

## Discussion Questions for The Line Becomes a River (Francisco Cantu)

1. Did you vote to include this book on the Reading List? Did it live up to your expectations? Would you recommend it to others to read? What form did you use to read the book (Hard copy, ebook, audio)?
2. Cantu's writing has been described as "prose that is at times vividly poetic and at others brutally barebones". How would you describe his unique writing style? How did that affect your reading of the book? Did the division of the book into 3 sections enhance the readability?
3. With all of the media influences that surround us daily, do you look for books about current issues that will deliver a different perspective to you? Did this book do that? What new insights did you gain from reading this book?
4. Cantu says "my aim is to describe the Border Patrol from within, not justify it somehow." He says he joined the the Border Patrol at age 23 and "expected to do the job for a few years to gain on-the ground experiences". How would you describe the effects that it had on him after 4 years?
5. Cantu's mother did not want him to join the Border Patrol and told him that she was concerned about the "health of my soul". What do you think she would say today about her son's experiences?
6. How was Cantu like other 22-25 year olds who chose to leave the comforts of their homes for the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps or other similar opportunities "to see how others live and to help those whose lives are different from theirs"?
7. Cantu concluded that "his belief that he could be a force for good within the agency was naïve, overwhelmed as they all were by the complicity of immigration policies along the border. He also, he said, realized that he was unable to change the system from the inside, realizing that it was designed to break you down? Comment on these conclusions.
8. In acknowledging criticism on his book, Cantu says "During my years as a BP agent, I was complicit in the perpetuation of institutional violence and flawed, deadly policy. My book is about acknowledging that, it's about thinking through the ways we normalize violence and dehumanize migrants as individuals." Comment.
9. Near the end of the book, José tells Cantu that he will keep trying. 'His reasoning is not a matter of law, or even justice. It is about something far bigger. I don't want to cause harm. But I have to break the law, Jose explains. It is a situation of emotion, of love.' It is also why other migrants will keep coming, Cantu seems to suggest, whatever the obstacles placed in their way, To deny that harms everyone on both sides of the border. Comment.
10. "The only way to fathom the troubled US-Mexico border...is to set aside the numbers, the statistics, the half a trillion dollars of bilateral trade, and most of all, the furor about a "wall"... and go to the border, look at the faces of its people and hear their stories." (New York Times Book Review) How well did Cantu describe his experiences and the "faces and stories of its people, including the Border Patrol?
11. People migrate to new countries for economic, social, political or environmental reasons. Why did your family migrate to the United States? If they came before 1917 (when a literacy test was required for those over 16), would they have been able to pass a literacy test? Would they be able to be US immigrants today?
12. To Cantu: What's next? Writing is where I see myself being able to do the most meaningful work. I still see it as a tool for exploring all the questions that I still have about the way that violence is normalized in a society. I have no urge to look away from the border, not just our border, but borders globally. How does the current "crisis" immigration from our Southern Border reflect the immigration crisis's in the rest of the world

*Sources include Reading Group Guides.com, Booked Reading Together: Book Club Discussion Questions, Christian Science Monitor: Dreams, divisions and death: author Francisco Cantu shares what he saw at the Mexican border New York Times: Border Patrol Memoir Ignites Dispute: Whose Voices Should Be Heard From the Frontier, Tucson Festival of Books/ The Daily Wildcat, Book Reviews from Dallas Daily News, New York Times, The Guardian,SFGate, NPR, and Financial Times.*