**Chapter 06 Native Americans and the Criminal Justice System**

**Summary**

This chapter examined the history of Native Americans in this country as well as the ways in which they become involved in the criminal justice system. The position of Native Americans is rather unique in that while they are supposed to have a separate system of justice to address problems relating to crime, increasingly, the federal government is encroaching upon tribal authority to handle a variety of tasks. We have also seen that in many ways Native Americans are a forgotten people. Historically, the U.S. seemed to have a sense of entitlement when it came to taking land that belonged to Native Americans. Social progress was seen as more important than preserving the heritage and authority of Native Americans. Even when treaties were signed that stipulated the rights and privileges of Native Americans, Whites historically ignored the agreements and used force when Native Americans refused to capitulate.  
 Control over Native Americans has historically fallen to the federal government who has created the Bureau of Indian Affairs to regulate most of the aspects of life on and off the reservation. Other agencies, such as the Department of Health and Human Services, the Public Health Service, and the Indian Health Service, all attempt to address the many issues surrounding Native Americans.  
 While Native Americans have made an effort to assimilate, their experiences have resulted in a number of social problems. Many Native Americans still lag behind Whites economically and educationally. There are higher dropout rates for Native Americans than other minority groups, fewer who graduate from college, and even fewer in professional careers. Moreover, a large percentage of Native Americans live at or below the poverty level. Native Americans also suffer from a variety of health problems, including tuberculosis, alcoholism, mental illness and other disorders.   
 Many of these limitation and problems result in a significant involvement with the criminal justice system, either as victims or as offenders. As was mentioned, jurisdictional problems confuse the issues of justice. Thus, while not a large segment of the population in terms of victimization or as offenders, like their African American and Hispanic counterparts, they are overrepresented in the crime statistics.