With its sweeping landscapes, grand myths, and oversized egos, the American West has loomed large within U.S. history. Since the nation’s birth, Americans looked toward the horizon and imagined their destinies, a gaze since copied by historians, novelists, and filmmakers. Nevertheless, the history of this vast region is much more fractured and complex. This course explores the West – as an idea and place – from the early nineteenth century through World War I. While we will engage the ways that Americans conjured and conquered the region, we will also look beyond their gaze toward the varied empires, peoples, and forces that created the West. Topics covered include: Northern New Spain and Mexico; American Indians and US expansionism; trans-continental and trans-Pacific trade and (im)migration; race, gender, and identity.