

1.

The following account of crossing the US-Mexico was provided by a 28-year-old Bay Area resident.

Before I read it, I'd like to emphasize that this resident & her mother crossed the US-Mexico border in 1991 – 3 years before the adoption of Border Patrol's policy of "Prevention Through Deterrence" – which is also to say abolishing this policy would not be enough to end violence against migrants in the US-Mexico borderlands. The US Border Patrol must be dismantled.

The Bay Area resident writes:

I was the only infant in the group, when my mother crossed the border by foot. She carried me in her arms the entire way praying I wouldn't make a sound. She feared being abandoned by the coyote and the rest of the people in the group, [if I made sounds that could alert] border patrol to where we were hiding.

She recalls gun shots at a distance and encountering a lost mother and her young son from Guatemala who were running from those bullets and how they were forced to stay behind because, according to the coyote, smuggling Central Americans meant greater punishment if they were caught.

I slept most of the journey and we made it to California – 27 years later we remain undocumented in the U.S.

If the night my mother and I made our journey through the desert, an agent had done the things you openly admitted to participating in [in your book,] I'd make sure that agent knew that writing a memoir, which has been dedicated to both migrants and the agents destroying their lives, is not complex and interesting, it's not romantic landscapes and internal struggles – it's horrific and at the very least insulting to those in the community you claim to want to bring light to.

2.

The following statement was written by a former employee of Green Apple Books:

In advocating for Green Apple Books' management to cancel this event in solidarity with immigration activists and latinx communities, I was confronted with how insidious it is to allow figures like Francisco Cantu to take up so much space, when the victims and survivors of the violence he and Border Patrol, as an institution, enact are silenced or remain unheard.

As a Black and non-binary worker at the store, I quickly realized that white America values stories that attempt to beautify and humanize men who participate in institutional violence because it excuses white America's inaction while marginalized groups suffer.

I tried illustrating how exploitative and racist it is to amplify the voice of men who violently destroy families and lives, while turning away from the communities impacted by Border Patrol and other forms of systemic violence. I said that it's insulting to San Francisco immigrant communities that have been displaced, as ICE prepares for raids and deportations in the Bay Area, to host this event against the wishes of latinx folks who don't want to give a platform to Border Patrol. Not too long afterwards, I was told by management that several of my coworkers complained that they no longer felt safe or comfortable working with me.

Management and other white coworkers insisted that only those who read Cantu's book could speak on the impact Border Patrol agents have on immigrants lives, supporting only more sales of the book that most working class and immigrant families can't afford to buy. Management retaliated against me with a disciplinary write-up, stating that I'd falsely accused staff of being racist, permanently banning me from using our internal list-serve and forbidding me from being vocal about any issues regarding race or else risk termination.

I was explicitly told to my face that the owners are not concerned with "anti-racism." I quit on the spot just this past Thursday, disgusted with how the matter had been dealt with. White tears and sympathy for a Border Patrol agent were prioritized over solidarity with oppressed people. The irony that my white coworkers prided themselves on fighting "censorship" while actively trying to silence people of color was too much for me to excuse.

3.

The list of people murdered by law enforcement officers claiming they feared for their lives is long: Mike Brown, Alex Nieto, Mario Woods, Jordan Edwards, Tamir Rice, Philando Castile, Amilcar Perez & many more & in an overwhelming number of these cases, cell phone video & other evidence has emerged that calls the credibility of law enforcement officers into question. Yet, 3 times in *The Line Becomes a River* we are presented with the accounts of law enforcement officers who have murdered someone while on duty as if there is no reason to doubt those accounts.

One of those accounts is of a border cop talking about his time as a cop in Virginia where he killed a 17-year-old boy who he says had a stolen a vehicle & endangered his partner's life. Anyone paying attention to the public outcry against police brutality in this country should have no reason to believe this.

Another account provided by a border cop seems to be a slightly muddied version of Border Patrol agent Cody Rouse's account of the 2002 murder of Bennett Patricio, Jr. In the book, he's "Cole"—your supervisor who laughs when he says he ran over a "drunk Indian."

In actuality, “according to Tohono O’odham Police reports obtained from attorneys representing Patricio’s survivors, when Rouse first called in the death, he reported it to dispatchers as a body in the road, without acknowledging that he ran over it.”

In actuality, Patricio’s Tohono O’odham family describes Border Patrol as a “death squad.” They have claimed: “[**Border Patrol agents**] are operating like [**death squads**] do in **Central and South America, because no one can hold them accountable.**”

In actuality, Patricio’s Tohono O’odham family “believes that he walked upon Border Patrol agents involved in a drug transfer in the predawn hours in the desert and was murdered. Patricio’s family has taken the case all the way to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. As in the majority of cases filed against US Border Agents who have murdered people of color, injustice prevailed.”

In actuality, the real story is one that would probably expose the complicity between elected Tohono O’odham officials, tribal police, cartels and border cops. It would cast a different light on that part of your book where you talk about your supervisor “Cole” deciding not to track down those drug smugglers.

For all of your statements about how people need to embrace the “complexity” of the border, you have presented a very one-dimensional picture of what happens there – a picture that is decidedly pro-cop.

4. Serious trigger warning here for: rape, attempted murder & suicide.

In 2014, in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas US Border Patrol agent Esteban Manzanares took a Honduran woman & 2 young Honduran girls into custody.

Manzanares proceeded to rape the woman & slash her wrists. He then turned to her 14-year-old daughter and sexually assaulted her as well & tried to break her neck. The girl passed out as a result.

Manzanares then took the remaining 14-year-old girl to his home in Mission, TX. He tied her up, stuffed a sock in her mouth & went back to finish his shift patrolling the area south of Mission.

Just before midnight he went back & sexually assaulted the girl.

Unknown to him, the woman he'd first raped had survived & told authorities searching the area that the man who had taken her daughter & the other girl traveling with them had been wearing a green uniform.

Shortly after, authorities discovered the woman's daughter. She, too, had luckily survived.

By this time authorities were onto Manzanares & had shown up at his home. While they were still outside, they heard a gunshot. A Mission police SWAT team broke a window & forced their way inside.

Manzanares had committed suicide. Authorities discovered the 14-year-old girl, still bound, but alive.

Neither Manzanares's ex-wife nor his neighbors could believe he would ever do such a thing. Little did they know that federal authorities had already been investigating Manzanares after previous complaints against him.

5. Trigger Warning: Cartel Violence

During Spring Break of 2015, in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, a headless body was found floating in the Laguna Madre off South Padre Island. The body was that of Honduran national Franklin Rodriguez Palacios Paz.

The investigation of this case led authorities on a meandering journey through the Gulf Cartel's internal blood-letting, which involved the familiar markings of mafia muscle & hardball tactics experts have come to associate with 21st century cartel warfare. Also involved was a US Border Patrol agent.

Joel Luna – a 6-year Border Patrol veteran – & his 2 brothers Fernando & Eduardo, who were citizens of Mexico, operated a criminal enterprise centered on drug trafficking. They were all charged with capital murder & drug trafficking.

Fernando eventually copped a plea & turned on his 2 brothers.

Turns out Eduardo was a “commander” for the Gulf Cartel. His charges stuck. He was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

Joel – the Border Patrol agent – was convicted of “engaging in organized criminal activity” but acquitted of murder. He was sentenced to 20 years.

According to the Texas Tribune, “multiple sources with direct knowledge of the investigation said that in March of 2013, Joel told [his supervisors at Border Patrol that] he’d been warned his family in Mexico was in danger unless he helped move drugs for the Gulf Cartel.” While it became part of the case against him, what happened between 2013 & 2015 suggests that this information was never followed up on.

In the same Texas Tribune article, it is admitted that “dirty cops & dirty border patrol agents are nothing new. More than 130 officers employed by US Customs & Border Protection have been caught in alleged acts of mission-compromising corruption – often by letting drugs or undocumented immigrants or both into the country – over the past decade. While that’s a tiny fraction of the total number of agents, report after report has suggested the known cases may be the tip of the iceberg.”

6.

Corruption investigators said the case of the former Border Patrol agent Ivhan Herrera-Chiang illustrates the damage a single compromised agent can cause. In 2013, he was sentenced to 15 years for providing sensitive law enforcement information to drug cartels.

Mr. Herrera-Chiang, who was assigned to a special undercover unit targeting the cartels in Yuma, Ariz., provided maps of hidden underground sensors, lock combinations to gates along the United States-Mexico border and the locations of Border Patrol traffic checkpoints to an individual who provided them to the cartels. The cartels used the information to bypass Border Patrol agents and transport methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana into the country, according to court records.

Mr. Herrera-Chiang also entered law enforcement databases on his work computer to run drug seizure checks and even provided information on confidential informants in Mexico. That information included one informant whom federal law enforcement officers were able to locate before he could be killed, court records said. Mr. Herrera-Chiang admitted to receiving about \$4,500 in bribes for his efforts, but his co-conspirator put the amount between \$60,000 and \$70,000.

“Corrupt C.B.P. law enforcement personnel pose a national security threat,” a Department of Homeland Security report released in May concluded. The report also revealed numerous problems with efforts to root out corruption among Border Patrol and customs agents. The report said the “true levels of corruption within C.B.P. are not known.”

7.

In June 2010, 15-year-old Sergio Hernandez and his friends were playing chicken at the U.S.-Mexico border, daring each other to run up and touch the tall border fence separating Juarez, Mexico, from El Paso, Texas.

At some point during their game, U.S. border patrol agent Jesus Mesa arrived on a bicycle. He detained one of the kids on the U.S. side while the others ran away. Hernandez hid behind a pillar beneath a bridge on the Mexican side of the border. A cellphone video shows the boy peeking out from behind the column, before Mesa shoots and kills him.

NPR's Nina Totenberg reports that Mesa claims he was being surrounded by the boys, and that they were throwing rocks at him....

The Justice Department decided against prosecuting Mesa because the department said it did not have jurisdiction on the Mexico side of the border. Mexico charged the agent with murder, but the U.S. refused to extradite him, so the prosecution could not move forward.

8. Trigger Warning: Physical and Sexual abuse of unaccompanied youth

In 2014, 5 immigrant rights groups filed a complaint accusing US border officials of participating in the systemic abuse of unaccompanied migrant children detained near the southwest border, including physical and sexual abuse, painful shackling and denial of adequate food and water.

The complaint details alleged abuse and mistreatment suffered by 116 children detained by US Customs and Border Protection officials. **One in four children said they experienced physical abuse, including kicking, beating and forced stress positions. More than half reported verbal abuse, including taunts, death threats and racist or sexually charged comments. A majority said they were held for longer than seventy-two hours, the maximum time permitted before CBP officials are required to transfer custody to the Office of Refugee Resettlement.**

Cases of abuse and mistreatment are described in graphic detail. A sixteen-year-old Central American girl said [Border Patrol] agents “violently spread her legs” while searching her, touching her genitalia and making her scream. A seventeen-year-old boy detained near Hidalgo, Texas said he was forced to maintain a stress position for twenty minutes as punishment for laughing. A seventeen-year-old rape survivor who fled Guatemala said she was repeatedly harassed by [Border Patrol agents]; one allegedly told her, “We’re going to put you on a plane, and I hope it explodes. That would be the happiest day of my life.”

9.

In 2016, Noe Lopez, a 10-year veteran of Border Patrol working out of the Imperial Beach station pled guilty to the attempted distribution of methamphetamine and cocaine and receiving a bribe by a public official.

Lopez picked up and delivered backpacks full of drugs that had been left for him at the border fence in San Diego County — transactions that were part of an undercover sting by the [FBI's Border Corruption Task Force](#).

A confidential source told authorities that Lopez had befriended him in late October and began communicating via WhatsApp, a cellphone texting program. Lopez told the source he was able to help smuggle drugs and offered to do so for \$1,000 to \$2,000 per backpack, the complaint says.

In a series of conversations, Lopez described how he could retrieve backpacks full of drugs at certain spots along the U.S.-Mexico fence while on duty and then deliver them to a safe location at a later time.

The source, who was cooperating with law enforcement, recorded a conversation with Lopez on Nov. 23 in which the agent agreed to accept \$500 per pound of methamphetamine during a smuggling run.

The first retrieval was to occur Dec. 6. Lopez called the source the day before, saying he'd be on duty but that his location wasn't near a good drop-off spot, the complaint says.

But Lopez was able to switch locations with a female agent who had been assigned near the bridge.

The source told Lopez that there would be 6 pounds of meth in the backpack.

Communications continued via WhatsApp to coordinate the transaction.

Law enforcement agents dropped a backpack containing a substance that would appear to be meth at the desired spot and Lopez picked it up, placing it in his Border Patrol vehicle, the complaint states.

After his shift, Lopez met the source in his personal Chevy Yukon at a [Chula Vista](#) strip mall and gave him the backpack, according to the complaint.

The next day, the two met at a restaurant in Chula Vista's Eastlake neighborhood. Lopez was paid \$3,000 for his services and offered to help again the next day, as he was working in a good area for drop-offs known as Goat Canyon.

On Dec. 8, Lopez told the source that he'd placed a cola bottle on the fence to mark where the drugs should be dropped. Agents again left a backpack that Lopez believed to contain 7 kilograms of cocaine, and he picked it up and delivered it.

The following day, Lopez was paid \$7,000 for his efforts during a meeting at another strip mall.

At the time of his arrest, Lopez was the third local federal agent to have been arrested on corruption allegations in just months.

Tyrone Duren, a Homeland Security Investigations agent had been arrested on suspicion of stealing drug money from traffickers and laundering the cash through real estate transactions and banks.

Customs and Border Protection Officer Jose Luis Cota had also been arrested on suspicion of allowing a woman to repeatedly smuggle unauthorized immigrants through his lane at the San Ysidro Port of Entry, in exchange for cash bribes and sexual favors.