Ahiska/Meskhetian Turks are an ethnic group from the region of Meskhetia (Ahiska) in the Caucasus, now in southern Georgia that borders Turkey. Ahiska/Meskhetian Turks have been forced to relocate multiple times in their history. First, they were exiled from their homeland of Ahiska to Uzbekistan by Stalin in 1944, then from Uzbekistan to the Krasnodar region of Russia in 1989. The US government granted refugee status to many Ahiska Turks in Krasnodar in 2004, and by the end of 2006 around 17,000 settled in 66 towns in 33 states in the US (Aydingün et al., 2006).

This study focuses on understanding ethnic identity and life of the Ahiska/Meskhetian Turks in Columbia/Missouri, and presents both my fieldwork as well as other pertinent literature addressing the topics of ethnicity and ethnic identity, adaptation and assimilation. For this research, data are mainly derived from qualitative ethnographic research methods that involved participant observation and semi-structured voice recorded interviews with both individuals and families. The two main topics of this study are understanding Meskhetian Turks’ ethnic identity and adjustment to life in the United States. The main theoretical concepts used for understanding these two topics are the primordialist and circumstantialist conceptions of ethnic identity, and the segmented assimilation and acculturation theories about adaptation to the US, and American culture.