Chapter 4

Violence
As ships entered into Amsterdam’s harbor in the early seventeenth century, each sailor, merchant, and visitor to the city could easily view the criminals dangling from the gallows on the opposite shore. Like a giant billboard, the location known as Volewijk, where the main office of the Shell Company now stands, warned newcomers to the city as well as its residents that Amsterdam’s magistrate penalized violators who did not abide by municipal laws. The cadavers hanging from the gallows transmitted a pedagogical message. Criminals guilty of offenses were publicly executed on Amsterdam’s main square, the Dam Square. Unlike other European countries with a monarch, Amsterdam’s magistrates were present, emphasizing that civic law reigned. Criminals were publicly executed after the sentence was spoken, ‘these are things that cannot be tolerated in a city of law and have to be punished as an example to others’. After the execution, the corpses were paraded to the harbor and taken in a boat to the gibbets of Volewijk and hung for all to see.¹

Violence was a common facet of early modern society. In 1606 the amount of bloodshed and violence in the towns and villages of the Dutch Republic was said to have reached excessive levels. In that year the Dutch Reformed Church classis of Enkhuizen asked Amsterdam’s classis to persuade the States of Holland to take drastic measures. Willem van Zuylen van Nyevelt, the bailiff of Gooiland, Muiden and Weesp (and the lord of Bergambacht), took matters into his own hands and requested the stadholder, Prince Maurits, to address the matter nationally. According to Van Zuylen van Nyevelt, the country was plagued with too much knifefighting, bearing of swords, breaking of windows, and malice in general. Consequently, a decree was passed that gave authorities the right to fine and prosecute those guilty of harming other people with knives, swords, and rapiers and causing innocent bloodshed. Furthermore, the decree stipulated stiff financial fines for those who smashed windows and caused other acts of property damage or disturbed the peace.² The early modern era has often been portrayed as a violent period marking the tumultuous transition from feudalism to capitalism. By exercising more self-constraint, the people experienced a substantial decline in the crimes committed throughout the era, which signifies a qualitative shift in the norms of the early modern society.³

CHAPTER 4

Violence
Contrary to contemporary society, violent behaviour was an integral part of the early modern world, and most urban young people witnessed acts of aggression ranging from domestic hostility to rape and manslaughter. They were exposed to violence on a daily basis. Executed criminals that hung from gallows adorned roads and waterways beyond the city parameters warned young and old of the might of municipal authority.

Early modern residents could also have witnessed violence sanctioned by the municipal or state government through publicly held brandings, whippings, thumb-cuttings, and hangings. Public executions attracted large crowds of people, especially those held in big cities. In the second half of the seventeenth century, Amsterdam had to close its city gates on the days executions were held. Publicly sanctioned violence had a dual purpose: firstly, it was a form of public entertainment, and secondly, it was a pedagogical tool to instill desirable behavior in young people and adult citizens.
Violence – a rite of passage

Young men in villages and towns were often the cause of violence. Lethal and non-lethal violence played an important role in the rite of passage to manhood. For them, committing violence often symbolized masculine character traits such as courage and the ability to take risks. In this chapter we will examine the role lethal and non-lethal violence played in youth culture and masculinity for young men growing up in the 1620s and 1630s. Early modern moralists and pedagogues did not know about the hormonal and neurological mechanisms at work during puberty and adolescence, but they were well aware that the nature of youths made them more inclined to be aggressive and violent. According to the Dutch physician Levinus Lemnius, the humoral state of male youths (the hot temperature and abundance of their blood) made them more prone to violent behavior: ‘blood eggeth a man to riot and wilfulness’. In the sixteenth century, the rebellious and wayward behavior of young men was often portrayed in school plays, which featured the Biblical theme of the Prodigal Son. The play, usually performed as a comedy, was mainly intended as an educational ray of hope for parents with adolescent sons.

Early modern youths demonstrated courage and took risks in various facets of life. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the most common display of risk-taking behavior in the public domain was drinking excessively. Consuming large amounts of alcohol caused young men to lose control over their reason and their bodies. Alcohol opened Pandora’s box and gave young men a ‘false’ sense of confidence, which often enabled them to become more daring. Acts of courage and life-threatening situations seemed to be a more natural outlet for young men to display manliness. Lethal violence in which young men put their lives at risk was an expression of manhood and physical strength. This was a major gender signifier distinguishing them from women. The mimicking of adult aggressive conduct was important for adolescent boys and young men to exhibit their manhood to society. Especially during the early seventeenth century when the Republic’s cities swelled in size, juvenile delinquency and tomfoolery became a growing menace for municipal authorities burdened with the task of maintaining law and order. In many aspects, Dutch cities formed a crossroads between the rural culture of agrarian society with its idiosyncratic norms of socializing young men and the emerging urban culture of civilized society that sought to maintain law and order.

During the 1620s and 1630s there was a visible shift from lethal to non-lethal violence in Dutch cities. As I will argue below, under the scrutiny of Dutch municipal restraint, adolescents and young men in the Republic were more inclined to resort to non-lethal violence. This was a key trait of Dutch youth culture for the era and a harbinger of the bourgeois youth culture that would later become widespread elsewhere in Europe. In history, timing is everything. The French cultural historian Robert Muchembled estimates modern adolescence to have already developed in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in villages and towns in Northern France and Flanders when the patriarchal structure of the family started to wither away, and tensions between adult males and unmarried sons grew. The German historian Norbert Schindler argues, on the other hand, that modern adolescence and youth culture came into existence much later, pinpointing the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the advent of
the nation-state and onset of bourgeois norms and values with its middle-class culture. In this chapter we will discover how the early modern adolescence and youth culture behavior started to emerge in the 1620s and 1630s.

**Collective socialization process**

To understand male violence in urban areas in the Dutch Republic, we first have to address the greater framework of collective rituals of young people in rural society, a cultural environment that many immigrants in the Republic originated from in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In agrarian medieval and early modern societies, the most common ritual young people participated in was known as ‘charivari’.

This rural youth culture oscillated between several significant dichotomies in society. There was the public and private world of socializing young people, and the civilized cultures of the elite versus the uncouth of the popular. Within these defined realms, there were less well defined spheres between harmony (order) and disharmony (disorder), rulers (authority) and the ruled (subjects), purity and filth, human and beast, and finally between the world of night and day. Consequently, within these constellations lay the parameters between the adult and adolescent world. Rural youth culture navigated in this dominion of disparity, of which ritualized violence was a significant instrument. The historian Julius Ruff explains: ‘ritual behaviour consists of all those acts that are repeated, as almost instinctual conduct, and that thus reflect the learnt behaviour of a society. Rituals are highly symbolic and express religious belief, political ideology, societal norms, and other aspects of the life of a given culture’.

Before discussing violence, let us first focus on how adolescent boys and young men in early modern rural society were socialized. During this phase of life, the education of young men took place in the public domain in local youth groups. Members ranged in age from 12 years old to the late twenties – the common age of marriage. For young men, the marriage ceremony terminated membership in the village group. It was the last stage in the upbringing of young men before social and economic independence. This phase took place outside the family. The village youth group consisted of adolescent boys and young men from all social backgrounds who spent their leisure hours gathering in public spaces such as village squares and local taverns. In rural Europe during the Middle Ages, male youth groups had jurisdiction over their peers, including the girls of the village, and fulfilled an important societal role as guardian of village norms and values. One purpose of the youth group was its responsibility in helping young men train and develop masculine character traits. A member was expected to publicly display courage, develop fighting prowess, and learn to take risks. In the evening and at night when youth groups often met and consumed alcohol, confidence and male bravado were likely to be on display. For the youth group, violence and tomfoolery were a means of expressing bravery and skill, and consequently an important medium in the transition from childhood to manhood. Tomfoolery or *kattenkwaad* (literally ‘hurting cats’ in Dutch because of the often sadistic maltreatment of cats and other animals) was a term that signified the innocent form of childhood mischief. However,
when the children reached puberty and early adolescence, and testosterone levels started to peak, the mischief took on more aggressive forms. One means of channelling this pent-up aggression was through ritualised violence. In rural communities, ritualized violence often had a disciplinary component, in other words, the youth group exercised discipline on those who did not conform to local norms and values. Violence was manifested in a public shaming of the individual in question. Based on her research on youth groups in France, Natalie Zemon Davis concludes that society tolerated the disciplinary violence of young men 'to help control their sexual instincts', while at the same time it also permitted them some limited sphere of autonomy in the period between the onset of puberty and marriage, which sometimes could span a decade and a half. Hitherto, the display of violence was a means to let off some steam that was pent up by sexual repression. Juvenile misconduct was a sanctioned outlet in rural society. Initially, the charivari entailed a broad array of tomfooleries from 'masking, costuming, hiding, farces, parades and floats; collecting money and distributing money and sweets; dancing, music-making, the lighting of fires; reciting of poetry, gaming and athletic contests, which usually took place according to the feasts of the religious and seasonal calendar. Most important were the twelve days of Christmas, the days before Lent, early May, Pentecost, the feast of Saint John the Baptist in June, Our Lady in mid-August, and All Saints Day. Domestic rituals were also important, such as marriages and other family affairs. In addition, there was a whole range of pranks that young people did at any time with which they publicly shamed individuals in rural society. Their mischief also included stealing chickens, soiling clothes on wash lines, dismantling piles of firewood or dumping human excrement in vegetable gardens. Of course, the victims of these incidents were not happy, but the acts of unruliness were tolerated as the misrule of youth, and no formal legal charges were brought against them. Rural society did make a clear distinction between acceptable tomfoolery and non-tolerated theft. In rural Switzerland, for example, local youths that picked cherries from a wild cherry tree on private property might be tolerated. The tree was considered to be communal property because the fruit did not require any formal cultivation from the farmer, but when youths stole vegetables and other tended crops, it was considered an act of theft, and they were punished.

According to Davis, the groups of young men in the cities in the south of France during the Middle Ages and sixteenth century were known as 'abbeys or abbeys of misrule' because they were initially organized by the Church and their festivities were sponsored by clerics. The feast of fools before Christmas, for example, was a festival that was supported by the clerics, but in the course of the fifteenth century when these festivities started getting out of hand, the Church withdrew its affiliation. Nevertheless, these festivals were continued by laymen and young men in general, and the activities they partook in fulfilled an important role in socializing them. The charivari, a custom in which violence was instrumental, was a ritual that socialized and prepared boys and young men for manhood. These rituals were often a means of upholding traditional marriage norms and values in popular culture.
Unequal partners

One custom that was observed was that marriage partners should be of the same generation or age group. The youth group fulfilled an important role in maintaining the supply of marriageable women. Hence, a union between an elderly man and a young woman was strongly disapproved of. For unmarried young men, such a match had social and economic repercussions for the entire local community because a younger woman was taken out of the marriage pool, which meant that an eligible younger man would have to wait longer before finding another suitable woman. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this norm was often visualized in the arts in a genre of prints and engravings that portrayed younger women with older men. They were popular among young audiences. By illustrating attributes such as birds in the portrait, the artist made a sexual innuendo alluding to the Dutch word *vogelen* or birding which meant ‘mating’. Another common print that denounced the older man/younger woman union was illustrated in Johannes Wierix’s *Impotent Fisherman* (1568). The engraving featured a young woman sitting on the bank of a lake next to an older man who is fishing. At first glance, there is nothing out of the ordinary but after further examination one notices his fishing rod is limp, which referred to the permanent status of his own flaccid rod. Most likely, the youth of the village were less restrained than artists when mocking the sexual inadequacies of older men who married younger women. In the popular culture of agrarian society, rural youth groups deemed it important that marriage partners be of the same age group. Among the elite, marriages were arranged by families in order to maintain economic and social standing. However, for the general populace, the local youth group exercised a significant influence in regulating marriages.

There were other cases when the violence expressed by young men did not pertain to marriage issues but were outward manifestations of social disapproval. According to Norbert Schindler, the violence oscillated from innocent tomfoolery and implementing norms and values (tolerated by rural society) to the more extreme cases that vented societal outrage towards church and state authority, which of course was not condoned. Sometimes the ideas and issues young people protested about in rural culture reflected a strong social and moral consensus among the general population, and eventually erupted into full-blown peasant revolts against rural hierarchies. On another level, the violence wielded by young men could easily be manipulated by the authorities or used as a catalyst for social change in the political order, an aspect that will be addressed shortly.

The most distinctive feature of rural youth culture was its destruction of public order and harmony. Young men in particular were the originators and producers of noise who made their presence known by occupying the ethereal space. For example, if a local youth group opposed the marriage of a younger woman to an older man, they could take action by blocking the entrance to the church or gathering in the evening outside the house of the newlyweds and making loud noises with their pots, tambourines, bells, rattles, and horns. The reoccurring nocturnal cacophony might go on each night for as long as a week. Young men expressed manliness in ‘the loudness of performances’. In Germany, the habit was called *Jauchzen*, which was a type of a loud cheerful crowing. Norbert Schindler explains that this crowing was an expression of...
self-assurance and well-being, of boisterous ebullience and confidence in one’s own impetuous physical strength, this form of laryngeal acrobatics was a challenge to everyone who heard it to join in the rejoicing, and at the same time a potential declaration of war on those who did not wish to participate, but in any case a conspicuous signal in body language of young men’s massive presence.\footnote{20}

It is probably no coincidence that the intimidating sound and mass of the charivari was referred to in England as ‘rough music’ and in the Dutch Republic as ketelmuziek (kettle music). Sometimes animals were abused to help enhance the squalling sound. Similar to the Dutch Republic with its kattenkwaad, pulling of a cat’s fur was a favorite trick in Germany where charivari was known as Katzenmusik (cat music), and in Burgundy it was known as faire le chat.\footnote{21} The early modern countryside was literally and figuratively anything but a quiet place. In England until the early nineteenth century, youths under the cloak of night committed arson and maimed and poached farm animals. The sound of cutting a cow’s tongue in the middle of the night would have caused a horrifying and gruesome bellow. In these cases, mutilating animals was not per se part of the charivari tradition, but rather violent acts of vandalism against farmers who were not willing to increase the salary of their farm hands. Nevertheless, the result was the same. Rural residents were instilled with fear by a horrible noise that emerged from the darkness of night while the perpetrators remained hidden.\footnote{22}

The early modern psyche, the night was still regarded as ‘an impalpable but very clean line between Apollonian, virtuous, luminous and active time, and the demonic time, which dwelt under the sign of the divinities of the night, disorder and the protector of thieves’.\footnote{23} Darkness afforded young people a cover that allowed them to do as they pleased without the witness of ecclesiastical and parental authority.\footnote{24}

In England, rough music, also known as ‘skimmington’ or a ‘riding skimmington’, symbolized the dichotomy of filth and purity of the charivari. Rough music involved primarily methods of humiliating those who turned the world upside down, in most cases those who did not conform to the conventions or norms of society such as women who beat their husbands or committed adultery. Shrews who wore the pants in the household were another prototype of women who were sought out and shamed through skimmingtons. The aggression was not just directed at women. Men who did not live up to the codes of masculinity were also humiliated, including
cuckolds and henpecked husbands. Unlike the all-male youth abbeys in France, both men and women participated in rough music or skimmingtons in England. The woman or man in question would be forced to ride on a pole that was carried by men and they would be pelted with dirt and muck. Afterwards, they would be led off to a duck pond where the woman would be dunked under water. Many times effigies of the husband were made which were decorated with horns symbolizing his cuckold status. According to E.P. Thompson, rough music not only expressed a conflict within norms, it established limits and imposed restraints. It also ritualized norms and values that were embedded in an oral tradition.27 In the early decades of the seventeenth century, English authorities turned a blind eye to rough music and skimmingtons, but they made them illegal later in the century.28 In the North American colonies, the practice known as ‘shivarees’ – derived from charivari – survived in some rural communities until the twentieth century, but it became more synonymous with a pleasant marriage ritual in which newlyweds would be expected to serve a drink and hospitality to a crowd outside their house at night.29

The Dutch historian Gerard Rooijakkers postulates that the organization and ritual of charivari remained prominent in rural areas of the Northern Netherlands until the mid-nineteenth century. In the eastern part of the predominantly Roman Catholic province of North Brabant, which bordered on the German region of Rhineland and the Duchy of Cleves, charivari remained an important ritual to socialize young men into manhood. Whereas traditionally village authorities tolerated the tomfoolery of local youth groups, some cases of charivari landed before the judicial council of municipal authorities due to the severity of the violence. For example, in 1685 the sheriff of ’s-Hertogenbosch reported that the tomfoolery of a charivari had gotten out of hand when a soldier, Adriaan Aerts, in the village of Herpen was abused by a group of young men from the nearby village of Berghem. The young vagrants had entered the soldier’s house and forced him to drink from a wooden shoe after one of the young men had urinated in it. There was a similar case in the village of Oss where a young man was forced to drink from a beer mug after members of the group had spat in it. Because the young man refused to drink, he was stabbed to death. Rooijakkers explains that the use of bodily fluids was especially symbolic in the charivari ritual due to their liminal connotation to undesirable behavior. By physically polluting the body of the victim, the youth group symbolized the gravity of the offence committed. In this realm, the boundaries of the body were regarded as metaphors of the social boundaries that could not be exceeded.30 The English historian Alexandra Shepard argues that this type of violence was a disciplinary violence, which is ‘an intrinsic part of the penal code, of the implementation of moral and social hierarchies, and of institutional and household discipline. Many forms of violent correction were designed to humiliate offenders with public shaming rituals and with symbolic gestures.’31
Urban socialization process

During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the cities of Holland were teeming with young men and women. Although we have no statistics about the exact age of these immigrants, it can be assumed that the majority were young people who were more mobile and sought employment in the booming economy of the Republic. While young people formed a large pool for the labor markets and were a dynamic force in the flourishing economy of the Dutch Golden Age, they were also a potential source of unrest and violence. Many immigrants came from rural areas that socialized adolescent boys and young men through the village group. The customs of the rural youth groups clashed with the orderly controlled behavior municipal authorities sought. For example, the traditional mayhem that was connected with marriage ceremonies was not tolerated after it had been made known to public authorities. In the provincial town of Almelo, located on the eastern border of the Republic, municipal authorities prosecuted young men when they tried to uphold the tradition that required newlyweds to provide beer for local youths. Immediately following the wedding of Steven Lucas and his bride in November 1630, the couple were ambushed by four young men who threw beer on them and pulled Lucas's coat off and threw it in the mud. After municipal authorities were informed about the incident, the young men were prosecuted and fined. The municipal council of Almelo also regulated the manner in which young people celebrated carnival. In 1636 when a group of young people appeared on a carnival evening outside the home of the newly appointed minister Molanus and his wife, they demanded a traditional 'voluntary' gift in the form of money or chickens to celebrate carnival. After Molanus refused to pay, one of the boys threatened to kill some of his chickens. Another young man called him a karige hond (stingy dog). Eventually, the band of young people left without committing any violence, but Molanus sought justice and had the boys prosecuted, unsuccessfully however.

In 1617 violence erupted at the local fair in Leiden when a drunken young man threw his wooden shoe at a member of the civil guard. The scene quickly turned into a battlefield when guardsmen fired back and a group of young men retaliated by pulling up street stones and tossing them at the guard. One of the young men died after a guardsman shot him in the head. Leiden’s municipal council, which was more concerned with maintaining law and order, used the tragic event as a warning to the public in general, and gangs of unruly young men in particular. For young men, most of the fighting that took place at the fair was a display of male posturing by showing who was the strongest, who had the most courage, and who could take the most life-threatening risks. Brawls could especially get rough when young men fought with their fists and used sticks. These young men from the lower ranks of society sometimes carried sand in their pockets and in the heat of battle threw sand in the eyes of their opponents or fought with pieces of an earthenware pipe enclosed in their hands to ensure that a blow to their rival's face would leave scars. For many rural young men, a scarred face often symbolized manliness, courage-lessness, and the ability to take risks.
Violence and the lower ranks

Besides venues such as the fair, uncivilized violence carried out by young men from the lower ranks of Dutch society took place in the streets, bridges, city squares, marketplaces, and taverns. During the night, Dutch cities were bustling with young people – servants and apprentices visiting taverns, brothels, and game-halls. In particular, unmarried young men from the lower echelons of Dutch society, who had more leisure time than married men with families, posed a great threat to disturbing the municipal order. In Amsterdam, this large juvenile group could easily disrupt public order or rebel against municipal authority similar to a ‘Fifth Column’, the name applied to rebel sympathizers in Madrid in 1936 during the Spanish Civil War when four rebel columns advanced towards the city. During periods of political upheaval, the heightened risk-taking behavior of youths could be a force to be reckoned with. Youngsters were usually the first to initiate stone-throwing, riots, and plundering.37 During the Twelve-Year Truce (1609-1621) the country’s fragile political unity almost erupted into a civil war. The conflict arose as a theological debate between Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) and Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641) of the University of Leiden about the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Theologians, moralists, and critics turned the disparity into an all-out war by publishing numerous pamphlets – a new propaganda tool – that were instrumental in exciting public opinion.38 At first, their differences were confined to academic circles, but due to the sensitivity of the issue within the Church, the conflict spilled over into the public arena. In Leiden, theology students were initially involved, but the matter eventually spread to Flemish textile workers residing in the city.39 In the course of the next 14 years, the dispute polarized Dutch society from schools to local chambers of rhetoric to the political level of the Dutch Republic between the stadtholder, Prince Maurits, who sided with the Counter-Remonstrant, and the country’s advocate, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547-1619), who rallied with Remonstrant supporters. The dispute caused a rift in church classes and municipal councils throughout Holland and the rest of the Republic. In the winter of 1610 the first tumult broke out in Alkmaar where vagrants in the city antagonized youths into tossing stones and snowballs at the windows of churches, anticipating that mayhem would erupt. In 1617 riots broke out in Amsterdam, Brielle, Haarlem, Rotterdam, Oudewater and The Hague, where either Counter-Remonstrant supporters were in the majority or Remonstrant followers were tolerated by local administrators. In Amsterdam on Sunday, February 12th, 1617, youths encouraged by Counter-Remonstrant ministers and supporters destroyed a makeshift Remonstrant meeting house while a sermon was being delivered inside. The minister managed to escape, and according to one pamphlet, juvenile bandits removed the chancel and tossed it into the canal. While the building was being ransacked, thousands of adults laughed and cheered the youths on.40 Youths were clearly used as catalysts by both parties of the conflict to terrorize the other. The violence of destroying the makeshift Remonstrant meeting house was initiated by adult agitators who hung libellous placards on Saturday, February 11th, throughout the city that summoned supporters to gather at the city’s stock exchange the next day at 7.30 pm.41 The following morning youths assembled outside a makeshift church in a warehouse on the Kromboomsloot canal, where a church service was being held. The mob began smashing windows and climbed on the roof where
they dismantled the shingles. Then the youths entered the building in a wild rage, chasing the congregation on to the street, and destroyed the new chancel. A week later the violence had not stopped. On February 19th youngsters gathered at the stock exchange where they threw stones at Remonstrant supporters. According to the account of one of the English-born rectors of the Amsterdam Latin schools, Matthew Slade (1569–1628), these boys were summoned by an advertisement that was hung throughout the city three or four days in advance, conveying the words:

that if any were desyreous to see 700 boyes resolved to hunt out the Armenians and to defend the received Religion, they should come on Sunday to such a place. Hereuppon it semeth the Armenians changed theyr appointed place, which was in the new towne. It may be the owner would not harzard his house. But one Byshop, man of wealth, brother to Episcopius, divinity professor at Leyden.

Slade reported that approximately 800 boys, many who blackened their faces and were armed with staves and stones, gathered at the market and marched in procession to the beat of drums towards the home of Remonstrant supporter and merchant, Rem Egbertsz. Bisschop, on the Singel canal, where it was rumored that a Remonstrant ministry was being hosted. The group met with no resistance from the authorities, and their captain was ‘about 16 years old’, the rest were youths, some as young as 6–8 years old. Once they arrived at Bisschop’s house, all mayhem broke loose. The boys pulled the cobblestones out of the street and used them to smash the windows of the house. With a large beam, they barrelled down the cellar door and stormed the house in a frenzy as they plundered and looted. Bisschop’s household goods and prized possessions were thrown on the street and tossed into the canal. The total damage amounted to 5,000 guilders. Both Slade and Remonstrant foreman, Johannes Uytenbogaert, reported Amsterdam’s magistrates protecting the youths by delaying taking action and allowed the youths to drink all the wine and beer in Bisschop’s house. Before the house had been plundered, the bailiff was called and had arrested one of the boys. But when the bailiff let the youngster go and left himself because he had other things to do, someone in the crowd yelled out, ‘Now the house is our prize for the taking’.

However, the magistrate must have been alarmed at the mayhem when three other houses burned to the ground on the same evening. Four days later someone yelled throughout the town that the city hall was on fire. Luckily, it was only a heater that was smoking.

The city’s youths from the lower classes were also used on other occasions to instigate violence in the Remonstrant/Counter-Remonstrant conflict. At another time, Bisschop’s brother Simon Episcopius was threatened as he exited a church when he overheard activists rile youths against him: ‘boys, grab stones and show the mutineer’. The magistrate refused to punish the youths and urged Episcopius to leave the city and return to Leiden. In fact, none of the boys were prosecuted for plundering Bisschop’s house. To top it off, a city decree was issued that forbid Remonstrants from congregating. Moreover, Bisschop and his wife were excommunicated from the church. If Amsterdam’s Counter-Remonstrant-backed magistrate condoned the tumult, the
Illustration 15 Jacobus Ruys, The Plundering of Rem Egbertsz. Bisschop’s house, Amsterdam (1617)
violence

youngsters must have been encouraged by Counter-Remonstrant ministers to implement violence. Cornelis Pietersz. Hooft (1547–1626), the father of the poet P.C. Hooft, noted that ministers admonished youths from the pulpit daily about their dancing and excessiveness in food and dress, but never mentioned a word about their plundering.48 One Remonstrant writer warned authorities that such social upheavals were a threat to Dutch society because once the grauw (the plebs) have acquired a taste for violence, there would be no stopping them.

Remonstrant supporters voiced concern about mob violence for all of Dutch society. One pamphlet warned against rousing the mob into becoming a ‘Cape de Grijp’, which was a name for a pirate’s ship because it risked navigating in choppy waters. Counter-Remonstrant supporters were also victim to hostility instigated by hordes of young people. The Landdrost (Reeve) of Amsterdam, Huybert Spruyt (also known as Spruitenburch), threatened to disrupt a Remonstrant meeting by sending in a gang of youths. Spruyt’s promise of spoils for the boys had also attracted adult riff-raff who wanted to get in on the booty, which eventually turned against Spruyt and other Counter-Remonstrant supporters. The same group of boys did not remain loyal to the Counter-Remonstrants because they later attacked them by throwing stones at their windows. In the town of Den Briel on the island of Voorne, youths were aggressive towards Counter-Remonstrant supporters while civil authorities turned a blind eye, and merely regarded the incident as being caused by a group of boys fighting for a righteous cause.

In Oudewater, the birthplace of Jacobus Arminius, violence broke out on January 1st, 1618. Youngsters with guns supporting Remonstrants attacked and would have lynched an ‘innocent citizen’ if he had not been rescued. Around 9 o’clock in the evening, the same group armed with guns, clubs, and stones gathered in front of the church door to intimidate those inside. The next day the violence continued with youngsters who set fire to houses where Remonstrant supporters lived, and rampaged through the town streets causing commotion.49

According to Uytenbogaert the rallying youths were armed with guns and other illegal weapons such as half-pikes, and congregated outside the mayor’s house where they attempted to ram the door down and intimidate him and the rest of the Arminian municipal council to reverse the dismissal of Johannes Lydius, a Counter-Remonstrant minister.50

In April of 1619 in the village of Hazerswoude near Leiden, Pieter Willems Clomp (who was approximately 16 years old) literally drummed up local youths against Counter-Remonstrant followers when he marched through the town beating a drum and managed to rally 20 to 30 young followers.51 Many of the boys were between eight and twelve years old. It is not certain whether the mobs of youths and other unattached men knew exactly what they were venting their aggression against. In the realm of implementing violence, we have to remember that there is a difference between ‘fighting for’ an ideal and violence ‘against’ an undesirable state or situation. Juvenile aggression in the early modern period was not rooted in idealism but was more commonly employed against repugnant circumstances, or just for the sake of expressing violence. One of the most repulsive crimes that youths committed during the Twelve-Year Truce was the digging up and dismembering of the buried corpse of statesman Gillis van Ledenberg (1550–1618)
in Voorburg’s church cemetery. Ledenberg, who had been imprisoned, just like Oldenbarnevelt, on trumped up charges of treason by his political adversaries, took his life while awaiting the outcome of his trial in September 1618. The following May the court ordered that Ledenberg be given the death sentence posthumously. His embalmed body was hung in its coffin from a gibbet and left for 21 days. After it was taken down, the corpse was reburied. However, that same night a mob of youngsters, not much over ten years old, entered Voorburg’s church cemetery, dug up his body, desecrated his remains, and tossed them into a ditch along the road. The Court of Holland was so repulsed by the aggressive behavior of the young men that they issued an injunction against any further havoc. Contrary to modern concepts of youth culture, which is often associated with having a progressive stance on politics, the youths involved in the Remonstrant-Counter-Remonstrant conflict often sided with conservative leaders who wielded power and authority, and who were often backed by the majority.

Rebelling against authority

The Butter War of 1624 was a prime example of how juvenile violence was used to ‘fight against’ an undesirable new situation implemented by the state. Three years after the Twelve-Year Truce ended and the war with Spain resumed, the province of Holland levied new taxes in order to finance its growing expenses. One of those taxes required imposing a new tariff on butter. This new tax was not readily accepted on June 1st, which was a warm Saturday. As the temperature rose, so did the tempers. In Haarlem, a fracas first started at the Butter Market when Trijn Maertensz., a farmer’s wife from the neighboring village of Spaarnwoude who was selling butter, got into an argument with a tax collector’s assistant about the new tax. After an exchange of words, she threatened him with a knife, but he grabbed her hands, and the knife fell to the ground. After he released her from his grip, she suddenly snatched the knife and managed to tear his coat with it. The tax collector fled, but she yelled to the crowd for help. The news spread throughout the city, and in the course of the day an angry mob congregated outside the tax collector’s house. Shortly thereafter, the rabble started tossing stones at his windows. Two days later mayhem erupted again when crowds fortified themselves behind tipped-over wagons that barricaded the streets throughout the city. According to one report, five people died and several were wounded after the civil guard were ordered by the municipal council to disperse the mob. The stadtholder, Prince Maurits, additionally ordered 150 soldiers to Haarlem in order to suppress the uprising. News of the city government’s suppression in Haarlem reached Amsterdam, where an uprising broke out the same morning at Amsterdam’s Butter Market, and in the afternoon the windows of the tax inspector were smashed. On June 5th unrest erupted in The Hague. According to Rudolf Dekker who has investigated the riots and uprisings in the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most of the participants who instigated uprisings were women (older than thirty) and young men under the age of twenty. This group was often used as a shield because the law would be more tolerant of them due to their young age. Jasper Thomasz. Bort, for example, a 17-year-old slate apprentice, was only given a mild sentence of four days in jail after
he was arrested for smashing the windows of the tax collector’s house with roof shingles during the butter riot in The Hague.

The conflict between the Counter-Remonstrant and Remonstrant followers was not over with the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618 and Oldenbarnevelt’s execution in 1619. And neither was the youth’s role as a catalyst in implementing violence against both parties. On Easter Monday, April 13th, 1626, youths removed cobblestones from streets near the Oude Schans in Amsterdam outside a house where Remonstrant supporters were holding a church service. At first, the boys made lots of noise and then chased after the Remonstrant worshippers. The mob entered the house, smashed the windows, threw the chairs and benches outside, and then dismantled the building. Shortly thereafter, the head of the guardsmen, Major Hasselaer, arrived with some soldiers, but they too were pelted with stones from the crowd. The soldiers fired into the angry mob, and two youngsters were killed. The horde dragged the corpses through the city and laid them on the door of two of the ruling mayors to indicate that they had blood on their hands. The next day, disturbances broke out again. The house where the Remonstrant congregation had met was completely destroyed, and the objects taken from the house were paraded as trophies through the city.

In order to gain more control over its populace, and youths in particular, municipal authorities gradually issued more city ordinances that restricted the gathering and leisure activities of young people in public spaces. In the city of Utrecht, the town council combated the traditional Catholic feasts of St. Martin, St. Nicolas, and Epiphany. These celebrations were condemned not only because they were remnants of the Republic’s Roman Catholic past, but also because they were popular celebrations that got out of hand, and consequently turned violent. Utrecht’s municipal council also tried to regulate certain neighborhood activities such as games, meals, funerals, fairs, and activities that took place around the church and church buildings and on public roads or waterways. In the later part of the seventeenth century, Utrecht’s municipal council restricted youths from playing sports and games in public areas. A similar development occurred in Groningen, a city in the northern part of the Republic. In that university town, large groups of people, especially young men, were prohibited from congregating in open areas, disturbing the peace, parading through the streets, playing dice, frequenting inns, having a tab at a tavern, tossing firecrackers, throwing stones at church buildings, and committing acts of vandalism. In the city of Bergen op Zoom in the predominantly Catholic generality province of Brabant, the Dutch Reformed Protestant magistrates had their hands full trying to maintain law and order among youths who resisted municipal discipline and tried to uphold traditional Catholic festivities. Again, the youths supported traditional and conservative values, the Catholic ones in this case, as opposed to the new Protestant magistrate.

Especially in the 1620s the magistrate issued municipal decrees on several occasions that prohibited local youths from mischief such as throwing stones at public and religious buildings. This included not only adolescent boys but also smaller children (both boys and girls) of the middle class, and those who lived in the garrison. Even young military men were found guilty of...
tossing stones. In 1621 rowdy young men were accused of removing cobblestones from the main market square and fareways. Pedestrians complained about literally breaking their necks at night, and how youngsters kicked and molested them in doorways and windows. The pack of young men went into a wild frenzy when they reached the market square and graveyards, where they pulled up stones and tossed them through windows. Besides the destruction of property, numerous fights broke out between groups of boys who gathered on streets or at the city’s bulwarks armed with clubs, stones, and bones from skeletons. Sometimes whole streets fought against each other, and parents and schoolteachers were instigators in urging young people to fight. In 1623, municipal authorities were forced to take action against the youth of Bergen op Zoom after they attacked and broke the windows of the city hall with stones. The magistrate retaliated with tough measures that restricted the movement and gathering of young people on Sundays and former Catholic holidays. Anyone caught instigating turmoil faced imprisonment in the city block cell. In Friesland, Dutch Reformed Church authorities encountered the same problem in their attempt to transform the province into a Protestant one. They complained about youths participating in ‘pagan celebrations’ such as traditional folk feasts, wedding rituals, games, Lent, the games on the First of May, and the igniting of St. John’s fires on the saint day of John the Baptist (June 24th), and celebrating on Saint Martin’s Day (November 11th). Most of the times, the traditional Roman Catholic culture of the Republic was kept intact by youths participating in these traditions. In a rebellious act, they fulfilled a key role in resisting the Dutch Reformed Church’s efforts to stamp out Roman Catholic traditions and celebrations in the Republic.

In order to gain control over these activities taking place after dusk, municipal authorities in Amsterdam were the first in Europe to install an elaborate system of streetlighting. In 1669 the city council granted a painter and inventor, Jan van der Heyden, the task of stationing 1800 street-lanterns that were strategically placed and maintained throughout the city. The initial intention was to prevent pedestrians from drowning while walking along darkened canals at night, to allow firemen to do their job more effectively, and to halt nighttime criminality. However, municipal authorities did not anticipate that lighted streets would only enhance nighttime activities. In the first years the number of complaints about street prostitution rose drastically.

Violence and the upper and middle classes

Let us now focus our attention on the violence implemented by upper- and middle-class youths who resided in urban areas and adopted more civilized behavior that was initiated by humanistic ideals about childrearing and increased regulation by municipal authorities who wanted to maintain law and order. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the process of socializing adolescents and youths in urban areas underwent a radical shift. The increasing migration of rural inhabitants to Dutch cities and urban areas meant the ‘autonomy’ that youth groups were allowed in rural society was no longer permissible. Municipal authorities in Dutch cities felt their authority being challenged. Urban areas became a crossroads where the traditional youth culture of rural society with its collective socialization and wild behavior clashed with the
well-regulated and controlled environment of the city. In cities during the late Middle Ages, the conduct of large groups of youths disturbed the public peace, threatened the city’s authority, and was considered as outright uncivilized. Under these conditions an important change occurred in how young men became domestically and publicly socialized.  

With the change in the family structure and scission of rural civil society in the city, a new socialization process emerged in the urban areas of Holland. Firstly, the family in cities of the Dutch Republic was reduced in size from the multi-generational extended family in which grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins were influential in the upbringing of children. In the primarily urbanized Republic, individualization, increased economic independence, and the small size of urban dwellings became catalysts that helped condense families into the ‘nuclear family’ of two generations, namely parents and children. With this development, parents gained the lion’s share of authority when raising small and adolescent-aged children. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic was almost obsessed with the raising and educating of children. Numerous child-rearing manuals and treatises were published that served as helpful guidebooks for the relatively new phenomena of nuclear families. According to the Dutch historian of childhood, Jeroen Dekker, there was a growing ‘educational space’ for parents to focus and spend more time on the education of their children. The humanistic ideals of the Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation influenced parents and moralists about the greater possibilities of education. The impact of pedagogical literature changed the conditions of family dwellings in cities. Urban houses were built with separate bedrooms for children and parents, and designated areas for eating. In addition, there was a wide array of toys produced just for children.  

Also, the care and socialization of adolescents and young men took place more under parental authority than in rural society. In other words, the upbringing of children in towns gradually became the sole responsibility of parents, and their influence on children started to last longer than in rural society. In the urban areas of the Dutch Republic, this development was evident among parents who petitioned municipal governments to establish local universities for their children. Parents often argued that keeping a son home longer reduced the expensive costs of room and board at a university in another city, but most likely they preferred a few more years to exercise parental authority over what they probably considered immature teenage sons. In Leiden, some pupils were already enrolled at the university while still in the higher classes of the Latin school and were as young as eleven and twelve years old. Parents who had heard exaggerated stories of rowdy and rambunctious student behavior were frightened and preferred to keep their sons at home longer. During the 1630s, illustrious schools, academies of higher education without the right to issue degrees, were founded in Amsterdam, Deventer, ’s-Hertogenbosch, and Dordrecht and offered courses equivalent to a bachelor’s degree today. Illustrious schools offered classes in more practical subjects than universities and were also open to young adult men. If a student pursued a higher degree, he would have to go to a university, which meant that he had more time to mature. In 1629, the magistrates of Deventer opened an illustrious school in their city so parents would not have to send their sons so far away. The closest university to Deventer, which lies in the eastern part of the Republic, was Leiden or Groningen, which were not
always easily accessible in case of an emergency.\textsuperscript{65} Parents had to travel by horse and carriage over long country roads that were often not navigable during the winter. Students from Amsterdam who enrolled at Leiden University had the luxury of regularly scheduled barge and coach services that travelled frequently between the two towns.\textsuperscript{66} That was not always a relief to parents in Amsterdam when it came to sending young sons to Leiden. In the long conflict between Amsterdam which hoped to found its own school for higher education, the illustrious school, and Leiden which wanted to maintain its monopoly-like status of higher education in the province of Holland, Amsterdam argued that its youths were too young and ‘\textit{onrijp}’ (unripe) and lacked good sense and judgment to be on their own in Leiden. Moreover, these young men risked exposure to the ‘danger’ and ‘perils’ of a student’s life, and were likely to engage with bad company.\textsuperscript{67}

\textit{Loco parentis}

If affluent parents had to send their adolescent sons away to a university in another town, they could hire a \textit{loco parentis} or governor to keep an eye on their children during their sojourn in another town or abroad. Parents with children studying in Leiden often chose one of three options: One, students would rent a room from a professor who would keep an eye on them. Two, students moved in with family members living in Leiden. Many times, young men lived together with uncles, cousins or brothers who had also studied at the same university. In 1633, for example, Johannes Merentz (Merens) travelled from London to Hoorn where he picked up his cousin Adriaan van Foreest, who was 18 years old, and continued on to Leiden where they both enrolled in the university as students of philosophy.\textsuperscript{68} Merens, 15 years old, was living in London at the time because his father was negotiating a deal for the Dutch East India Company. During his stay in London, he lived with a tutor who taught him English, Greek and Latin. Two days after Merens and Van Foreest enrolled at Leiden, their cousin Adriaen van Bredehoff and 20-year-old Cornelis Sonck joined them. Three of the young men were full cousins, the fourth, Sonck, was a relative by marriage. Nevertheless, they belonged to Hoorn’s ruling elite whose fathers served either as burgomaster, town council member or bailiff.\textsuperscript{69} Jan Merens’s father, Jan Maartsz. Merens, who later became burgomaster of Hoorn, advised Van Foreest’s father, Jan Foreest, who was a member of Hoorn’s town council, to hire the same pedagogue the Soncks used, which suggests that families often employed the same governor or pedagogue to look after their children.

The third option was for the family to move to the university town.\textsuperscript{70} In Leiden, for example, no student had a grander presence at the university than the Polish prince, Janis Radziwiłł. When the 18-year-old arrived in 1631, he was accompanied by an entourage of 15 household staff members who were also enrolled at the university. Radziwiłł brought his court master, a court preacher, a valet, and 12 noblemen and various servants. For onlookers, the sight of Radziwiłł and his associates travelling from one location to another must have been a spectacle. Although the prince and his group were an exceptional case, students in general were seldom alone and without the guidance of a \textit{loco parentis} or at least an older brother or cousin to keep an eye on them.\textsuperscript{71}
Armed young men

In the urban environment, adolescent boys and young unmarried men asserted their individuality by rebelling against parental authority or the loco parentis, and against urban authorities and or their representatives, the municipal guard responsible for maintaining and implementing law and order. A relatively new phenomenon in the Republic during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the growing number of armed young men in Dutch cities and towns that established a university within its walls. The new trend began after the revolt against Spain had started. Throughout Europe, new institutions of higher education sprang up while the attendance at the old universities founded in the Middle Ages waned. Newly established universities claimed to be just as good as the older counterparts and conformed completely to older rivals. Willem Frijhoff argues that the new universities of the early modern period imitated the same structure and ‘created senates, colleges, faculties, and were first in the field of copying or “re-inventing” all the symbolic marks of the full universities: beadles, maces, gowns, seals, privileges, rituals and auditoria’. One of the privileges that new Dutch universities duplicated from the medieval university was the right to bear arms. This special right originated in the Middle Ages when universities were predominantly attended by the nobility, who had been granted the privilege to bear arms. After the outbreak of the revolt, William of Orange rewarded Leiden in 1575 with the right to establish a university after the town had endured a long siege between 1573 and 1574. In the course of the next 75 years, new universities were founded in Franeker (1585), Groningen (1614), Utrecht (1636), and Harderwijk (1648). Consequently, the right to carry weapons, which was customary of the medieval university, was also bestowed on students in those university towns in the Dutch Republic. In practice, this meant that young men enrolled at universities were allowed to carry swords, rapiers, and pistols at all times. In the Dutch Republic these weapons were readily available, and metal workers in Utrecht produced some of the finest pistols that were in great demand throughout Europe.

Young men from the lower social echelons were excluded from this right. However, this did not imply that they were unarmed. Quite the contrary, if they needed to engage in a fight, they armed themselves with sticks, daggers, and knives similar to the modern-day pocketknife, which was used for eating and other practical purposes. In the course of the early modern period, an increasing number of students from other social strata also started to attend universities and gained the privilege to carry weapons. The armed student population became a growing source of concern for university officials and municipal authorities, especially the civil guard, which was responsible for exercising urban authority. When burghers rebelled against unfavorable municipal laws and ordinances like tax increases, it was the civil guard that had to implement them. Simultaneously, the guard was also responsible for mansing the city gates and walls during the evening, and maintaining law and order during the day and at night. Each year the guard, paraded through the city with a colorful procession of banners, flags, musicians banging drums and guardsman displaying their weapons. This had a dual function. Besides demonstrating their capacity as defenders of the city, they also used the annual procession to intimidate burghers. In the summer of 1620, there were so many guardsmen in the city of Amsterdam that it took then
several days to march over Dam Square in front of city hall. That summer, authorities of the New Church complained to the town council that the minister’s voice could not be heard over the cacophony of the procession.  

The guard in towns with universities was especially burdened with the growing number of armed students who drank too much in the evening and became rowdy late at night. It was usually during the late night hours or early morning hours when early modern towns had very little or no street lighting that the task of maintaining law and order became difficult. 

The most popular weapon for students in the early seventeenth century was the rapier. This sword, often portrayed in films like *The Three Musketeers*, was a modernized version of the medieval sword. The rapier had a long and narrow blade, sometimes more than one meter in length and 2.5 centimeters in width with a hilt to protect the hand. With a slight jab to the heart or one of the vital organs, the rapier was more deadly than the standard sword, and required more technical skill than physical strength of the user. For municipal authorities, swashbuckling students donning swords or rapiers became a real headache. This caused a continual conflict throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries between municipal authorities (town) and universities (gown). The senate of the University of Groningen banned students from carrying weapons in some areas of the university such as the ‘burse’ or resident halls for scholarship students. In 1637 they forbid students from carrying a ‘pistol, club or any other type of weapon’
when entering the ‘burse’. Moreover, students were not allowed to bring anyone along after dark because that often amounted to fighting in which ‘furniture was destroyed’.  

In the public domain, municipal authorities usually had a difficult time demanding tighter restrictions and the disarmament of rowdy students. If universities threatened to withdraw from towns, municipal authorities were easily reminded of how dependent local merchants and business were on the influx of students. Given the renting of rooms, purchases of books, clothing, and foodstuffs such as milk, butter, vegetables, meat, and wine, students were a significant force in circulating money through the local town economy and its environs.

In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, research has revealed that young men manifested aggression and violence towards each other primarily by fighting with swords and rapiers and by using weapons against unarmed civilians. One common crime was assaulting women such as ‘onder de rokken tasten’ that was considered a form of sexually intimidating women by grabbing them under their skirt. Armed, drunken students sometimes forced women to have sex with them. Occasionally, groups of students abused a young woman. In 1640, for example, a pregnant woman in Leiden made the mistake of being out late at night. She passed three students in an alley who first threatened and then sexually abused her.  

In the period 1620–1630, there are no reports of group rape; however, there were other ways in which young men intimidated women with their weapons. One act that displayed male bravado and scared women the most was known as kratsen, which involved dragging the sword along the cobblestone streets to produce a frightening screech.

This noise resembled the shrieking sound that young men in the countryside made during charivari festivities. In German towns during the early modern period, municipal authorities tried to reshape the tradition of juvenile noisemaking from the domain of the uncouth into the civilized. During the last weeks of December, for example, youths from the orphanages and poor houses were allowed to beg for their supper by going door to door and singing in public areas. The proceeds were collected for their dinner. Streetsinging resembled Katzenmusik, which aimed to produce as much noise as possible around the darkest time of the year to scare the evil spirits away. Eventually, this type of streetsinging and begging evolved into the modern caroling at Christmas, a holiday known for its generosity. In Leiden, students producing noise at night with their rapier was not considered a crime or a nuisance by the authorities. It was primarily a means for young men to frighten and instill fear in Leiden’s civilians at night, and in particular intimidate young women.

The option of keeping boys at home and sending them to a local illustrious school was not always a guarantee that parents could exercise parental authority and control the conduct of their teenage sons. In 1630, Melchior Fabius, the first pupil enrolled in Deventer’s newly opened illustrious school, was reprimanded twice by school authorities and finally expelled for fighting with a weapon. The same day that the board decided Fabius’s fate, the school requested Deventer’s municipal council to deny students the right to bear arms during the day. The municipal council took more drastic measures, however, and banned the carrying of weapons at all times.
University of Leiden, which attracted many sons of the nobility such as those of the House of Orange, the son of the Winter King, Frederick V, and many other Protestant German princes, contemplated taking the same measures but feared they would frighten off students if the right to carry a sword was abolished.  

According to the records of Leiden’s Academic Vierschaar, one popular form of violence committed by students during the period 1620-1640 was to provoke the civil guard. The watchmen were usually much older than the students, which added the element of generational struggle to the conflict. In 1627, Anselmus van Deurverden van Voort, a 20-year-old law student from Utrecht, assaulted the head of the civil guard in Leiden. Anselmus, who had just enrolled at the university two months earlier, was fined 100 guilders and lost all his university privileges. In the realm of male posturing, the municipal guard was the proper playmate of students because guardsmen were also armed with the same type of weapons. In Groningen, for example, some students aspired to becoming guardsmen. In September 1629, Cornelis Damman, the 20-year-old son of Zutphen’s minister Sebastiaan Damman, joined the guard just five months after he enrolled as a philosophy student in Groningen. However, Groningen’s university senate felt responsible for the safety of students, and later that year prohibited them from becoming guardsmen. The urge for students to join the guard remained great because the regulation had to be reinforced again in 1639, 1666, and 1667.
The guard was not always held in high esteem. One German spy commented in 1608 that despite the great reverence that Dutch citizens had for their civic militia, the fact of the matter was that guardsmen were a motley crew of Dutch merchants and artisans who were poor soldiers who could offer little resistance. The Dutch did sometimes doubt the military virtues of the guard and complained about the lack of discipline, inadequate armaments, the disorderly exercise with weapons, and the fact that a member could easily be bribed. If this was common knowledge, students, especially foreign ones, were tempted to provoke or engage guardsmen.

In order to keep the student population under control, Leiden's municipal council continuously expanded its corps of night watchmen throughout the seventeenth century. That was no easy feat for the town council, especially with students like 21-year-old Casparus von Waldo, the son of a Saxon nobleman who studied in Leiden together with a younger brother. In one skirmish in 1638, Von Waldo and his servants had gotten into a fight with Dutch students who were later joined by the municipal guard. However, by the day’s end what had started out as an innocent student brawl ended in tragedy when one of the municipal guardsmen, Franco van der Burg, was killed. Von Waldo and his servants were fined as accomplices in Van der Burg’s death, and eventually two German law students, 27-year-old Henricus van Aleveld from Holstein and 24-year-old Johannes Graro from Brandenburg, were charged with Van der Burg’s murder. This was not the first time Von Waldo was arrested for provoking the municipal guard. Three months earlier he and his servants had already been in a fight with them. That time nobody was harmed.

Student violence – a rite of passage

In the realm of courage and risk-taking, Von Waldo’s behavior can be interpreted foremost as a public display of courage. His public fracas with the civic guard also demonstrated his ability to take life-threatening risks, and enhanced his manliness. For him, the risk was probably experienced as a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. If we regard this type of risk-taking among adolescents from a modern psychology viewpoint, it would be considered ‘audience-controlled’ because it was important that Von Waldo’s willingness to challenge the municipal guard be witnessed by an audience, in this case his fellow students and peers, with whom he was a social equal, and secondly his servants of a lower social status. Although it is not known if Von Waldo was encouraged by peer pressure, his ability to take risks was probably rewarded by the respect of his fellow students and a personal feeling of masculinity.

For young men the mere fact that taking on the guard was risky business symbolized the rite of passage to manhood. It was a life-threatening situation. Guardsmen were often eager to repress any kind of student rowdiness, especially that taking place at night when the visibility from the guards’ posts and city gates was limited. According to the diary of Everardus Bronkhorst, professor of law at Leiden, the municipal guard could be cruel and barbaric in wielding their authority. While walking home after an evening of eating and merrymaking on a December evening in 1607, Bronkhorst and a group of noisy students encountered Leiden’s municipal guard. The evening that started as a joyous occasion turned into a nightmare for Bronkhorst. The guard started shooting and unloaded 21 shots into one of his students, who later died from his wounds.
Shattering glass

Smashing windows was the most common act of vandalism committed by youths, regardless of their socio-economic background. The town of Schiedam, for example, passed numerous municipal ordinances prohibiting boys and youths from playing ‘kolf’, a primitive type of golf, and other ball sports on city squares located adjacent to churches and town halls. Too many windowpanes and roof shingles had suffered from this juvenile amusement. In university towns, however, smashing windows was often done with malice and not as the result of accidental child’s play. According to the cases investigated by Leiden’s Academic Vierschaar, the most popular transgression that students committed was the smashing of windows. Most houses had windows that could be closed off from the outside with shutters. Students would walk along the outside of houses, open the shutters, and smash the windowpanes with pistols and clubs. In December 1623 Lucas van Hulten, a law student in Leiden, was incarcerated after he was caught breaking windows. After a few days on a meagre ration of bread and water in a cold winter jail housed in the cellar of the university’s academic building, the 22-year-old from a prominent Groningen family finally confessed his crime. Van Hulten had only been in Leiden for six months after transferring from the University of Groningen where he had already been enrolled as a law student for three years. In Groningen he probably lived at home under the parental authority of his mother and father who held esteemed positions in the church council and had good connections with the stadtholder. However, once in Leiden, the young man had free reign. After his confession, the Academic Vierschaar fined Van Hulten 40 guilders and had him incarcerated for a month and a half. When students were required to pay fines, half of the money usually went to the office of justice and the other half was donated to the alms for poor students. Van Hulten had to pay the repair of the damaged windows as well as the expenses the Academic Vierschaar had incurred. However, most students and young men were not alone when it came to throwing stones and breaking windows. This type of tomfoolery was a deed of male camaraderie that often occurred under the influence of too much alcohol and at night while Leiden’s civilized burghers slept. The Academic Vierschaar emphasized cases when offenders committed this crime in broad daylight, which suggests that crimes perpetrated during the night were more permissible than ones committed in the light of day.

Lucas van Hulten later finished his law studies at Leiden, became a prominent administrator and held municipal and national political offices such as council advisor to the city of Groningen and member of the Council of State. However, he was not alone on that December night in 1623. A fellow law student from Groningen, 23-year-old Otto Farmesom, accompanied Lucas van Hulten at night when he smashed the windows of someone’s house. Otto and Lucas had most likely been friends in Groningen. They enrolled at Leiden within five days of each other, and both were from families of magistrates. The details of the owner were not disclosed nor how many windows were broken. The young men were arrested separately. Farmesom was arrested first and confessed two days before Van Hulten’s arrest. In all likelihood, Farmesom confessed to the officer of justice that Van Hulten had broken the windows, that he had no knowledge of breaking windows and was just an innocent bystander. The Academic Vierschaar
believed Farmesom and only fined him 20 guilders (half for the alms of poor student relief and the other half for the judges of the court), and he was put under house arrest for a month at the home of his landlord. In another example in 1622, the 21-year-old law student Johannes Pauli from Vollenhoven in Gelderland-Overijssel was not found guilty of throwing stones, but was fined six guilders for being in the company of stone-throwers.

If students fled or were arrested and did not confess to their crimes, they risked banishment from the university and town and of having their names removed from the university registers of enrollment. That was the case for Jacob Velius, who was fined for smashing windows in 1624. His punishment included three years’ banishment from the university, town, and jurisdiction of Holland and West Friesland. Velius disagreed with the verdict and petitioned the Prince of Orange to be pardoned. Not surprisingly, his request was not honored. Six years earlier in 1618 when the conflict between Remonstrant and Counter-Remonstrant was raging through the Republic, Jacob's father, a Remonstrant sympathiser, was ousted from Hoorn's magistrate along with the rest of the council. Jacob could rely on little political clout from his family’s connection to get him out of trouble. His name was consequently removed from the university register.

Velius’s partner in crime, Johannes Beets, a 21-year-old law student who was also from Hoorn, found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time. At first, he was also held accountable for smashing windows but pleaded innocent and was given a lighter sentence, which included house arrest in the home of his landlord. Young men or students were sometimes literally and figuratively brothers in crime. In February 1626, during the celebration of Lent, Jacobus and Juriaan Sevelt were accompanied by a 22-year-old law student and Silesian aristocrat, Caspar von Nostitz. The boys not only disturbed the peace when they paraded around at night disguised in masquerade, they also smashed windows, destroyed property, and looted goods from the house of Isaac Doreslaer, who resided in a large house on the Rapenburg canal together with his English wife. At the time, Doreslaer was the deputy headmaster of the Latin School and a law student at the university. Since 1621 he and his wife had rented rooms to English students, which was probably the reason why the Sevelt brothers and Von Nostitz, who were compatriots, attacked the house. The following night, the boys returned to Doreslaer’s home and struck again. This time they shamefully abused his servant girl. Consequently, the Sevelt brothers lost all their student privileges, were banned from Holland and West Friesland for twelve years, and their names were deleted from the university registers. Within a year Doreslaer moved to England where he was appointed the first incumbent of the newly founded history lectureship in Cambridge and ultimately made his home in England, where he became affiliated with the Protestant movement and took a strong stand in religious debates. In 1649 Doreslaer, together with Cromwell supporters, played an important role in having the Stuart monarch, King Charles I, found guilty of treason and beheaded. Doreslaer was made an envoy and sent to The Hague. Not long after his arrival, Scottish royalists stabbed him to death while dining at an inn.

In a pan-European context, the smashing of windows was a popular act of violence committed by students. According to the Italian historian Ottavia Niccoli, young people throwing stones
at each other was a favorite pastime in the cities of Northern Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, despite being prohibited by municipal and ecclesiastical authorities. When stones were thrown at public figureheads and their property, the offence took on a different meaning with a significant connotation. For example, stones thrown at the house of a young girl shamed her, and the act was interpreted to mean she was a prostitute.116

Breaking the windows of a burgher’s home was more than just a cheap thrill. The deed symbolized public violence towards an individual who wielded authority and a person that young people intended to shame. If the community could witness the broken windows, the individual was publicly humiliated and disciplined for non-conforming conduct. However, when windows were smashed that faced the non-public domain such as alleyways and backyards, the act was considered an individual retribution.117

In Dutch university towns, the smashing of windows and misconduct in general were often directed towards men of authority and buildings where men of authority resided and congregated. In 1628, Georgius Borchers, a German student at the University of Franeker, misbehaved in front of the house of one of the university’s senators. Consequently, Borchers, who was also found guilty of breaking windows, was expelled and banned from the city.118 Students who resided with men of authority were also the brunt of student violence. In 1652 a band of students of various nationalities from the University of Groningen joined together to act out their hostility towards Karel Vijgh, who resided with the university’s professor of theology and rector, Samuel Maresius.119 Armed with rapiers, the students vowed in a special ceremony to defend the freedom of the students and the autonomy of the nations (student associations). The clash between the students was ignited when Vijgh, a student from Nijmegen, refused to join the nation of Gelderland. Vijgh made the fatal decision of informing the university senate about the coercing tactics of the nations, who in turn reprimanded the nation. The students took immediate action and unified against the academic authorities for interfering with the rituals of the nations. The students formed a procession and proceeded towards the professor’s house. En route they encountered the city guard whom they engaged in armed combat, and continued on to Maresius’s residence where they fired their guns into his house and smashed all the windows, including those of the neighboring houses. Eventually, the students were arrested and punished. Ultimately, the university took further measures by forbidding the students from conglomerating in large numbers and prohibiting them from carrying weapons in public.120

In the history of the University of Franeker (which existed from 1585 until 1812), the most fines for breaking windows were issued by its Academic Vierschaar in the period 1605-1650. This suggests that smashing windows was only a preferred act of violence for students in the early seventeenth century.121 One possible reason why students favored breaking windows over other acts of destruction to personal property could be that glass was an expensive building material. Moreover, the façades of Dutch buildings at the time had large windows in order to let in more natural light. During the seventeenth century, England and the Dutch Republic were the largest producers of glass in Europe. Despite its common use in the construction of homes and public buildings, it remained relatively costly during the Republic’s building boom of the 1610s.
and 1620s. Only in the late seventeenth century did the technique of glass production improve, which reduced manufacturing costs and allowed glassmakers to produce larger panes of glass. Consequently, once glass became cheaper, the breaking of windows by students gradually became less thrilling, and the number of cases declined drastically.

Breaking windows was not restricted to students or youths living in Dutch cities. As the British historian Paul Griffiths explains, ‘the crashing of breaking glass was a familiar accompaniment to youthful games and sports’ in early modern England as well. In this aspect, the crimes of students at Dutch universities deviated little from those in other European university towns. The University of Leiden and to a greater extent the University of Franeker were successful in recruiting foreign students, while at the same time they also experienced more deviant behavior from students. This is not surprising considering that Dutch cities were influenced by the customs and rituals brought by the great influx of students and immigrants from the Southern Netherlands and German territories during the early seventeenth century. According to a criticism penned by Haarlem’s poet, Gilles Quintyn, Holland’s youth had become poisoned by the waywardness of its immigrants from the south. Gerbrand Bredero’s well-known comedies Moortje and Spaanschen Brabander poked fun at the illicit norms of foreigners in the Republic. Whether realistic or fictional, the foreigner’s character was usually portrayed as being drunken, promiscuous, and immoral. It was true that the Republic was swarming with immigrants and influenced by their presence. In the early seventeenth century half of the students enrolled at the University of Leiden were foreigners, almost a quarter of them being German. During the Thirty Years’ War there were more German students enrolled at Leiden than there were students enrolled in German universities such as Rostock, Wittenberg, Frankfurt an der Oder, Altdorf, and Leipzig. Only the universities at Königsberg and Cologne had more German students enrolled than Leiden.

Nations

Another potential source of violence in university cities was the fraternities of students from the same country or region. Young men in these ‘nations’ as they were called formed close-knit fraternities while abroad. In the Republic, nations were sometimes created according to regions like the nations of Friesland, Holland, Groningen, Gelderland, and Zeeland. In most university towns, academic authorities prohibited the nations because they disturbed municipal law and order, but this did not restrain students from uniting in regional groups. In the Republic, the nations at established medieval universities such as Bologna and Padua, which wielded power in academic governing bodies, might have posed a real threat to the newly founded, ‘enlightened’ universities in the north. Municipal and national administrators could not risk the threat. In 1659 the States of Holland banned the nations completely. From then on, very little is known about these brotherhoods because they often operated clandestinely and kept few, if any, records. However, in 1660 when the nation of Gelderland-Overijssel in Leiden was dissolved, it left a
book of shields of its members. Since its founding in 1617, it had accumulated a total of 670 members. A list of rules from the same nation in Franeker exposes how the nations operated. Meetings started with a song of praise to the military honor and an ode to the university for the education that helped mould the character of young men. Nations honored universities for extending them the right to bear weapons. The use of weapons and challenges to duels among the members of the nation were forbidden. If caught, members were fined with penalties. For example, a challenge would cost four guilders, accepting a challenge two guilders, and if wounded, the fines were doubled. Most importantly, members were obliged to keep silent about the nation, its activities, and its rituals. For the foreign students, the nations fulfilled an important role because they encouraged affinity and obedience among young men from the same region or country. The members helped each other in times of need, especially during illness and misfortune. Lifelong friendships and loyalties blossomed among its members. Students also helped protect and defend each other’s honor, regardless of the issue at hand. The Dutch historian De Vrankrijker explains this was the essence – and ultimate danger – of the nations. They became nations of blood that did not tolerate any wrongdoing against any of its members by another nation or an individual. Because these organizations were forbidden by the university’s senate and were not recognized, they operated in secrecy and could not be controlled by the university. Occasionally, an incident would occur and come to the attention of the Academic Vierschaar. In June 1624, just beyond the city gate of Witte Poort, two students from the Dutch nation, 18-year-old Johannes Vossius from Dordrecht and Johannes Luce Bevervoorde, threw stones and threatened Cuno von Bodenhausen, a 22-year-old law student from Brunswick in Germany. Vossius and Bevervoorde also intimidated other students from the German nation with a gun. The two managed to rile up public agitation against the Germans from travellers in carriages and other boys on the street. Two days later, Bodenhausen sought revenge and awaited the main culprit, Johannes Vossius, early in the morning. He attacked him with a cane and by throwing stones. These were the cases that came to the attention of the Academic Vierschaar. Most minor incidents of violence probably went undetected.

Each nation had its own mysteries and secccies, especially concerning rites. In Leiden, freshmen were intensively harassed and teased. They were jeered at in the streets and pestered during lectures. Some students protected them from humiliation but required some kind of financial compensation in return. These mafia-like practices, which often robbed freshman of their entire scholarship, were harmless in comparison to the German initiation rites of the deposition or deposition cornuum as it is known in Latin. According to Marian Füssel, the academic deposition was a ritualized form of violence among young men that was common practice from the Middle Ages until the eighteenth century. It was an initiation that probably originated in the University of Paris where the arriving student would be termed beanus from the French bec jaune (yellow beak), or greenhorn in English.
In the initiation ceremony, fellow students would treat the greenhorn as a *pecus campi* (animal of the field), which entailed that the recruit be dressed in a hood with horns and wearing the teeth of a boar protruding from his mouth. During the ceremony, older students would lecture the greenhorn about his unworthiness. In the course of the initiation, the animal attributes of the costume would be pulled off with the help of over-sized tools. Then the student’s body would be abused. This symbolized the cleansing and beautification, and the transition from the world of the uncouth to the world of the civilized, and ultimately the conversion from beast to man. Füssel argues that the philosophy of this ritual was embedded in the Christian belief system based on the ideology of death and resurrection, as well as the significant rite of passage to manhood. The humiliation and physical abuse practiced in the deposition represented the death of the child and the end of childhood. At the end of the ritual, the student was symbolically resurrected and emerged as a man. In 1612 this initiation rite was also featured in Crispijn de Passe’s *Academia sive speculum vitae scolasticae* [The University, or Mirror of Student Life]. The book was intended as a guide for potential students about student life, and was primarily based on the University of Leiden where De Passe was living at the time he completed the manuscript. De Passe’s engraving of the deposition rite carried the description: ‘To cure the tyro of his uncouth behavior and make him well-mannered, offering due liberation to the eternal gods, He is tormented with light whippings and trimmed with axes, Henceforth to become, like a second Aeson, a new man.’ Additional comments on the illustration refer to the initiation as ‘barbaric’, but it was still regarded
as an important rite of passage from boyhood to manhood which was probably an aspect that simultaneously alarmed and was appreciated because it made men out of boys. In Leiden there is only one known deposition from 1640 in which, after the examination, the recruit is reported to have emerged as a mensch (human). The fact that the ritual or similar initiations are still practiced today illustrates the importance of rites of passage in society. In the Skull and Bones fraternity at Yale University, which is known for its secrecy and having members among the United States's rich and powerful, recruits are initiated by being made to wrestle in mud, being physically beaten, and then made to lie naked in a coffin where they reveal their most intimate sexual secrets. Afterwards, they are taken to a tomb where they view the skulls and the bones of various skeletons, and upon leaving the tomb they emerge ‘mature’. The academic ritual during the Middle Ages and early modern period signified a mark of distinction. For the initiates, it caused a substantial change in their social status. In comparison to the structural relationship with other social initiation rituals of the artisans and guilds, it had a durable symbolic purpose, which demarcated the boundaries of those who were accepted into the domain of privilege. Symbolically, the deposition was a ritual entrenched in a symphony of symbolisms and acts, whose meaning is reflected in the moralistic instruction of the initiated students. The means legitimizes the framework of acquired norms through physical force whose authority is represented through the symbolic violence of the corporation and its institutional norms.

Channelled violence

Having a pedagogue or loco parentis was not always a guarantee of good behavior in students. The Protestant, Silesian aristocrat Georg Schönböner (1579–1637) hired the talented young poet Andreas Gryphius to tutor his three sons. One of his last requests before dying in 1637 was that his sons study at the university in Leiden and that Gryphius accompany them. Schönböner, like many Protestant nobles in Silesia, probably hoped to send his sons to a university in a safe environment, far from the perils of the Thirty Years’ War raging in Silesia. Originally a Lutheran who later converted to Catholicism in 1629 for political reasons, he authored various volumes on law. He was appointed by the ultra-Catholic Emperor Ferdinand II to numerous administrative positions and later held the position of court-palatine. After his death in December 1637, Gryphius escorted his sons to Leiden where they enrolled in July 1638 as law students. Gryphius was only 22 years old at the time; the same age as Schönböner’s two eldest sons, Franciscus and Georgius Schönböner. The youngest son, Johannes Christophorus, was one year younger. Gryphius enjoyed the scholastic environment of Leiden. He was a passionate student and gave lectures as well, but at the same time he had his hands full with two of Schönböner’s sons.

In December 1640, Johannes, the youngest of the Schönböner brothers, was challenged to a duel by a Danish student named Dionysius Christianus. A fellow student from Silesia encouraged Johannes to take up the challenge. The records leave us no details about the disagreement, but apparently the young men and their friends felt that their honor was at stake. Schönböner
was persuaded by Jan Frederick Nimptsch to challenge Christianus to a duel at the Haarlemmerpoort, an open area outside Leiden’s city gate. The Dane in turn was supported by Caspar Hendriks Bonsdorft to accept the challenge. Schönborner and Nimptsch were members of the Silesian nation, and probably felt obliged to defend each other’s honor. The exact details of the duel are not known, as the diary of Andreas Gryphius was lost. Perhaps the religious quarrels of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) between the various factions of Calvinists and Lutherans formed the reason for the challenge, or maybe it was a simple verbal belittlement. A duel could be ignited by any number of reasons. One known challenge in Augsburg, Germany, involved one man calling a soldier a ‘dog’s cunt’ (*Hundsfott*), which was an obscene accusation of cowardice. One of the friends of the accused was so insulted that he quipped back, ‘He’s called you a dog’s cunt, are you going to take that from him? I’ll hit you in the face myself, if you call yourself a soldier, and put up with that.’ In comparison to other nations, the Silesians were quick to take up arms if their honor or reputation was at stake. In Leiden during the 1630s and 1640s, the students from Silesia were a formidable group. In 1640 there were approximately 40 students from Silesia enrolled at the university, of which seven were from the nobility. During the Thirty Years’ War more than three hundred young men from Silesia attended the University of Leiden. It was no coincidence that the Silesian nation often instigated dueling.

However, the outcome of this duel was fatal. Twenty-six-year-old Christianus died on the spot from a jab to his right side inflicted by the Silesian’s sword. After the duel, the Academic Vierschaar charged Schönborner with murder and ordered the death sentence. Johannes already knew what awaited him because he had ignored the rules of engagement of the duel by stabbing the Dane, instead of hitting him with the flat side of his sword. Johannes fled the city before the authorities could capture him. The university confiscated his personal possessions, revoked his university privileges, and eradicated his name from the university register. He was banned from the university, the city, and the jurisdiction of Holland and West Friesland. Perhaps he returned to Silesia for a couple of years and later enrolled at another university where his reputation did not precede him. In 1646 a young man with the same name enrolled at the University of Jena.

His fellow countrymen, Nimptsch and Bonsdorft, were found guilty of being accessories, and were banned from the university and city of Leiden for 15 years. Nimptsch’s role in the crime had little effect on his reputation and career later in life. He returned to Silesia where he inherited his title and fulfilled his duty as the Baron of Ölse.

The duel and death of Christianus had an immediate impact on students. In May 1641, the jurisdiction of Holland and West Friesland passed a law forbidding students and members of the university from dueling. Those found guilty were fined 100 guilders and risked forfeiting university privileges. If a duelist died, his corpse would be shamed by a burial at night and without services. Any display of family shields and banners was strictly forbidden, and if someone attended the burial, he risked a fine of 60 guilders. The law had an immediate effect. In the same month, even before swords were drawn, the Academic Vierschaar charged a German student, Baron Bernard von Khevenhüller, just for making a verbal dare. He confessed to his crime and was only fined 150 guilders instead of being banned from the university and city.
A few months after his younger brother’s duel, Georgius Schönborner was arrested for smashing windows and causing destruction to the home of Anna de Nerée, the widow of the Remonstrant minister, Richard Jean de Nerée. Georgius Schönborner was looking for his friend, Johannes Christophorus Strackwits, a fellow Silesian and student of law who enrolled at the university six weeks after the three Schönborner brothers. When the widow answered the door and told him that Strackwits was not there, Schönborner, who probably had had too much to drink, barged into the house and sat at the table stating that he would not leave until Strackwits returned. However, after Anna de Nerée pleaded with him and informed him that Strackwits would not be back until the next morning, Georgius became impatient with the woman and threatened her. The widow managed to force him out the door, but he went to the adjoining park where he heaved stones through the windows of her house and those of a neighbour. De Nerée had acquired a reputation as being a respectable pedagogue or loco parentis for students throughout Europe. In their large double house on Leiden’s prestigious Rapenburg canal, De Nerée and his wife supplemented their income by renting rooms to students for almost 40 years. Between 1611 and 1650 more than 150 students stayed with them, and many were the sons of nobility. One of the most famous students included the son of Sir Walter Raleigh, who stayed with them in 1613. However, the majority of the students were from the Baltic and German states, Silesia, Poland, Denmark, and Sweden. One of the few Dutch students who stayed with De Nerée was Carel van Nassau, the bastard son of Prince Maurits. However, Carel’s guardian found De Nerée to be too expensive and had him replaced. At any given time, the De Nerée family might have as many as seventeen students boarding with them. With foreign students living in the house, the aggression and violence between nations were familiar aspects to the De Nerées. As early as 1632, one of their Saxon students, Johannes Bruno de Pelnitz, was fatally wounded in a sword fight with a Dutch student. The damage to the house in February 1641 resulted in smashed windows. After pelting the windows with stones, Georgius Schönborner was arrested and confessed to his wrongdoings; the Academic Vierschaar banned him from the university and city for 12 years. Strackwits’s role in the incident is not clear. However, two months later, the Silesian was arrested early in the morning of April 21 for fistfighting and duelling with Johannes Georgius van Duijzen. Strackwits was injured on the right side of his chest and Van Duijzen in his right arm. Van Duijzen died from his injuries, and Strackwits was consequently charged with murder. In many cases, the reason for the duel is not clear but most likely involved an insult to one’s honor in combination with too much drinking. In most countries in early modern Europe, honor was a public property that was often wielded or protected by one’s peers. It was often a zero-sum game; it could easily be gained at the loss of another person’s honor. According to William Miller, ‘the shortest route to honor was thus to take someone else’s, and this meant that honorable people had to be ever-vigilant against affronts or challenges to their honor, because challenged they would be’. In other words, a verbal or written stain on one’s honor often had to be restored with the use of violence. Nobles were especially sensitive to a slur or symbolic gesture such as bowing, kissing, and doffing one’s hat, which acknowledged their status and power. According to the cases investigated in Leiden during the 1620s and 1630s, the many na-
tionalities of students at the University of Leiden suggest there were clear differences in notions of honor. German students, for example, were quick to resort to lethal violence when their reputation was at stake from an insult. Dutch students, on the other hand, sought more civilized means in repairing damage to their honor. This was also the case for the young Danish student and nobleman Dirck Quitzau, who in July 1631 brought Arent Dirkse van Cortenbosch, a wine merchant in Leiden, before the Academic Vierschaar for calling him a mof and zekel (Kraut and dick). Quitzau claimed that he suffered from the accusations, and the Academic Vierschaar fined Van Cortenbosch 400 guilders. In Dutch society in general, violent behavior to restore one's reputation had already become replaced by more civilized means. While family feuds were still popular in Mediterranean countries, especially when the virginity of one of the daughters was questionable, in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic these issues had become less prevalent, and Dutch citizens were more likely to use civil means to reconcile family disputes.

The major problem in Dutch university towns was that students had too much leisure time on their hands and not enough honest distraction. In this respect, students at Dutch universities were not any different from those in other European university towns. Throughout Europe, idleness and inactivity were considered moral and physical risks for the young. Both the cultural historian Peter Burke and the historian of recreation Alessandro Arcangeli argue that the elite slowly started to withdraw from violent forms of recreation involving intensity, physical strength, and military training. Early modern institutions in the Dutch Republic were instrumental in channeling this development. In December 1627 the University of Leiden had already taken measures to bring a halt to street violence primarily caused by members of nations who challenged Leiden’s municipal guard, and often resulted in the throwing of stones and the destruction of property. However, these measures had little or only a temporary effect on curbing student aggression. Two years later in September 1629, the jurisdiction of Holland and West Friesland banned nations altogether, arguing that the activities of nations consumed too much of the students’ time and money due to membership fees. Some students had become so impoverished by their financial obligations to the nations that they could not afford a proper meal. This ordinance limited their freedom in the public domain, which meant that their ritual practices such as the deposition, carrying weapons, dueling, and other forms of congregating took place in secrecy. Young men who went beyond the boundaries of the private domain and into the public eye came to the attention of municipal and academic judiciary courts. In 1648 the University of Leiden again issued an edict against the unruliness of the nations.

Dueling in the early modern period was a popular conduit for showing male courage and displaying risk-taking skills. By challenging another man to a duel, a gentleman defended his honor while at the same time displayed a refined civility and politeness. This form of fighting, which originated in Renaissance Italy, was a civilized replacement of the vulgarized Italian vendetta, in which men fought like animals. In the course of the sixteenth century, the duel became interwoven with the education of the elite young men across Europe. Numerous conduct books, usually based on Erasmus’s De Civilitate morum puerilium, incorporated civility and honor with
dueling. In the course of the seventeenth century, fencing at the University of Leiden became a popular recreation for many students. Various fencing schools sprouted up where students could learn the techniques of using a rapier and sword. In 1622 the acclaimed fencing master, Girard Thibault, who ran a fencing school in Amsterdam in the Nes where he trained well-known celebrities such as the poet Bredero, opened a fencing school in Leiden for students. When Thibault arrived in Leiden, the 40-year-old enrolled in the university and shortly thereafter took up residence in the home of Richard Jean de Nerée, where he lived with other students. He developed fencing techniques and a new method in which fencers maneuvered within the parameters of a mystical circle with areas of middle lines, cords, and home lines that mathematically stipulated the boundaries of opponents. The novel method became especially popular among the elite. At the time, Thibault’s methods were considered cutting edge. He taught his techniques to Georg Wilhelm and Joachim Sigismund, the Elector of Brandenburg, and regularly gave demonstrations in Leiden for the stadtholder, Prince Maurits, and his brother Prince Frederik Hendrik, who most likely applied his methods to train the Dutch army. While coaching students, Thibault made a clear distinction between thrusts to be used during sporting, known as en courtoisie, and those that were exclusively used in a duel, such as en rigueur. In this era, fencing was part of the physical education of elite young men, as was dancing. Fencing, dancing, and horseback riding helped young noblemen to develop stance and poise, which were desired traits for people with breeding. According to Herman Roodenburg’s research into courtoisie behavior and the molding of European identities in the early modern period, Dutch parents of good standing spared no expense when it came to correcting children with stooped posture, drooping heads or bandy legs. Elegance and an upright posture could be cultivated. In 1625, the Frenchmen Nicolas Vallet opened a dancing school in Amsterdam. He taught on weekdays and Sundays, and because he played the lute, he also led the ensemble which performed during his lessons. It is very likely that Vallet and Thibault were acquainted with each other and that they had many of the same young clientele in Amsterdam.

Fencing became an important aspect in the physical education of young men. Besides developing elegant posture, poise, and carriage, it was also an excellent channel for venting pent-up aggression. At the same time, conduct books emphasized the additional skills such as civility and politeness that were entrenched in the rules of the duel. Fencing trained young men in proper duelling.

However, young men sometimes wanted to apply their new skills in real-life situations and challenged other young men to a duel. According to the historian Jennifer Low, ‘the duel … gave men a way of asserting their elite status by linking essentially transgressive violence with more culturally accepted forms’. Besides being a ‘sanctioned’ form of elite violence, dueling was also embedded in a rich tradition of manhood and valor. By winning a duel, a young man earned and upheld his manhood and honor (including that of his family); the loser, however, lost face, was humiliated, and probably experienced a ‘lessened sense of his own manliness, and made him feel effeminate or infantilized’. By the eighteenth century the duel came to mean something else in regard to risk-taking. According to Ute Frevert, the point of the duel was no longer just
to overcome the opponent. ‘It was not the victory itself but the willingness to risk his life that constituted the honorableness of a duelist. Courage and bravery served not to punish the opponent but to protect oneself from disrespect.’ 

This development had already started in the early seventeenth century and was probably enforced by fencing schools that trained university students. Linda Pollock argues that in England during the 1620s, there was a growing trend among the elite to exercise restraint, and patience under provocation became more of a masculine virtue, instead of being a traditional feminine one. In the course of the seventeenth century, the use of violence in general among the elite became a smudge on one’s honor and a reason for shame. 

By the late eighteenth century, there was a drastic drop in interpersonal violence in European society in general. Robert Shoemaker attests this trend to changing beliefs of what masculinity and honor were. It allowed men to be respected without resorting to violence in order to defend their masculinity and honor.

The cases examined in Leiden’s Academic Vierschaar during the period 1620-1640 support a similar trend: there was a growing willingness to exercise restraint and patience, which were virtues that young men in the Dutch Republic started to exhibit; and all of the duels were instigated by non-Dutch students. There is a noticeable shift from lethal violence to non-lethal violence. Dutch students were more likely to negotiate and discuss differences instead of resorting to lethal violence that could be life-threatening. Pieter Spierenburg argues that the possible rationale for the decline in male-on-male fighting among the upper echelons of Dutch society during the seventeenth century is that urbanization in the Republic had a pacifying effect on Dutch patricians: they ‘cherished a relatively peaceful lifestyle from the Revolt on, hence before the consolidation of the European state system’. Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies postulate a more likely reason that took place over a longer period of time. The relatively young Republic of the seventeenth century was based on a culture of negotiation. Unlike some states in Europe in the early modern period, the Dutch Republic in the sixteenth century was peacefully unified by agreements that had been negotiated, sometimes by endless discussions of give and take, but always allowing room for discussion. By the mid-seventeenth century the culture of discussion had infiltrated Dutch life on multifaceted levels ranging from political decision-making processes to parent-child relations. In the environs of Dutch cities during the 1620s and 1630s, it became increasingly evident that honor and reputation upheld through peaceful means had become more valued traits, especially among students. Frijhoff and Spies regard the ‘discussion culture’ of the seventeenth century as a continuation of a shift from physical violence to verbal negotiation in the Low Countries that had already began in the late Middle Ages. Increased urbanization, urban patrician culture, and an economy based on commercial trade and specialized agriculture were key factors leading to this.

There are also convincing similarities with another society in early modern Europe that was strongly influenced by humanism, had a strong mercantile-based economy, and also had a republic as a form of state government. The Italian republics experienced a similar decline in violence already in the sixteenth century after the last real war ceased in 1559. Although they were quite urbanized in the Middle Ages, Italian society had gradually become less belligerent.
and demilitarized only after its wars had ended. This was a tendency that was reflected in the play behavior of local youths. Gregory Hanlon, a historian of European warfare in the Renaissance, opines that ‘warlike cultures apparently practice more combative sports than unwarlike cultures’. In the socially mobile society of the Dutch Republic where fortunes were acquired through trade contacts established throughout Europe, the ability to maintain one’s reputation and honor (without the use of violence) had become a precious commodity. Trade relations in the early modern period depended greatly on reputation, reliability, and accountability. This mentality trickled down through all facets of Dutch society, starting with the urban elite and their offspring who attended Dutch universities.

Christopher Corley, a historian of early modern childhood and youth, argues that ‘in the pre-industrial world without banks or credit bureaus, one’s reputation within a neighbourhood influenced access to personal credit and to a variety of professions and honorific positions’. Some youths might be inclined to result to violence in order to defend their honor because that was as valuable to them as a commodity, one that could be gained but also easily lost.

If young men were increasingly expected to refrain from taking life-threatening risks in order to uphold their honor, then how did they vicariously demonstrate their risk-taking abilities? Analogous to the development of restraint regarding lethal violence, there was a steady rise of organized recreational activities in the Dutch Republic which allowed students and young men to vent aggression, demonstrate courage, and display risk-taking. Besides the growing number of fencing schools, playing tennis became a popular pastime of young men. And these sports were not only restricted to the outdoors and favorable weather conditions. In Leiden, young men could display their physical strength and aggression year round in indoor tennis halls. Leiden had already established indoor and outdoor courts by the turn of the century. In 1616, just two years after the University of Groningen was founded, Cors Louriszoon borrowed money so he could build a tennis court for students registered at the university. At first, the courts were not visited as frequently as Louriszoon had hoped for, but thirty years later it was a flourishing business. In 1628 Johannes Coumans, a board member of the University of Franeker, petitioned city council members to build a tennis court so that it might attract more domestic and foreign students to register at the university. According to Coumans, it was a sport of status, one that was played by kings, princes, dukes, counts, and their children. Moreover, the university was in dire need of a facility where [young people] could do ‘eerlijcke lichamelijke Exercitia’ (honest physical exercise), instead of squandering their time on drinking and other foolishness.

Tennis was already a popular sport for young men, instead of solely being a recreational activity that universities used to distract students from participating in tomfoolery. The following illustration, featured in Crispijn de Passe’s Academia in 1612, encouraged the game because it kept the bodies and minds of young men engaged. The ball restored the strength of the weakened student body whose mind was overworked from ceaseless study. During the 1620s, when tennis was at the height of its popularity in university towns, other sports such as horseriding were making their entrance among the elite and eventually as a sport for young men in general. Because the Dutch Republic lacked a court culture where equestrian skill was an integral part of a noble-
man’s education, horseriding was of minor interest. However, when the exiled king, Frederick of Bohemia, and his wife Elisabeth settled at the court in The Hague in 1621, they brought their passion for horseriding and dressage with them. The court and the elite cavalry became the first to train and exercise in games such as tilt at the ring. These games required riders to develop special skills. Ring tournaments were held lasting a couple of days in 1624 and 1626 on The Hague’s prestigious lanes, Hofvijver or Voorhout, and the winter king’s wife, Queen Elisabeth, awarded the prizes.

The first dressage riding schools were established in the Republic after 1650. However, students who embarked on the grand tour often visited riding schools in France where they learned the skills of a good horseman.\textsuperscript{19}\textsuperscript{1} Daytime sports such as fencing, playing tennis, and dressage were effective means of channeling pent-up energy while at the same time helping to develop their physique. According to Norbert Elias, sports became an important conduit in the civilization process.\textsuperscript{19}\textsuperscript{2} In the Dutch Republic during the 1620s and 1630s, sports became a significant outlet for young men to manifest their masculinity by demonstrating skills of courage in public, developing prowess, and displaying risk-taking behavior. Moreover, for institutions such as universities and municipal authorities, sports was a constructive activity and a form of behavior that could be governed and monitored effectively.