. Discuss how black power structures in the inner city have inherited problems as a result of "white flight" to the suburbs.
8. Explain why the "poverty syndrome" is not only an economic but also a psychological barrier for the poor to overcome.

9. How do new minorities tend to take pressure away from problems of older minorities in a community?
10. There tends to be some animosity between the youth and the units of the criminal justice system. Discuss how it may develop.

Critical Incidents for Analysis and Discussion

1. There are minorities based on sex, race, age, power structure, etc. Analyze the possible techniques for easing the stress of being classed as a minority. Define such terms as segregation, accommodation, acculturation, and assimilation. How do these influence criminal justice services to the community?