**Chapter 1: Introduction**

**Summary**

The issue of race and ethnicity in the U.S. remains an important factor in understanding social interaction, relationships, and the fabric of American culture. While many people like to think that issues such as racism, discrimination, and prejudice are a thing of the past, there is ample evidence to suggest that these problems remain a critical component of social life. It is also the case that many people misunderstand or misuse certain terms when discussing race-related issues. This chapter outlined the way social scientists operationalize terms such as prejudice, discrimination, minority groups, racism, race, and ethnicity. It also sought to explain how minority groups are created, how and why they are mistreated, and the debate about the value of multiculturalism in American society. On one hand, some experts believe that too diverse a society dilutes its national identity and the social cohesion that comes from people seeing the world similarly. On the other hand, multiculturalism celebrates people from different backgrounds and offers insight into human nature as well as how groups can coexist peacefully and equitably. For students of criminal justice, the treatment of minority groups is central to understanding criminal behavior and how the administration of justice affects people without power. Many of the theories explaining crime can be used in part to describe the motivation of some offenders, but they also are framed in light of criminals’ minority status. Thus, any discussion of crime in American society must pay some attention to the way certain groups are treated by the dominant culture.