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## NATIONAL NEWS

### Fear, raids don't deter May Day marchers

By Roberto Lovato

*New America Media*

Updated May 14, 2008, 12:08 pm

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The battle for immigrant rights rages daily in the heart, mind and lanky 10-year-old frame of Chelsea, Mass., resident and May Day marcher, Norma Canela. Norma's mother Olivia illegally crossed the borders of Guatemala, Mexico and the U.S. almost 11-years-ago from Honduras. Born shortly after her mom came to the United States, Norma says attending one of the over 200 May Day marches for immigrant rights made her feel "good, like we could help people get their papers!"

Chanting, singing and marching alongside so many others in the Chelsea march also provided the energetic fourth grader a counterbalance to the crush of loneliness and isolation she sometimes feels.

If it achieved nothing else, march organizers say, the May Day mobilizations gave Norma, Olivia and the 12 million undocumented immigrants and their families living in United States, a dose of hope in the face of an escalating war on the undocumented.

Yelling "Alto a las redadas! Alto a las deportaciones!" (Stop the Raids! Stop the Deportations!) the tens of thousands of immigrants and their supporters marching throughout the country on May Day believe they took crucial steps for a movement trying to defend families like Norma's from a multibillion dollar war being waged on immigrants. On May 1 they hoped they helped align the movement's agenda, animate its base and flex its power.

Relieved, yet still animated after organizing the largest of the hundreds of May Day marches in towns and cities throughout the country, Christine Neumann-Ortiz, executive director of Voces de la Frontera in Wisconsin, a low-wage and immigrant workers center, said the day's primary objective had been accomplished.

"Almost all immigrant rights groups are now on the same page as far as opposing measures that criminalize immigrants and demanding legalization in the first 100 days of the next (president's) administration," said Ms. Ortiz. Her march drew over 30,000 participants. "I think across the board most groups are calling on the Bush administration to put an immediate end to raids and deportation."

Prior to the marches, the fissures and differences around strategy for immigration reform had split the movement. Some groups supported "trade offs"—legalization for even heavier enforcement—like those in the now defunct McCain-Kennedy bill. Other groups didn't.

May Day march organizers also found themselves on the defensive against what Ms. Ortiz calls "a kind of low-intensity conflict" unleashed on immigrants shortly after the historic May Day marches of 2006: Thousands of raids on homes and workplaces conducted by heavily-armed immigration agents, deployment of 6,000 national guard troops to the border, billions of dollars in government contracts to military-industrial companies like Halliburton, Blackwater and Boeing to build the infrastructure to survey, trail and jail, immigrants.

Against the backdrop of the attacks and the fear they engendered after 2006, Ms. Ortiz and other organizers, like Gladys Vega of the Chelsea Collaborative, believe they also succeeded in injecting some "animo" into their movement. "On a daily basis, we have to deal with community members terrorized by raids, facing increased problems in the workplace because of the tighter (employment) regulations," said Ms. Vega, adding, "Here in Chelsea, a city that is 63 percent immigrant, 350 mostly Latino families had their houses foreclosed on and we can't just sit by and watch."

In response to what she considers the very predictable mainstream media stories focused on the decreased size of the May Day marches, Ms. Vega said, "When your community and you have to do so much and when there is so much repression against immigrants and their families, the real story is how so many people overcame their fear and marched in 200 cities."

Now Ms. Ortiz is ready to pull out of a defensive posture and launch an offensive. "Marching is one critical piece but not the only one," she said. "Most of us are also involved in the massive push for voter registration, citizenship drives and getting people to vote. May Day was also about sending a message to the Republicans and Democrats, about holding their feet to the fire."

Norma and Olivia can't cast a vote this election. One is too young, the other doesn't have the papers. But they are still involved in the electoral process. "I talk to our family and friends who can vote; I make phone calls, distribute flyers, attend events—anything I can do, I do it," said Olivia. For her part, future voter Norma, who sometimes joins her mother's electoral activities, offers up some immigrant rights strategy of her own, "We're going to march until they (the government/immigration authorities) get bored. Then we can all be safe."

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