**Chapter 4: Hispanics and the Criminal Justice System**

**Summary**

This chapter explored the changing face of American society as an increasing number of Hispanics, both legal and illegal, become a fixture of the social landscape. Estimates by the Census Bureau suggest that Hispanics will constitute the largest minority group by 2050. The Latin and Hispanic influence on American culture can be seen in a host of areas. Perhaps the best example exists in Miami, which has been transformed by the influx of Cuban immigrants over the years. Moreover, the way that Hispanics and Latinos have been historically treated in this country has resulted in many subgroups remaining mired in a life of poverty and crime. As we have seen, part of the problem for Chicanos stems from the isolation they experience with regard to education as well as the limited access to quality healthcare in this country. For Puerto Ricans, the main issue is independence, but they will remain a commonwealth of the United States until the people on the island and on the mainland decide whether they want to be an independent country or remain a subsidiary of the U.S.   
 As it relates to criminal justice, Hispanics, as a general category, are overrepresented in virtually every area of criminal justice. Whether it is treatment by the police, sentences relating to drugs, or the increase in the number of Hispanic inmates in prison, clearly the trend with this group’s experience in the criminal justice system looks remarkably like that of their African American counterparts. This is particularly true in light of the recent changes to immigration enforcement, which is often referred to as the criminalization of immigration. While much of the rationale for the decision to escalate the arrest, detention and deportation of immigrants from Central America and Mexico are not based on the actual facts, such a strategy has increased the number of Hispanic and Latino minorities who are involved in the criminal justice system.