

The leather case holding the identification card is crumbling in my hands. There is a picture of a serious looking young man in a suit, clearly in his best clothes. But the entry talking about his work shows the reality of his daily life. "Occupation: Laborer."

That man in the picture is my great-grandfather, Juan Angel. He was born in El Paso, Texas, and his family had lived and worked there for generations, even before it became the Republic of Texas, and later part of the United States. Yet he had to always keep this card with him just to prove that he belonged there.

Between 1929 and 1939, during the Great Depression, government officials wanted to free up jobs during hard economic times and started to send Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to Mexico. Under this policy, called Mexican Repatriation, up to one million people were sent away to a place that many had never even visited, often with little or no warning. They had no choice.

My great-grandfather spoke Spanish and his skin was brown. But he was American. He had to carry the identification card. My father has chosen to carry the card during important life events, and I will do the same. I will do this because, inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I want to remember the past, so I can act upon injustice in the present.