

**HIS 285**

**Games, Burlesques, and Spectacles:  
Popular Culture in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century America**

Satisfies SBC: SBS, USA

Thematic Categories:  
“Arts, Ideas & Culture” and “Race, Religion, Gender & Sexualities”

M/W 5:00 pm - 5:55 pm

Professor April Masten

During the nineteenth century, the word *culture*, which referred to the *nurture of* something, came to mean “a thing in itself.” Culture is something people make or do. It is a moral, intellectual, creative activity. It is also a response to personal and social relationships and to political and economic developments. It is a mode of interpreting our common experience, and even changing it. This lecture (and recitation) course looks at popular entertainments – from waterfall jumping, blackface Shakespeare, and newspaper reading, to circuses, Christmas rituals, and spectator sports – to see how cultural forms and practices reflected and shaped American society between the Revolution and Reconstruction. Course requirements will include regular attendance and participation, weekly readings, a weekly quiz, two short essays, two in-class midterms, and a word-game.