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## detain, *v.*

**Pronunciation:** /dr'teɪn/

**Forms:** ME-16 **deteyn(e)**, 15-16 **detein(e)**, **deteign(e)**, **detayn(e)**, **detaine**, (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 \**dē-tenēre* for Latin *dētīnēre*, to hold off, keep back, detain, < DE- *prefix* 1b + *tenēre* 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.

[1292 *Britton* I. v. §3 Ou si malicieusement le fet detener.]

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

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

1605 W. CAMDEN *Remaines* II. 16 When King Richard the first was deteined prisoner.

1761 D. HUME *Hist. Eng.* III. lix. 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. Tiiij<sup>v</sup> To be deteigned with suche a spece of madnesse.

1660 tr. H. Blum *Bk. Five Collumnes Archit.* (new ed.) C b 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. ?

**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. I1 My sword fore'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. L5 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.)

- 1541 T. WYATT *Defence* in K. Muir *Life & Lett.* (1963) 187 That the defendante myght detayne vnto hym counsell.
- 1578 J. BANISTER *Hist. Man* v. f. 65<sup>v</sup> 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 deteene 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 vigilancy 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. *dētīnēre* of the Vulgate. *Obs.*

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

1593 T. BILSON *Perpetual Govt. Christes Church* 100 That..they might learne not to detain the trueth of God in unrighteousnes.

a1694 J. TILLOTSON *Serm.* (1743) VII. 1846 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.*

1632 W. LITHGOW *Total Disc. Trav.* III. 103 A large and strong Fortresse..now detained by a Garison of Turkes.

1642 *Lanc. Tracts* (Chetham Soc.) 56 Thus the Lord hath preserved an unwall'd Towne from being destroyed or detained by a great Armie.

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

c1595 COUNTESS OF PEMBROKE *Psalme lxxiii.* 75 in *Coll. Wks.* (1998) II. 95 No good on earth doth my desires detain.

1621 R. BURTON *Anat. Melancholy* II. II. VI. iii. 374 I..am mightly detained & allured with that grace and comelinesse.

a1780 J. HARRIS *Philol. Inq.* (1781) II. vii. 148 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.*

1580 J. FRAMPTON tr. N. Monardes *Dial. Yron* in *Ioyfull Newes* (new ed.) f. 158 The water that cooleth the yron, doeth detayne the bellie.

1580 J. FRAMPTON tr. N. Monardes *Dial. Yron* in *Ioyfull Newes* (new ed.) f. 158<sup>v</sup> 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.)

1593 SHAKESPEARE *Venus & Adonis* sig. E For pittie now she can no more detain him.

1644 MILTON *Of Educ.* 3 I shall detain you..no longer in the demonstration of what we should not doe.

a1665 K. DIGBY *Private Mem.* (1827) 89 Here Theagenes resolved to detain him self some time.

1790 W. PALEY *Horæ Paulinæ* Rom. ii. 12 The business which then detained him.

1826 W. COBBETT *Rural Rides* in *Cobbett's Weekly Polit. Reg.* 30 Sept. 25 I was detained..partly by the rain, and partly by company that I liked very much.

1861 E. D. COOK *Paul Foster's Daughter* i Don't let me detain you.

1891 E. PEACOCK *Narcissa Brendon* I. 113 We will not detain our readers.

1892 *Times* (Weekly ed.) 21 Oct. 2/4 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).

Oxford University Press

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