

Convocation Essay Questions

After reading *The Line Becomes a River*, please carefully read the two-part prompts below and select the one that most appeals to you. Produce a response of about 750 words (this is flexible for creative responses in genres other than prose) in which you both engage the book, quoting specific passages to provide examples or to clarify your ideas, and reflect upon your own unique experience and perspective. This essay, which will be collected, will prepare you for the Convocation discussion. Check out The [College Reads website](#) for additional resources!



(1) Creativity on the Line

In the concluding Author's Note, Cantú writes that his book "seeks to function as literature rather than reportage, to resonate more deeply within the soul rather than the mind." This approach can lead to a powerful, immersive reading experience. It also demands much of the reader as we are not told *how* to feel or think about these often brief and unconnected scenes, but rather asked to construct, as Cantú puts it, our own "moral interpretation." **In the first part of your response**, introduce us to and closely analyze one narrative moment or vignette that you found particularly evocative and effective. What makes this moment so powerful? How does Cantú use small details to convey certain unspoken tensions and emotions?

After closely engaging one such moment, please adapt this narrative approach as you creatively recast a moment that you have witnessed in your own life related to a current social justice issue that is important to you. Try your best to let the details convey the deeper truths, leaving the reader to navigate this moment and form their own moral interpretation. Alternatively, if you prefer to express yourself in a genre other than narrative prose, you might compose a poem, choreograph a dance, curate a set of photographs, construct a collage, or employ some other expressive form.

(2) What Lies Beyond Idealism

In one of the early conversations that Cantú has with his mother about his motivations for joining the Border Patrol, he says that "I know there's something here I can't look away from.... Whatever it is, I'll never understand it unless I'm close to it." Do you think that Cantú's time in the Border Patrol gave him the understanding he was looking for? **In the first part of your response**, highlight and explore a few key moments in the narrative where you think Cantú's early idealism seemed to be either supported or challenged. Where on the spectrum between idealism and despair do you think that Cantú ultimately concludes his account? If we are not left with clear answers to the border crisis, what are we ultimately left with?

After closely engaging a few of these key moments, please consider your own position early in your college career. As you enter CofC, you have likely already started to experience how your idealism in relation to certain political and social issues is often challenged by the persistence of certain borders of race or class or identity that arise before us. In the second part of your response, write about a moment where your own early idealism in relation to an important political or social issues was either strengthened or challenged. What knowledge from this experience will you take forward with you in the years ahead?

(3) Solving the Unsolvable

Cantú enters the Border Patrol with hopes that his university studies, complemented by a few years of boots-on-the-ground experience as an agent and witness, will yield ideas for policy solutions to the ongoing border crisis. As is clear from Cantú's narrative, viable immigration reform can seem hopelessly impossible as the border continues to invite violence, destroy families, and consume a significant level of human, environmental, and economic resources. **In the first part of your response**, discuss a moment in Cantú's account where the failures of border policy are most pronounced. Beyond these apparent failures, do you think Cantú offers a glimmer of hope? If so, where do you find evidence for this?

After introducing the reader to a key part of Cantú's text, reflect upon how the immigration debate has changed in light of of family separations at the border, the threat of losing key protections for undocumented individuals, the current administration's push for an enhanced border wall, and a broad increase in deportations and criminal prosecutions for those who cross the border illegally. Given all of these complexities, what do you think are the most promising solutions to the current border crisis? And how would you encourage someone with an opposite point of view to consider those solutions?

Learn more about the border and organizations addressing the crisis...



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