The crash of 1929 and the migration policies of President Hoover forced thousands of Mexicans out of the United States. Deportees found their way back into Mexico, where they reinvented their lives. Post-revolutionary regimes of the time had initiated an ambitious state-led cotton program right on the border between Texas and Tamaulipas. They expanded the threshold of the desert with massive works of water infrastructure, deriving water for agricultural purposes from the Río Grande for the first time, and set the financial basis for national and international investments in the area. To be successful, the cotton program needed expert workers—and the deportees from the United States, with vast experience as cotton pickers in southeastern ranches, came to play fundamental roles here. In this cross-genre creative non-fiction account of the process, Cristina Rivera Garza unearths a series of domestic objects to trace the history of her grandparents as they crossed the border, cleared the land, and developed a new life as the brave ejidatarios who created one of the most daring and successful Cardenista programs in the north of Mexico.

Discussants: Douglas Massey, Department of Sociology, Princeton University; Michael Wood, Department of English, Princeton University

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