

IMMIGRATION DEMONSTRATIONS; HBO production chronicles Latino students' 1968 protest

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
April 12, 2006 Wednesday, Main Edition

Copyright 2006 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
ajc.com

Section: ATLANTA & THE WORLD; Pg. 3F

Length: 514 words

Byline: TERESA BORDEN

Body

The recent **Latino protests** across the country clamoring for **immigration** reform have given "life-imitates-art" relevancy to Edward James Olmos' newest movie, "Walkout," an **HBO production** about **Latino students** in Los Angeles who walked out of their classrooms and into the streets to **protest** discrimination in **1968**.

"It was a civil rights story that allowed us to experience the empowerment of young people during a time period that was most crucial in the development of our country," Olmos said at a recent opening for the movie in Atlanta. "**1968** was one of the most crucial years we've ever had."

As two major figures, Robert Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., were assassinated that year, labor leader Cesar Chavez fasted for immigrant workers' rights and, in Mexico, young protesters against a dictatorial regime were mowed down by soldiers and police.

The movie, directed by Olmos on a script by Mexican-American writer Victor Villasenor, will next show on HBO2 on Friday at 6 p.m., on April 19 at 11:15 p.m., April 24 at 9:30 a.m. and April 27 at 3:30 p.m. It stars Michael Pena, who starred in this year's Oscar-winning "Crash," and Alexa Vega of "Spy Kids" fame.

Olmos is no stranger to the L.A. classroom. He was an Academy Award nominee for his 1988 portrayal of Jaime Escalante, the calculus teacher at Garfield High School who in the early 1980s inspired dropout candidates to instead focus on higher math. Escalante did such a good job with them that they were later accused of cheating.

The story of the **students** in "Walkout" takes place more than a decade earlier, and Olmos said it's American **Latino** history that had heretofore remained untold.

"This is ground that's never been touched," he said. "We didn't know about this ground. ... This film is a part of history that nobody knows about, and everybody should."

He said what really happened during the walkouts had been hidden in footage in the vaults of the three major networks who covered the movement and wasn't discovered until three filmmakers who were **chronicling** the Chicano civil rights movement of the early 1970s in a documentary went in and found it. From there, the search for the former **students** who took part in the walkout began.

IMMIGRATION DEMONSTRATIONS; HBO production chronicles Latino students' 1968 protest

Those students, who staged walkouts over their teachers' and administrators' refusal to let them use school bathrooms or speak Spanish in school, among other things, and who were later arrested for their protests, are widely believed to have inspired the movement. One of them, Moctezuma Esparza, became executive producer of the movie.

Another was Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. Just weeks ago, Villaraigosa found himself at the front of another Latino march in Los Angeles, this time by immigrants and their American citizen children, who again walked out of the schools to press for immigration reform and protest punitive measures now in Congress that could put their parents in jail.

Olmos said "Walkout's" release is just in time for another Latino awakening.

"The awareness is strong," he said. "That's what has to be done. That's where the 'Walkout' is."

Graphic

Photo: Courtesy of HBO Films Edward James Olmos said footage of what really happened during the 1968 walkout by Latino students in Los Angeles had been hidden in the vaults of the three major networks.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspapers

Subject: ACADEMY AWARDS (90%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (90%); CIVIL RIGHTS (89%); STUDENTS & STUDENT LIFE (89%); FILM (89%); POLITICAL PROTESTS (78%); FOREIGN LABOR (78%); VISUAL ARTISTS (78%); PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS (77%); DISCRIMINATION (77%); FILM DIRECTORS (77%); DOCUMENTARY FILMS (77%); CALCULUS (77%); TEACHING & TEACHERS (77%); HIGH SCHOOLS (77%); EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION EMPLOYEES (77%); WRITERS (76%); IMMIGRATION (73%); ARRESTS (73%); IMMIGRATION LAW (73%); ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS AWARDS (70%)

Industry: ACADEMY AWARDS (90%); VISUAL ARTISTS (78%); MOVIE INDUSTRY (77%); FILM DIRECTORS (77%); HIGH SCHOOLS (77%); WRITERS (76%); TELEVISION PROGRAMMING (72%); ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS AWARDS (70%)

Person: MARTIN LUTHER KING JR (79%)

Geographic: LOS ANGELES, CA, USA (92%); CALIFORNIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (79%)

Load-Date: April 13, 2006