

## Melissa Chavira Meraz transcript

- Speaker 1: [00:00](#) We're, we are recording. Um, so today is October 30th and we are in the library conducting an interview for my honors thesis titled The Latino South Race and Racialization. So we'll go ahead and jump right in. Are you 18 years or older? And can you state and spell your first and last name for the record?
- Speaker 2: [00:25](#) Yes. My name's Melissa Chavira Meraz
- Speaker 1: When were you born? I was born on May 10th, 2000.
- Speaker 1: [00:42](#) Okay. And um, where are you from and where did you grow up?
- Speaker 2: [00:47](#) I am from Nashville, Tennessee. I was born there but I was, I moved to a Walls, Mississippi and that's where I grew up.
- Speaker 1: Where is Walls?
- Speaker 2: Walls is right on the state line of Mississippi and Tennessee, it's close to Southaven and all that in Desoto county.
- Speaker 1: [01:06](#) Okay. And um, have you lived in any places other than Walls and Nashville?
- Speaker 2: [01:12](#) No, I haven't.
- Speaker 1: Um. And why did you move from Nashville to Walls?
- Speaker 2: I think my parents decided to move from Nashville to Walls because there was just more family and friends down here, down here. So I think that's what made them want to move.
- Speaker 1: And what brought you to Oxford?
- Speaker 2: Uh, really when I came to see the campus. I really loved it here. I was really convinced by a recruiter so, and I knew I wanted to start off at a university and I just always knew that I wanted to come to Oxford ever since I was little.
- Speaker 1: [01:52](#) Is race an important part of your identity? Why or why not?

Speaker 2: [01:57](#) Um race is important but not important. I mean I think it's important like I liked the fact that I am Hispanic, Mexican, but like I don't pay attention to like negativity about it. So at that point, like it's like it's off to the side, like I don't really pay attention to that. So that's what I would say about it.

Speaker 1: [02:28](#) Um, how has your experience being well being a student here and living in Oxford?

Speaker 2: [02:35](#) Well, I myself haven't experienced, experienced anything. So like with racism, not yet. I hope not to experience that. I've heard many stories about it, but so far nothing. It's been a good experience so far.

Speaker 1: [02:50](#) And what about the Oxford community? Have you participated in maybe any community events or

Speaker 2: [02:58](#) Not yet, but I probably will sometime soon.

Speaker 1: [03:02](#) And uh, what is your major, your classification and any involvement that you have?

Speaker 2: [03:07](#) My major is biology, um, I'm a freshman class of 2022. Yeah.

Speaker 1: [03:17](#) And um, are you involved in any campus organizations?

Speaker 2: [03:21](#) Not yet. Maybe next year.

Speaker 1: Okay. Yeah, that's fine. And uh, what is the most important aspects of your life right now and why?

Speaker 2: Um the most important aspects. I think school is definitely one of them. Um, I think it's just all I can really think about is school because that's really what I think is what I need to be focused on and being motivated to be able to getting into a career. Graduating. So I think school right now, college is important.

Speaker 1: [04:07](#) Alright, so now we're going to jump into more specific questions about race.

Speaker 2: Um, so the US Census Bureau considers race and ethnicity as two different concepts. What is your ethnicity?

Speaker 2: [04:21](#) My ethnicity is Mexican.

Speaker 1: [04:25](#) What are your parent's nationality and do you identify with their nationality?

Speaker 2: [04:31](#) Both of my parents are Mexican. I do. You mean like, do I consider myself? Yeah, I consider myself Mexican just because I was born here doesn't mean Oh, I'm not Mexican, but I do consider myself Mexican, just like my parents.

Speaker 1: [04:48](#) How do you identify racially and why do you identify this way?

Speaker 2: [04:55](#) Um, could you explain that?

Speaker 1: [05:02](#) Race and ethnicity are different. I don't really want to tell you the definition right now because I just want to see how you personally choose to identify because I'm afraid if I tell you the definition that may change your answer. So just normally if someone asks your race, what do you say?

Speaker 2: [05:22](#) I'd just say Mexican.

Speaker 1: [05:24](#) And um, do you identify as Hispanic or Latina?

Speaker 2: [05:29](#) I think I hear myself saying Hispanic more. I don't really say Latino, but I do have people that come to me and yet they're like, oh, you're Latina. I'm like, yeah, I guess. I mean I, I think I hear myself saying Hispanic more so.

Speaker 1: Do you prefer the term Hispanic over Latina?

Speaker 2: I think so, yes. I don't know. I feel like it fits me better in some way. I just don't see myself saying Latina as much as. Yeah.

Speaker 1: [06:04](#) Do you maybe have like a reason as to why it fits you better?

Speaker 2: [06:11](#) **I don't know. I think I just, I think, I don't know. I think I hear my parents say, Oh, they're Hispanic and so I don't know, I just always heard that term. So I've always, I've always been like, I'm Hispanic, you know, I don't really hear Latina in my household or anything or Latino. I don't really hear that a lot so I just stick with Hispanic**

- Speaker 1: [06:34](#) Studies show that the Latino population is growing in the US. Um, how do you think this will affect the way race or race relations is? Views viewed in the United States.
- Speaker 2: [06:51](#) You said it's increasing? Uh, I think, I think it'll be worse just because it's kind of bad now. Seeing a lot of things going on. I hope that it will be better in the future, but I feel like it'll end up getting worse just because I've seen so many things going on. The I don't like.
- Speaker 1: [07:17](#) can you elaborate a little bit on what those things are that you have seen?
- Speaker 2: [07:20](#) Like ever since like Trump was in and I've seen like a lot of things like with the kids being separated from their families and stuff like that. So I just don't want that to increase more. I want it to be like I don't want it to be a problem anymore. Now I'm scared that it'll become a problem. Like even a bigger problem in the future.
- Speaker 1: [07:44](#) Do you think that like things that are going on now are affecting the way Hispanic people are viewed in this country?
- Speaker 2: [07:58](#) I think some people are like kind of getting it like okay they were getting separated from their families. Like I think people are like kind of seeing what we go through, what Hispanics go through now, but I think there's still some of the negativity. They're like, they're still on that stuff. Like they don't, they will never get it. That's what I think.
- Speaker 1: [08:27](#) How do you maintain your Hispanic culture while being a student here at the university?
- Speaker 2: [08:33](#) Um, well I don't know how to answer that. I mean I don't, I think, I don't know if this is really like a big thing on but like since I go home every weekend because I'm not, I don't live that far. I try to bring like my mom's food and I don't know if it makes me feel more at home when I'm here and I'm eating her food and so does my roommate because she's Hispanic also when she brings some of her mom's food also. And like it just reminds me of like being at home, being at like when I'm at Oxford I feel more at home when I have her food. So.

Speaker 1: [09:18](#) And what are some of your favorite things that your mom cooks?

Speaker 2: [09:22](#) Uh, she makes these with, um, with me in vegetables in it and I just really love that. I always tell her to make that my roommate actually brought to my lists like two weeks ago now, last week and yeah, it was really good. So that's what we really liked to do, like bringing in food from home.

Speaker 1: [10:03](#) Okay. And um, what are some challenges you face with the university and in Oxford as a Hispanic student?

Speaker 2: [10:13](#) I don't know if I really don't think I've faced any challenges other than just not being able to make a lot of friends, but I mean that's part of my fault also because I'm a really shy person. I don't really talk first unless someone talks to me and I don't really like that. I feel like that's my problem, but um, I don't think I've, I haven't felt like anything, any challenge so far Um, I think it's like I have people that talk to me and I talk to them like in my dorm, like if I'm in the elevator, like they'll speak and I'll speak. Um, but like the specific class that I'm taking the freshman class, EDHE, um, they're like all like, all the girls are like rushing. So I think maybe that's why I don't fit in a lot or maybe that's why I don't have like a lot of friends. I do have one friend in there, but it's not like I can like go up there and talk to the other girls maybe just because I'm not like I'm not rushing or anything. That too.

Speaker 1: [11:49](#) Was there any decision that strongly influenced you not to make the decision to and does it have to do with your Mexican culture or heritage or is it just something you're just not interested in?

Speaker 2: [12:00](#) Honestly, I didn't even know about that till I came to this unit to the university. I didn't know anything about it. I didn't even know what was like the point of it until I started hearing about it and I was like, I don't think I'm really interested. I think I'd rather join other organizations. But yeah, I didn't know what it was like outside of being at the university.

Speaker 1: [12:24](#) And. Has anyone ever asked you about your race and your ethnicity and if so, how do you typically respond to these questions?

- Speaker 2: [12:34](#) I don't think I've had anybody asked me about my race ethnicity. I don't think I've had anybody talk or ask about that.
- Speaker 1: [12:42](#) Do you think that people typically assume what your race is or you just have never really experienced anything period?
- Speaker 2: [12:59](#) I have experienced like, oh, she's Mexican, I can already tell, but how do you know that? What if I'm Cuban or something, you know? Um, but I've experienced that before in high school, not here at the university. Not yet at least, but my friend has, like, they've, they've assumed that she's Mexican also and she said the same thing, like how do you know if I'm not Puerto Rican or anything, but I don't think I've, I've never like experienced that here yet.
- Speaker 1: [13:29](#) So as a student in high school when people would just say, oh, she's Mexican, how would that make you feel?
- Speaker 2: [13:35](#) I would, at first I would be like, okay, whatever, like I am though I am Mexican. But then I thought about it and I was like, how do you know that though? Just because you see me and you think that I'm Mexican and that doesn't really mean that I am, I could be any other ethnicity and um, and I've actually had people think that I'm half white and half Mexican and half had people that come up to me and asked me, are you white? Are you all full white? And I was like, no, I'm Hispanic. I'm Mexican. So that's what I've experienced but not here.
- Speaker 1: [14:15](#) Um, when people assume that you're white or mixed with white, does that make you feel any type of way?
- Speaker 2: [14:22](#) Not really. I don't feel any type of way. I like being Mexican, but it doesn't make me feel like, oh my God, no. Why do they think that? No, I don't think that.
- Speaker 1: [14:32](#) Okay. Have you ever experienced any assumptions or has anybody ever made any assumptions about who you are because of your identity?
- Speaker 2: [14:59](#) They assume that I speak Spanish. I think that's the only thing have experienced.
- Speaker 1: [15:06](#) Okay. Um, and do you speak Spanish?

Speaker 2: [15:09](#) I do, yes.

Speaker 1: How did you learn?

Speaker 2: Um, I think I learn the best way was learning from my parents because they speak Spanish, but um, but it was a struggle because I was learning Spanish and English at the same time, so that kind of like, it's kind of like a issue growing up, but eventually I got it.

Speaker 1: [15:32](#) Um, and which language did you learn first?

Speaker 2: [15:36](#) That's hard. I'm not sure. I think I want to say I want to say Spanish, but I speak more Spanish with my mom and sometimes it's a little bit of English, not so much, but it's a little bit more. It's Spanish also with my dad, but it's a little bit more English than what I do with my mom.

Speaker 1: [16:10](#) And is there any reason for that?

Speaker 2: [16:12](#) Not really. Um, but I do try to speak English because they want to learn more and they're like, show me how to speak, like teach me. And they'll be like, just talk to me and I'll ask you if I don't understand. So I try to do that to them for them.

Speaker 1: [16:29](#) And um, are they originally from Mexico or were they, were their appearance from Mexico or what is the history?

Speaker 2: [16:36](#) Yes, they were born in Mexico.

Speaker 1: [16:38](#) When did they move to the United States?

Speaker 2: [16:41](#) I think my dad moved sometime in the 90's, I'm not sure. And my mom did too in the 90's.

Speaker 1: [16:48](#) And um, do you remember there being much of a strong Mexican or Hispanic presidents while you were living in Nashville or do your parents ever talk about it or anything?

Speaker 2: [17:00](#) I don't remember because I was really young. I was probably like two, but, um, I do remember my parents saying there was a lot of Hispanics in Nashville, but um, that's really it. They don't really talk about it unless we visit, but we don't really visit a lot. But I think that's the only thing I've heard them say that that's really it.

Speaker 1: What about Walls?

Speaker 2: They like it and everything. There's a lot of Hispanics also that I think that's the main reason why they moved down to walls because they know there's more family down there, more friends just because, you know, they just recently came from Mexico to the United States and they probably felt, felt little lonely with nobody to help them. So I feel like that's probably the biggest reason why they moved down the walls.

Speaker 1: [17:58](#) Um, and how important is the ability to speak Spanish to the Hispanic culture?

Speaker 2: [18:05](#) I think it's very important because, um, there's a, there's Hispanics that don't, that can't speak English in. I think if you can speak Spanish and English, that's like a plus one right there. Like you can always help them with anything. Even if like you don't know them. Like I try to help people. If I see somebody at the store struggling that can't speak English, like I'll try to help them as much as I can and I think that's really important.

Speaker 1: [18:36](#) How does the university and the community cater to the Hispanic population?

Speaker 2: [19:08](#) Mm, I don't really. I don't know what to say about that because I haven't really seen like the university do anything help the Hispanic community. I haven't seen that myself. Um, so I don't think I can really say anything. Speak on that.

Speaker 1: [19:27](#) Okay and how does the university and the community omit or forget about the Hispanic population?

Speaker 2: [19:41](#) I don't know. Um, I remember there was one thing that I did attend, I think it was Hispanic heritage month. I did attend that. Um, it was just talking about how the university doesn't really do anything for like the Hispanic culture. So I think I can only say that I'm not sure if the university has forgotten. I hope not because I don't know, I just think that they should try to, how can I say, like try to focus on every culture, at least not just on one culture and have like their type of, like only like choice. I think they should focus on everything.

Speaker 1: [20:34](#) Um, and how did you perceive the Hispanic population of affecting he idea of race in the south?

Speaker 2: [21:51](#) I don't think I can say anything on that.

Speaker 1: How you see race in the United States, in the south and in Oxford. Like what is race to you or what type of issues do you see? It doesn't just have to be issues, maybe when you see a positive thing, it's just how you view race period. It's a very open ended. So maybe anything that comes to mind when you're thinking about race and how or how it relates to the United States, the South and here in Oxford.

Speaker 2: [22:57](#) I don't think I see like the same thing. Like I don't see a lot of racism here at the university or anything. Like any issues, I don't see positivity where issues here at the university, but within the south I do see a lot of other types of like problems with racism, same thing with the United States. So I don't think like the units in the United States in the south can, like really relate with the university. At least that's what I think now. I'm not sure something good could come up, but I can't really see anything they have related. I think if anything, I think the United States and the south could have shared common with racism things.

Speaker 1: Um, and is there anything else that you'd like to add or anything else that you'd like to talk about that I didn't ask you?

Speaker 2: No, I think you asked me pretty much a lot. Good enough.