

Thousands march to support illegal immigrants in U.S.

PROTEST

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nearly 5 million undocumented immigrants were residing in the United States in October 1996. This group was estimated to be growing by about 275,000 each year. This estimate is 25,000 less than the estimated growth in 1994. The 5 million undocumented immigrants made up to 1.9 percent of the total U.S. population.

"The goal of the march was to call national attention of the public to the situation that is suffered by undocumented immigrants and to bring light to other issues that concern immigrants," Orellana said.

It is estimated that between 15,000 and 20,000 protesters walked about two miles from Malcolm X Park on 16th St. N.W., which is near a predominantly Latino/a neighborhood, to Lafayette Park, which is in front of the White House. Women's organizations, workers unions and international immigrant coalitions participated in the march.

Cynthia Garza of the Project of the Counsel for Latino Agencies helped organize students from universities across the nation, including the University. Garza offered her office space as a shelter for the students.

"It is great that the students of the University are showing such great interest and being a part of the march. I think the University of Michigan has a reputation for being interested in these types of issues and just to have the representation at the march is important," she said.

But not everyone at the University favors giving undocumented immigrants legal status. Engineering senior Mark Dub maintains that "to give a general granted amnesty to illegal immigrants would be unfair to persons who immigrate here legally." Dub also noted that "if undocumented immigrants were given legal status it would show people who haven't immigrated here that if you break the law in coming here and don't get caught, it will be OK."

But Beatriz Maya, education director of The Farm Organizing Committee, said immigrants should not be penalized for needing a place to go.

"There is a lot of hypocrisy in the way we treat immigration. The immigrants are blamed for being here and there is no discussion of the causes of immigration," she said. Maya said undocumented immigrants are extremely vulnerable in the United States and are subjected to economic exploitation,



SAM HOLLENSEAD/Daily

University students march among the 15,000 protesters in Washington, D.C. on Saturday.

abuses and in some cases, death.

Dub does not reject the humanitarian goals of amnesty altogether.

"One of the great things about the U.S. is that it was founded on people escaping persecution and I think we should provide a safe haven for those who are escaping inhumane conditions," he said.

Yet he said he would limit the ability of natives of other lands to penetrate the U.S. border system without tight controls being in place. He said he believes that immigrants who migrate to the United States "need to present themselves here legally. You have to play by the rules. Exploitation and illegal immigration need to be addressed. They're two separate problems and both are serious."

INS reports state that in October 1996, the highest percentages of undocumented immigrants lived in California, Texas and Washington, D.C., the site of the protest.

Orellana related her School of Social Work classroom experience to her marching in Washington.

"As a student of social work you are constantly being educated about injustices and how injustices are a very complex issue, lot of the times there are structural causes for people's poverty. This definitely was an issue concerning why people are at the bottom of the ladder and how structurally it's constructed," she said.

"We're all immigrants regardless of your status of residence or no residence. I think that we are all entitled to certain rights, the right of not being exploited or discriminated," she added.