In January 2015 Pope Francis announced plans to canonize (elevate to sainthood) Father Junípero Serra, the Franciscan founder of the eighteenth-century California mission system. Some received this message with joy, others with anger or despair. Why? This term we will take an intensive look at the role of frontier missions in Spanish-American colonial history. Mission systems such as the Franciscan enterprise in Alta California are often portrayed through the mists of a romantic haze of gentle, utopian days of yore. Yet they have also been vilified by critics of colonialism, to the extent that some writers link the missions with a process of genocide visited upon hapless indigenous neophytes. Our challenge is to hold up both visions of the frontier mission systems (in California, in Paraguay, and what is now the Southwest of the United States) to a more critical, nuanced kind of investigation. What, exactly, was a true "mission?" Why were missions founded in frontier regions? How did the native peoples brought into the mission systems fare? Why do frontier missions still capture our attention and continue to exert very real cultural influences in the twenty-first century? Over the course of the term, we'll be reading a wide variety of narratives, including accounts written by missionary friars as well as recent scholarly works examining various aspects of mission history. Some of you will even have a chance to volunteer to do a dramatic reading of a play about the missions and friars of Alta California. We'll also view and critique a Hollywood film about the missions of colonial Paraguay (imagine Robert De Niro as a Jesuit).