

## *A protest festively flavored*

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

May 5, 2006 Friday

Copyright 2006 Times Publishing Company All Rights Reserved

**Section:** NORTH OF TAMPA; Pg. 1

**Length:** 541 words

**Byline:** MARLENE SOKOL

### **Body**

---

From the outside it looked impressive.

But from the inside it didn't look like quite enough.

Alex Velazquez wondered why more Latinos did not attend Monday's "Day Without Immigrants" demonstration outside Legends Field.

He couldn't figure out why some of his friends traveled all the way to Orlando for what they thought would be a better rally.

Velazquez, a Honduran who works for the state Health Department, traveled from Zephyrhills with his wife, Marta, their two school-age children and both their mothers.

"In this country everyone is an immigrant," Marta Velazquez said. "Now that we are here legally, we are thankful to the people who helped us."

While an estimated 20,000 marched in Orlando, police put the Tampa crowd estimate closer to 7,000. Business owners described the one-day work stoppage as an inconvenience, but not much more.

Still, those who joined the Velazquez family seemed to be having a pretty good time.

The atmosphere was festive and, in all honesty, quite commercial.

People weren't just handing out little American flags, they were also handing out advertisements for English language classes, business cards for law firms, leaflets for storefront immigration services.

The Velazquezes laughed at hats and T-shirts someone had given them from a Bill Heard car dealership. "It's the American way," Alex said.

It was American and then some.

People in their 20s shouted slogans from the 1960s. Posters of Emiliano Zapata, the Mexican revolutionary, drew thunderous cheers. Three Mexican construction workers who had been excused from work for the day hoisted a sign that asked, "Who builds your houses?"

A man wore a large flag of Colombia like a Superman cape. People from Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory with no such immigration issue, came out in solidarity.

## A protest festively flavored

Everywhere you looked there was evidence of the vast influence Latin America has on our culture, from the dozens of Latin-oriented businesses along Columbus Drive to the neon traffic signal leading to the stadium parking. "Derecha al senal," it read, turn right. If immigrants really did go out on strike, if the showing had been closer to 70,000, just imagine the impact.

But the Tampa event was less of an exercise in leverage than a friendly day in the park. Despite a contingent of anti-immigration demonstrators across Columbus Drive, the mood was celebratory.

You could even join in from behind your wheel: Roll down your window, hug the right lane and honk your car horn for a rousing cheer.

You could almost forget the serious reason for the rally - pending congressional reforms that could make it a felony to live in this country without immigration papers. That's what brought out Esmeralda Ramirez of Plant City, along with her boyfriend and their 2-year-old son Bryan

Ramirez grew up in the migrant circuit and now picks strawberries in Plant City. At \$1.50 a box it's not an easy living, she said. "Sometimes I don't even make \$20" in a day.

Ramirez, who was born in Texas, does not have to worry about being jailed or deported. But her boyfriend was born in Mexico. "If they make this law, he has to go also," she said.

So Ramirez was grateful for those Latinos who attended, for the friendship they extended her, and for a day to wave a flag on Dale Mabry Highway.

## Classification

---

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Document-Type:** COLUMN

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (89%); STRIKES (73%); STADIUMS & ARENAS (72%); ARTS & HUMANITIES EDUCATION (70%); US TERRITORIES (66%); PUBLIC HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (56%); HEALTH DEPARTMENTS (56%); FELONIES (50%)

**Industry:** MOTOR VEHICLE DEALERS (65%); HEALTH DEPARTMENTS (56%); NEW CAR DEALERS (50%)

**Geographic:** TAMPA, FL, USA (92%); ORLANDO, FLORIDA, USA (92%); UNITED STATES (93%); MEXICO (92%); LATIN AMERICA (79%)

**Load-Date:** May 5, 2006