Love it, like it or hate it, American popular culture is pretty much unavoidable almost everywhere in the world, but definitely in California. While we might not be able to avoid consuming parts of popular culture, individuals do have some choice in determining how they participate in and understand popular culture. This class is designed to equip students with the tools to critically analyze and engage American popular culture.

What does popular culture do? Does what popular culture does matter? How does American popular culture shape the ways people within and beyond the US understand their own identities and the relationships between identities? Why is American popular culture so widely consumed in the US and internationally? How and why do movies, television, music and video games produced in the US dominate global popular culture and what is the impact of this phenomenon?

This upper division course will introduce students to key concepts and debates in American Studies with a focus on US popular culture, its global circulation, and the production and implication of identity categories such as gender, race, class and nationality. Rather than assuming that popular culture is simply fun or entertainment, we will consider the kinds of stories, images, and scripts provided by popular programs such as Law and Order and The Fosters, movies such as Pocahontas, video games like Call of Duty, and toys like Barbie. What do these various media productions teach audiences about femininity and masculinity, social class, whiteness, blackness, Asianness, and other racial identities? How do these ideas circulate in the US and abroad?