

DRINKS WITH DEAD PEOPLE

QUARANTINE EDITION

APRIL 14, 2020: THE STOMACH REBELLION

This week's theme: Connecticut history, because it's my home and I'm sheltering in it. Today's story: 19th century dining hall riots!

THE STORY

Coronavirus isn't the first reason that college students have been abruptly sent home mid-year. In the summer of 1828, Yale students got so upset with their dining experience that they undertook a group protest that came to be known as the "Stomach Rebellion," and it got so heated that the university president had to expel everybody to get them to cool the eff down.

College rules at the time required students to both live and eat on campus. In a letter of protest, students claimed that the food was unconscionably lousy. (There were rumors of worms in the cabbage.) The student body largely moved off campus to eat and live in boarding-houses and taverns, leaving campus in a state of empty disarray. The college president replied that he considered the students – who had angrily smashed dishes and greased stairs with butter in response to the fare on offer – to be in a state of rebellion, and wouldn't entertain anything, thank you very much, until they got their butts back into the dorms and made polite, respectful requests of the administration. College staff went to taverns and inn-keepers and, with a mix of fines and strong hints, made students unwelcome in the local establishments. The faculty expelled four students in response to the "stomach rebellion," in response to which the students agreed that they would attend no college meetings or classes until the four were readmitted.

Yale's administration ended the rebellion the only way it knew how: by sending the entire student body home for an unscheduled summer break.

Read on [at the blog](#) for more detail and resources.

DISCUSS:

Fighting over food may seem silly, but what other examples of student activism can you think of? Can student protest make a difference?

Do you think the Stomach Rebellion was really about the food, or was it possibly a cover for other concerns?

What does civic engagement mean to you?

Hi, I'm Betsy. Stuck at home? Let's learn history together, because the past helps us to understand that we are not alone. Weekday updates during #COVID19.

Questions? Comments? Say hello.

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READ MORE:

Judith Ann Schiff, "[The Way We Ate](#)," *Yale Alumni Magazine*, December 1995

Primary source: [The Hartford Courant](#), August 12, 1828

Harvard Graduate School of Education, "[Student Protests: Questions and Answers](#)"