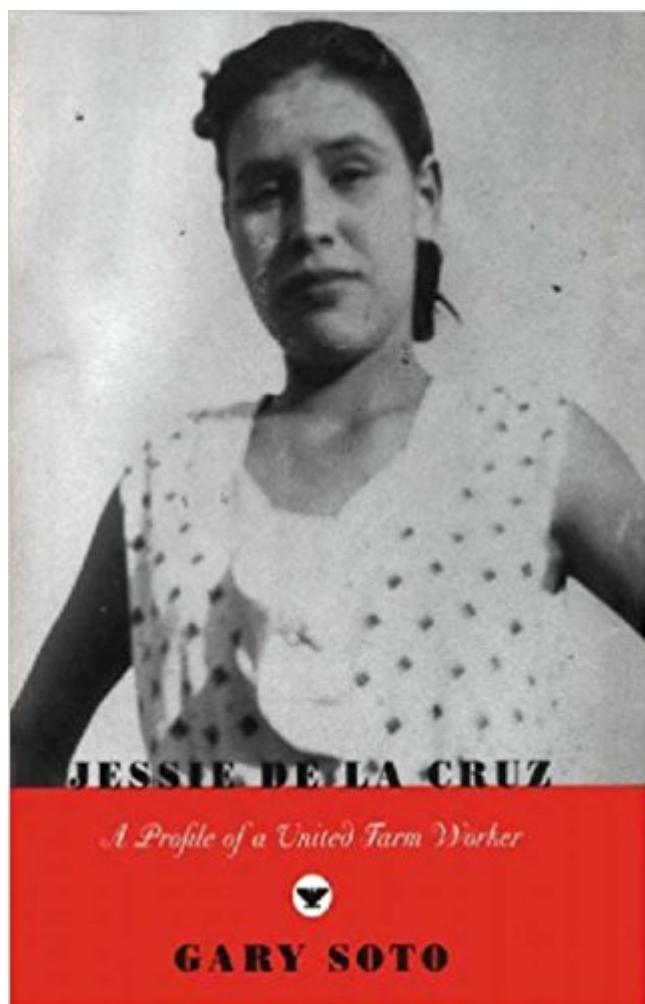


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# Jessie De La Cruz: A Profile Of A United Farm Worker



## **Synopsis**

The acclaimed young adult biography of the UFW's first female organizer. This inspiring story of Jessie De La Cruz, the United Farmer Workers, and la Causa is told as only Gary Soto, novelist, essayist, poet, and himself a field laborer during his teens, can tell it, with respect, empathy, and deep compassion for the working poor. A field worker from the age of five, Jessie knew poverty, harsh working conditions, and the exploitation of Mexicans and all poor people. Her response was to take a stand. She joined the fledgling United Farm Workers union and, at Cesar Chavez's request, became its first woman recruiter. She also participated in strikes, helped ban the crippling short-handle hoe, became a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, testified before the Senate, and met with the Pope. Jessie's life story personalizes an historical movement and shows teens how an ordinary woman became extraordinary through her will to make change happen, not just for herself but for others.

## **Book Information**

Series: Karen and Michael Braziller Books

Paperback: 128 pages

Publisher: Persea (October 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0892552859

ISBN-13: 978-0892552856

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.4 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #361,256 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #42 in Books > Teens > Biographies > Political #51 in Books > Teens > Biographies > Social Activists #77 in Books > Teens > Biographies > Cultural Heritage

## **Customer Reviews**

Gr 6 Up-Cesar Chavez may have led the La Causa movement, but it was due to the tenacity of supporters like Jessie de la Cruz that the cause received national attention and influenced labor laws. Soto met de la Cruz, now in her 80s, at a 1998 gathering of the California Rural Assistance League and shortly after began interviewing her. Through her stories of her life as a child laborer, a young mother working under grueling conditions in the fields, a union organizer, and eventually a small farm owner, Soto illuminates the plight of migrant workers from the 1920s to today and the

history of the La Causa movement. Told in simple prose that rings with the lilt of a Spanish accent, he covers the work of de la Cruz and her husband. They spent half a century persuading fellow farm workers to stand up for themselves, negotiating and leading strikes, and accompanying Chávez on the heroic 250-mile march from the lower end of the Great Central Valley to Sacramento. Chávez comes to life in the book as well, as a friend, a worker, and a tenacious thorn in the collective conscience of the country. Several pages of black-and-white photographs are included. While unapologetically devoted to his subject, the author effectively personalizes the struggle of farmworkers in a manner that will enable students to understand and care about their triumphs.-Mary R. Hofmann, Rivera Middle School, Merced, CA  
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Gr. 7-12. From the age of five in the 1920s, Jessie De La Cruz worked the fields in the San Joaquin Valley in California with her migrant family, sleeping in tents and scavenging for food, with no respite from the backbreaking labor. Now, Chicano writer Soto (who worked in the fields in high school and college) has written her biography, based on personal interviews. It's a story of her daily work over six decades and also of her role as a United Farm Worker organizer. The writing style is undistinguished, not Soto at his best, but teens will be caught by the facts of her hardship and struggle. The biography weaves together one brave woman's life and the political history of the farm-worker movement. From the Depression to the grape boycott to the farmworkers' fight to own some of the land they work, this is stirring American history. A central photo insert shows De La Cruz in the fields, on the marches, at her wedding. Appended is her moving Congressional testimony that says it in her own words. Give this to fans of Francisco Jimenez's *The Circuit* (1997). Hazel Rochman  
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I bought this book for my college writing class because it was required for our course. What I wasn't aware of was how good it was going to be. The novel Jessie De la Cruz gives the first hand account of Jessie and what it was like being a farmworker throughout her life. The book starts up with what it was like growing up as the daughter of farmworkers, and then she continues by telling her experiences as an adult working the fields. She tells about the Cesar Chavez's movement to help and protect workers, who were otherwise treated badly by those who employed them. After reading the book we had to write a research paper on one topic from the book, either pesticides, their movement La Causa, Cesar Chavez, or those who were unknown heroes in the movement like

Jessie. The book was super helpful in writing my paper and it was very well written which helped in my paper, and strengthened my topic. I was able to gain a lot of knowledge in reading Jessie De la Cruz and I would definitely recommend it to anybody who wanted to learn more about La Causa and how it impacted farmworkers.

This was an educational read. I don't really know what else to say other than that. If you don't know anything about hispanic workers coming into America, this is something you should look into. If you do have a little idea about it, don't just assume you know the facts.

Great read!

This is a fine contribution to the body of writing re: the farm worker struggle and the creation of the United Farm Worker Union. However, I must point out the obvious. In the first part of the book we read how utterly poor these migrant Mexican farm workers are; as they work the fields they live in primitive conditions. I am tired of reading how farm workers live in hovels, eat beans and tortillas, are illiterate and yet still continue to toil in these jobs and worse still they even get married and birth children to perpetuate this cycle of miserable poverty. If life is truly unbearable then why do these people continue to slave away? Too many books like this, detail the suffering of the working poor and thereby glamorize it. I understand some people are dirt poor but then for God's sake stop the madness! The glorification of the farm workers struggle has left them as the only legitimate prophets of Chicano History. As a boy I was ashamed to hear of the deprivation of the Mexican farm workers and I often heard my Black classmates laugh that they would never stoop to such low levels of work and how stupid Mexicans were for participating in it. (It was hard to argue w/ this logic. There is an urban legend that Cesar Chavez asked the Border Patrol to deport illegal aliens working in the field and breaking his strike. Here we have documentation of this. In Chapter 6 page 80 there is a frightening scene where Jessie recounts how she called on the Border Patrol (and then shamed the Border Patrol Agents for their inaction; including a telephone call to her Congressman) to detain some illegal alien farm workers. She had little reservations in turning these workers in to La Migra; a lot more could be written about this. Just another nail in the coffin of poor workers from Mexico who simply have no alternative. Again, I am tired of seeing Mexican people and Mexican-American people portrayed as just one step above beasts of burdens w/out the self-respect to seek other employment. Jessie tells how her family bought land to farm and sell their own produce. I am encouraged by that. The only way to improve your work conditions is to be your own boss. I would

have suggested the union organizers should move to the big cities in California and open a supermarket that sold union harvested crops. This would have been a great publicity tool for the union and it would have helped some farm workers to get out of the field and enter the small business world. Such a supermarket could have supplied Latino restaurants and any union sympathizer could have bought vegetables thereby demonstrating the real demand for "fair trade" produce.

This is an outstanding portrayal of an amazing woman, why have we never heard of her before? Soto does an outstanding job of tracing Jessie's life and realistically tracing her accomplishments and triumphs as well as her set backs and disappointments. How can anyone do so much in so little time? We always hear of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, yet this woman has never come into view. Now we can read all about her, thanks to Soto. This will be a best seller for sure. I think it is written for school age students but as an adult I marveled at its quality. Soto gives her the respect she deserves.

I like the book because it was very interesting for me. It reminded me of my parents who work in the fields. How they come home hungry, tire and dirty. When my family and I came here we didn't had anything any family who could help us out. My family suffered a lot. When I was reading the book I got into it because the same reason I felt like there were talking about my family. In the end it got more interesting because Jessie talk about her life how she helped Cesar Chavez. I think they did a lot for all Mexicans people. I enjoyed reading the book.

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