

La Marcha' empties schools, businesses

By George N. Schmidt

It began in Chicago on March 10, 2006. The invisible suddenly became visible. By the time it had worked its way across the country in early April, more than two million Americans had taken to the streets from New York to Los Angeles. But it began in Chicago on March 10, 2006.

They left school by the tens of thousands, knowing they had to do something important but also knowing it would be fun. In response to the growing call from the communities that have always created and re-created the United States, children and teenagers whose families came from more than 30 countries left their homes on the morning of March 10, reported to public schools with names like Benito Juarez and Roberto Clemente, and then, within an hour after attendance was taken around 10:00 that morning, disappeared into Chicago's streets. In all, at least 30 Chicago elementary and high schools reported their students had left in large numbers that morning. Some went out from as far away as Senn High School (eight miles from the Loop) on the north and Gage Park High School (nine miles southwest of the rally site) on the south, but nobody got an accurate count.

By noon, the students reappeared in a sea of people numbering at least a quarter million that flowed from Ashland Ave. past Whitney Young High School and Skinner Elementary School into Chicago's Loop. There the march and rally shut down the central business district of one of the largest and most powerful cities in the history of the world.

As tens of thousands of marchers moved slowly and peacefully into the Loop, Chicago's police (who handled the event with as much restraint as the marchers showed in their ranks) funneled the march from Jackson Blvd. north to Adams St. The march then moved east again five blocks and into the Federal Plaza at Adams and Dearborn. Above, the march had finally 'ended' after 4:00 p.m. when this photograph was taken from an upper floor of Chicago Public Schools headquarters at the northeast corner of Adams and Clark streets. The photograph is looking west from Clark to LaSalle (the heart of Chicago's financial district, which was closed by the event). The intersection at the top of the photograph is Adams and LaSalle, the corner the headquarters of Chicago's LaSalle Bank. Substance editor George Schmidt and Sports editor Dan Schmidt did a rough calculation based on several actual counts of the number of people filling each linear block and estimated that the total number of marchers was between 180,000 and 250,000. Additional thousands joined the rally in the Loop itself. Police estimates said "in excess of 100,000." Additional photographs will be published on the Substance website. Substance photo by George N. Schmidt.

"My father is not a criminal," read one sign among thousands.

As the month wore on, similar rallies took place in cities as diverse as Los Angeles (where a half million people filled downtown and finally topped Chicago's total) to tiny places like Alvin, Texas, where a couple of hundred left school in late March.

More than two million had taken to the streets by month's end.

More photographs appear on Page Six of this Substance, and more will be published at www.substance news.com later in April.

Organization for the rally was done by hundreds of people, but several were given major credit for the event. Among those was SEIU Local 73 executive board member Jose Arreola (above, right) with fellow SEIU people. Left to right: Substance Editor George Schmidt, SEIU Rep Bill Silver, and Jose Artemio Arreola celebrate at federal plaza at the end of the March 10 march. Substance photo by Dan Schmidt.

The march assembled north and south of Jackson Blvd. along Ashland Ave. two miles west of the Loop, and began moving east at around noon. The photograph above was taken shortly after noon under the "L" tracks at Ashland and Lake streets, adjacent to Union Park. Substance photo by George N. Schmidt.