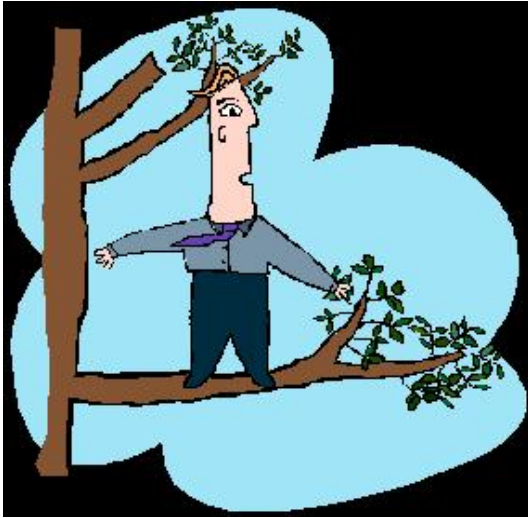


Out on a limb



The return of an old favorite about word and phrases we use and where they come from. Today's installment can be called "Dem's fightin' woids!"

Fisticuffs – in a more civilized manner (as if any fight could be), early 17th century men who found reason to fight were said to be “engaging in fisticuffs”, a word derived from “fistic” (of or relating to fighting with the fists) and “cuff”, a word long synonymous with



punching someone (as in, “he cuffed him across the head”).
Would you challenge *this* man to a duel?



I got beef – We have to zip all the way up to the early 19th century for this one, which ultimately derived from the cry of “hot beef!”, which meant “stop thief!” (why they didn’t just cry “stop thief!”, since it’s no longer than the other words is not for us to know, apparently).

This led to the “cry hot beef”, which meant to raise a hue and cry. That led to in meaning “to raise an alarm” and ultimately simply “to complain”. Thus, finally, we get to “beef” meaning complaint.

Put up your dukes – Dues, in this instance, refers to hands or fists. In a roundabout way, these “dukes” came from “real” Dukes, or in this case, the Cockney slang expression Dukes of Yorks.



If you're still puzzled, hang on. The expression uses “Yorks” to refer to “Forks”. Confused? Don't be. Forks, back then, referred to fingers and/or hands (think “fork over” or “fork out”).

Therefore to “put up your dukes (of Yorks/forks)” means to put up your fists for fighting.