In 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 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 course begins with the premise that every cultural form or practice derives its meaning and value from the immediate conditions of its production and reception. It analyzes the way nineteenth-century popular entertainments – from dancing, boxing, and gambling to theaters, circuses, and Christmas celebrations – both reflected and shaped American society.