

Features

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CHRIS DAINES / DAILY SUNDIAL

Many protestors upon leaving city hall crowded the overpasses of the 101 freeway and cheered as passing cars and trucks honked in support of their march.

Where were you on March 25, 2006?

500,000 protest immigration legislation

CONNIE LLANOS AND CHRIS DAINES

DAILY SUNDIAL

Cars circled around Metro's park and ride lots looking for parking. A young man adjusted his bandana drawn across his face and the girls walking behind him held their water bottles on their way to catch the Redline subway downtown. The sidewalks were uncharacteristically crowded for a Saturday morning. With everyone was headed downtown it looked to be some-

thing of great importance. Organizers dubbed it "The Great March of 2006," and it drew a crowd of protesters of more than 500,000 to downtown Los Angeles on Saturday March 25.

The streets rumbled with excitement. The blocks surrounding Olympic Boulevard and Broadway were congested to the point that traffic sat at a standstill both into and out of downtown.

The flow of people rushing to the march was a constant sea of white dotted with the occasional colored shirt. Marchers wore white as a symbol of their desire to peacefully protest federal bills threatening to criminalize illegal immi-

gration and tighten border security.

Once on Olympic Boulevard, those rushing to the march joined the unified voices of protest. The crowd slowed to a crawling pace as people flowed into the march up Olympic.

Giant American, Mexican and other country flags were carried proudly above their heads, draped over shoulders and attached to strollers and wheelchairs. The faces of families and individuals showed determination as they gathered together in protest. Every face told a different story for the same cause.

Amparo Gonzalez-Soto, a Fremont high school teacher who gained U.S. citizenship only 10 years ago, pushed her son in a stroller surrounded by thousands of protesters. A handwritten purple sign was attached which read, "I was a wet-back as a child, a teacher now, always proudful."

Gonzalez-Soto said she and her parents arrived in the United States illegally in 1974. After years of hard work, her parents were eventually able to see her graduate from Princeton University.

"There's a lot of people who came here, who worked really hard," Gonzalez-Soto said, and they deserve a chance. She also said the possibility of being penalized for helping undocumented immigrants was ridiculous.

"If I help my own uncles or cousins, I could be taken to jail. If I teach (illegal) kids I could be taken to jail," she said.

As the crowd moved north on Olympic Boulevard the voices of protest reverberated off the tall



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Three friends chant, "Si se puede" as they march in protest in downtown Los Angeles.

buildings, which lined the streets.

A white sign with vibrant red letters that read "Si se puede" (yes we can) hung in a window 10 stories above the crowd. Winds picked up and for a moment the sign caught on an edge, obscuring it from view. Reacting almost in unison, the crowd yelled for the

They see us as delinquents but what if we weren't here?

— Bertha Martinez, housekeeper and south central farmer

man in the building to fix the sign. When it was fixed the crowd instantly erupted in cheers.

Unified chants of "Si se puede" and "Un pueblo unido jamas sera vencido"

(a people, united, will never be overcome) created rhythmic chants that followed the strides of the protesters. The chanting pumped protesters with adrenaline as it became part of the soundtrack for the length of the march.

Catherine Ortiz, a 13-year-old junior high school student said she was afraid that her dad would be put in jail for being an undocumented immigrant.

"It's not fair," Ortiz said, "my dad is not a terrorist."

Some protesters deviated from the march on Olympic Boulevard hoping to find a faster route to city hall. But every street within a block of city hall was shoulder-to-shoulder with people hoping to hear speakers whose presence had been publicized.

The main march traveled too slowly for all of the teeming masses to arrive at city hall in time to hear the speakers.

Jose Frias, an injured desert storm veteran, maneuvered along with the crowd

in his wheelchair. Holding a bullhorn in one hand and an American flag in the other, he said the government needed to make up its mind when it came to undocumented immigrants.

"They don't want us, but they have our kids on the front lines," Frias said. "Half the people (at war now) are immigrants or were immigrants."

Frias was an illegal immigrant when he signed on for military service. He said anti-immigration supporters should reevaluate their fight against immigration.

"If the minutemen want to start a war they should go to Iraq and fight a real war," he said.

The protesters quieted as they took audience around city hall. They sat in trees, and on fences, in planters and sculptures and anywhere they could rest from the marching. Large black speakers placed in front of city hall carried

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A man reflects as he listens to L.A. Mayor Villaraigosa.

