

'A Day Without a Mexican' catches on Little-noticed movie resonates with activist immigrants

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri)

April 23, 2006 Sunday, FIRST EDITION

Copyright 2006 St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Inc.

Section: NEWS; Pg. A2

Length: 675 words

Byline: By Erin Texeira THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dateline: LOS ANGELES

Body

As activists urge work and school boycotts May 1 in what's being called "A Day Without Immigrants," a movie with a similar title and the same message -- America needs immigrants -- is enjoying a revival.

The 2004 independent movie "A Day Without a Mexican" made less than \$5 million in theaters. But now, rentals are up and a new ad campaign is in the works. Some protesters are sporting T-shirts with the movie's logo, a silhouette of a man in a sombrero carrying a duffel bag.

"There's been a lot of talk about the film -- it has served as an organizing tool, a kind of reference," said Yareli Arizmendi, who co-wrote the script and whose husband, Sergio Arau, directed the movie.

Arizmendi first noticed renewed interest in the movie when she went to protests in downtown Los Angeles in March. Not only were people wearing the movie's T-shirt, others carried banners with the logo and some chanted variations on a key movie line: "How do you make the invisible visible?"

In the last month, rentals of the movie are up 17 percent compared with the month before, said Leigh Savidge, CEO of Xenon Pictures, the distributor.

"It was the right film pegged to the zeitgeist right now," he said, adding that Xenon was planning new billboard ads and radio spots and would give away T-shirts at upcoming rallies.

Playing for laughs

An HBO movie titled "Walkout" also was prophetic. The feature dramatizes an event when thousands of Latino students in Los Angeles boycotted classes over the poor quality of schools. It made its debut March 18, a week before hundreds of thousands, including many students, marched in Los Angeles.

"A Day Without a Mexican" is a mockumentary showing what happens when mysterious fog surrounds California and all the Latinos -- one-third of all residents -- disappear. Arizmendi plays a television news reporter who is the only surviving Latino.

The comedy plays on stereotypes of California's immigrants, most of whom are Mexican, as farm laborers and gardeners. Without them, carts of oranges go unsold beside freeway ramps and leaf-blowers spin in circles with no one to work them. The governor disappears, garbage goes uncollected and public safety is endangered as police departments are decimated.

Mixed reviews

'A Day Without a Mexican' catches on Little-noticed movie resonates with activist immigrants

The moviemakers' point: The state needs immigrants as much as the immigrants need the state.

Many immigration activists are now saying just that, as they plan for May 1. Though there is disagreement over the strategy, many are urging immigrants to boycott work, school and shopping that day to show how important they are to the nation.

"One of the arguments is that immigrants take away from the U.S. economy. Then, if they're not here -- if they don't work or buy anything -- essentially the economy will go up, right?" said Oscar Byanko Sanchez-Quinto, a spokesman for the March 25 Coalition in Los Angeles.

"This will be a good marker. Let's show our economic power," he said. "I think the film made perfect sense from that point of view."

Though nearly everyone involved in the immigration movement seems to have seen the movie, not everybody loved it or even acknowledges it. Reviews were mixed, with many saying its clever premise falls short. Nearly 2,700 viewers who rated it on Yahoo! Movies gave it an average grade of C.

"What? You mean the really bad movie? No, no, we're not connected to that," said Brad Baldia, spokesman for the coalition in Philadelphia that staged a Day Without an Immigrant boycott on Feb. 14.

Still, the movie won festival awards in Mexico and grossed \$4.6 million in theaters -- more than twice what it cost to make. In its first six weeks available for DVD rental, it brought in \$13 million, Arizmendi said. Netflix, which rents movies online, said demand for the movie spiked dramatically starting late March.

Activists who want to use the movie to raise money are free to do so, Arizmendi said, but the distributor now controls any commercial screenings.

"As artists, the pleasure is to really have your work resonate and mean something," she said. "Art takes its inspiration from reality."

Graphic

PHOTO

PHOTO - High school students in Denver join a march Wednesday to the state Capitol to show their support for immigration reform. More than 2,000 public school students joined the rally. The Associated Press

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: PROTESTS & DEMONSTRATIONS (90%); IMMIGRATION (89%); BOYCOTTS (89%); THEATER (89%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (78%); FILM DIRECTORS (78%); STUDENTS & STUDENT LIFE (78%); EXECUTIVES (68%); POLICE FORCES (60%); FARM LABOR (50%)

Industry: MOVIE INDUSTRY (78%); FILM DIRECTORS (78%); ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS (78%); BROADCAST

'A Day Without a Mexican' catches on Little-noticed movie resonates with activist immigrants

ADVERTISING (76%); MARKETING CAMPAIGNS (71%); MARKETING & ADVERTISING (71%); RADIO ADVERTISING (71%); OUTDOOR ADVERTISING (69%); TELEVISION PROGRAMMING (64%); TELEVISION INDUSTRY (64%); FARM LABOR (50%)

Geographic: LOS ANGELES, CA, USA (93%); CALIFORNIA, USA (94%)

Load-Date: April 23, 2006

End of Document