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detain, v.

Pronunciation: /dɪˈteɪn/

Forms: ME–16 deteyn(e), 15–16 detein(e, deteign(e, detayn(e, detain(e, (16 deten), 16– detain.

Frequency (in current use):

Etymology: Late Middle English deteine , deteyne, < Old French detenir (12th cent. in Littré), detener (Britton) = Provençal detener , Spanish detener , Catalan detenir , Italian ditenere < Romance type *dé-tenère for Latin dētinere , to hold off, keep back, detain, < de- prefix + tenère to hold. For the root-vowel compare contain, maintain, sustain, retain.

1.

a. trans. To keep in confinement or under restraint; to keep prisoner.

spec. To place (a political offender) in confinement.

[biblio]

1292 Briton L. v. §3 Ou si maliciousement le fet detener.

1485 Caxton tr. Thystorye & Lyf Charles the Grete sig. gviij/2 The peres of fraunce beyng thus assyeged and deteyned.

1548 Hall's Vnion: Henry IV f. x A traytor..which is apprehended and deteigned in prisone for his offence.

1605 W. Camden Remaines II. 16 When King Richard the first was detayned prisoner.

1761 D. Hume Hist. Eng. III. lxx. 279 He was detained in strict confinement.

1884 M. E. Braddon Flower & Weed 139 'Beg your pardon, sir,' said the constable.'I shall be obliged to detain you till this business is settled.'

1918 East India (Sedition Comm.): Rep. Comm. to investigate Conspiracies in India 86 in Parl. Papers (Cd. 9190) VIII. 423 Such men are the leaders and organizers of the movement. They are now detained or their arrest is intended under Regulation III of 1818.

1940 J. Anderson in Hansard Commons 23 May 277 I have found it my duty, in the exercise of my powers under Regulation 18B of the Defence (General) Regulations, 1939, to direct that Captain Archibald Henry Maule Ramsay, Member of Parliament, be detained.

†b. pass. To be 'holden' or possessed with (infirmity, disease, etc.). Obs.

a1440 Found. St. Bartholomew's 18 With this so grete A sykenes was he deteynyd.

1549 T. Chaloner tr. Erasmus Praise of Folie sig. Tiij To be deteigned with suche a spece of madnesse.

1660 tr. H. Blum Bk. Five Colunmnes Archit. (new ed.) c A Maide of the City Corinthia..detained with sicknesse, dyed.

2.

a. To keep back, withhold; esp. to keep back what is due or claimed.
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Obs.

c1535 in J. A. Froude Short Stud. (1867) 1st Ser. II. 82 The said abbot hath detained and yet doth detain servants' wages.

1637 J. FLETCHER & P. MASSINGER Elder Brother v. i. sig. II My sword forc'd from me too, and still detein'd.

1670 A. MARVELL Let. to Mayor of Hull 12 Apr. in Wks. (1875) I. 324 To call to account such persons as detained mony in their hands given charitably.

1710 H. PRIDEAUX Orig. & Right Tithes v. 221 These Tithes have been granted by the King but afterwards by the instinct of the Devil many have detained them.

1720 POPE tr. Homer Iliad VI. xxiv. 172 No longer then..Detain the Relicks of great Hector dead..restore the Slain.

1768 W. BLACKSTONE Comm. Laws Eng. III. 855 The form of the writ..is sometimes in the debet and detinet, and sometimes in the detinet only: that is, the writ states..that the defendant owes and unjustly detains the debt or thing in question, or only that he unjustly detains it.

1849 MACAULAY Hist. Eng. I. iii. 288 The interest of the sum fraudulently detained in the Exchequer by the Cabal.

†b. To keep (a person) from his right. Obs.

1583 P. STUBBES Second Pt. Anat. Abuses sig. I5 Hereby the poore pastors are deteined from their right, and almost beggered.

†3.

a. To keep, retain (in a place or position, in a state or condition, or in one's possession). Obs. (exc. as associated with 4.)


1578 J. BANISTER Hist. Man v. f. 65 Some [glandules] are strewed as beddes vnto Veynes, and Arteries, to deteine them from hurt.

1606 W. BIRNIE Blame of Kirk-buriall xix. sig. F1 To dedicate the same thing a Kirk, and yet deteine it a buriall.

1632 W. LITHGOW Totall Disc. Trav. v. 195 Rivers mentioned in the Scriptures, which to this day detayne their names.

1635 E. PAGITT Christianographie (1636) i. ii. 41 The inhabitants of Spaine are detained in superstition, by the vigilance of the Inquisition.

1774 O. GOLDSMITH Hist. Earth II. 159 When we fix and detain them [sc. our eyes] too long upon the same object.

†b. To hold, hold down: transl. détinerë of the Vulgate. Obs.

1582 Bible (Rheims) Rom. i. 18 Those men that deteine the veritie of God in injustice [1611 hold: Wycl., Tind., Cranm., Geneva, withhold: Rev. V. hold down: Gk. κατεχόντων].

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That...they might learne not to detaine the truth of God in unrighteousnes.

Men have a natural knowledge of God; if they contradict it by their life and practice, they are guilty of ‘detaining the truth of God in unrighteousness’.

c. To hold or occupy with an armed force. Obs.

A large and strong Fortresse...now detained by a Garison of Turkes.

Thus the Lord hath preserved an unwalled Towne from being destroyed or detained by a great Armie.

d. To hold, engage, keep the attention of. Obs. (or merged in sense 4.)

No good on earth doth my desires detain.

I am mighty detained & allured with that grace and comelinesse.

It wants those striking revolutions, those unexpected discoveries, so essential to engage and to detain a spectator.

e. To constipate, ‘bind’; also absol. to cause constipation. Obs.

The water that cooleth the yron, doeth detayne the bellie.

It is bynding, and therefore it doeth deteyne.

4. To keep from proceeding or going on; to keep waiting; to stop. (The ordinary current sense.)

For pittie now she can no more detaine him.

I shall detain you...no longer in the demonstration of what we should not doe.

Here Theagenes resolved to detain him self some time.

The business which then detained him.

I was detained...partly by the rain, and partly by company that I liked very much.

Don’t let me detain you.

We will not detain our readers.

The vessel...is detained in quarantine.

5. To keep back or restrain from action; to hinder; to delay. Obs.
1600 E. BLOUNT tr. G. F. di Conestaggio *Hist. Uniting Portugall to Castill* 54 But he resolved not any thing, detained by his blinde commission, and the advise of some other Capteines.

1621 R. BURTON *Anat. Melancholy* III. II. III. 616 Modesty would detain them from doing amisse.

1681 DRYDEN *Absalom & Achitophel* 8 How long wilt thou the general Joy detain; Starve, and defraud the People of thy Reign?

This entry has not yet been fully updated (first published 1895).