**Chapter 12: Courts and Multiculturalism**

**Summary**

While this discussion of the U.S. court system and multiculturalism centers on criminal courts, one cannot overlook the accomplishments of federal civil courts in shaping state and local criminal justice practices with regard to diversity. Several areas of federal civil legislation have important consequences for criminal justice officials. The more significant legislation relates to:

* Civil rights violations, which enable individuals to sue civilly city or state employees who deprive them of their constitutional rights,
* Equal employment opportunities, which prohibit discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, age, or national origin,
* Sex discrimination, and
* Discrimination against the disabled, which protect Americans with disabilities from discrimination in employment in the use of public facilities and services.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Steven Vago, author of the book *Law and Society*, stated that “racism is embedded in the system and proponents recognize that its elimination is impossible but at the same time they insist that an ongoing struggle to countervail racism must be carried out.”[[2]](#endnote-2) To be sure, disparity and discrimination in the courtroom is not restricted to one’s race, as gender, ethnicity, cultural, and socioeconomic factors influence discretionary practices at all stages of the system. As an example, minority women face special concerns upon entering the criminal justice system, particularly given their high rates of poverty and unemployment, and the increased likelihood of them being a single parent. Unfortunately, the plight of minority women who enter our courts has been the subject of scant research efforts. What we do know about this group suggests differential treatment of minority women in the courts and throughout the criminal justice system.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Much has changed in our courts, as numerous reforms directed at leveling the playing field for minorities and all groups have influenced courtroom practices and personnel. Nevertheless, much work remains. It is hoped that recognizing and highlighting the problems and accomplishments provides an impetus for continued progress.

1. Neubauer, 2005, p. 62. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Vago, Steven. (2003). *Law and Society* (7th edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice

Hall, p. 71. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Mann, 1989. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)