

## Elbridge Gerry Responds to Maryland "Landholder" X, *American Herald*, 18 April 1788

This essay is the concluding salvo in a long, intertwined newspaper debate among several former Constitutional Convention delegates. In late November and December 1787, Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut began the debate in several numbers of his widely reprinted "Landholder" series. Ellsworth criticized both Elbridge Gerry's actions in the Convention and his objections to the Constitution. Writing anonymously, Gerry responded in the *Massachusetts Centinel* on 5 January 1788, and Maryland delegate Luther Martin defended Gerry in the *Maryland Journal* on 18 January. The *Massachusetts Centinel*, 5 April, reprinted the Maryland "Landholder," and on 18 April Gerry responded anonymously in the *American Herald*.

### TO THE PUBLIC.

An elegant writer, under the signature of "A LANDHOLDER," having, in a series of publications, with a modesty and delicacy *peculiar to himself*, undertaken to instruct members of legislatures, executives, and conventions, in their duty respecting the new constitution, is, in stating facts, *unfortunate*, in being repeatedly *detected in errors*; but his *perseverance therein* does honor "to his magnanimity," and reminds me of Doctor Sangerado (in Gil Bias) who being advised to *alter his practice*, as it was founded on false principles and destructive to his patients, firmly determined to pursue it, *because he had written a book in support of it*. Had our learned author *the modern Sangerado*, confined himself to *facts* and to *reasoning* on the Constitution, he might have continued to write without interruption *from its opposers*, 'till by *instructing others*, he had obtained that instruction which *he seems to need*, or a temporary relief from that incurable malady, the *cacoethes scribendi*; but his frequent misrepresentations having exposed him to suspicions that as a disciple of Mandeville, he is an advocate for vice, or, that to correct his curiosity, some humourist has palmed on him a spurious history of the proceedings of the federal convention, and exhibited his credulity as a subject of ridicule, it is proper to set him right in facts, which, in almost every instance, he has mis[s]tated.

In a late address to the honorable Luther Martin, Esq. the Landholder has asserted, that Mr. Gerry "uniformly opposed Mr. Martin's principles;" but this is a circumstance *wholly unknown* to Mr. Gerry, until he was informed of it by the *Connecticut Landholder*; indeed Mr. Gerry, from his first acquaintance with Mr. Martin, has "uniformly" had a friendship for him.

This writer has also asserted, "that the day Mr. Martin took his seat in convention, without requesting information, or to be let into the reasons of the adoption of what he might not approve, he opened against them in a speech which held during two days."—But the facts are, *that* Mr. Martin had been a considerable time in convention before he spoke; *that* when he entered into the debates, he appeared not to need "information," as he was fully possessed of the subject; and *that* his speech, if published, would do him great honor.

Another assertion of this famous writer, is, that Mr. Gerry in "a sarcastical reply, admired the strength of Mr. Martin's lungs, and his profound knowledge in the first principles of government;" that "this reply" "left him a prey to the most humiliating reflections; but these

did not teach him to bound his future speeches by the lines of moderation; for the very next day he exhibited, without a blush, another specimen of eternal volubility.”—This is so *remote* from *truth*, that no such reply was made by Mr. Gerry to Mr. Martin, or to any member of the convention; on the contrary, Mr. Martin, on the first day he spoke, about the time of adjournment, signified to the convention that the heat of the season and his indisposition prevented his proceeding, and the house adjourned without further debate, or a reply to Mr. Martin from any member whatever.

Again, the Landholder has asserted that Mr. Martin voted “an appeal should lay to the supreme judiciary of the United States for the correction of all errors both in *law* and *fact*,” and “agreed to the clause that declares *nine States to be sufficient to put the government in motion*,” and in a note says, “Mr. Gerry agreed with Mr. Martin on these questions.” Whether there is any truth in these assertions as they relate to Mr. Martin, he can best determine, but as they respect Mr. Gerry, *they reverse the facts*; for he not only voted against the first proposition (which is not stated by the Landholder, with the accuracy requisite for a *writer on government*) but contended for jury trials in civil cases, and declared his opinion, that a federal judiciary with the powers abovementioned, would be as oppressive and dangerous, as the establishment of a Star Chamber.—And as to the clause that “declares nine States to be sufficient to put die government in motion,” Mr. Gerry was so much opposed to it, as to vote against it, in the first instance, and afterwards to move for a reconsideration of it.

The Landholder having in a former publication asserted “that Mr. Gerry introduced a motion, respecting the redemption of old continental money,” and the publick having been informed by a paragraph in the Massachusetts Centinel, No. 32 of vol. 8, as well as by the honorable Mr. Martin, that neither Mr. Gerry, or any other member had introduced such a proposition, the Landholder now says, that “out of 126 days, Mr. Martin attended only 66,” and then enquires “Whether it is to be presumed, that Mr. Martin could have been minutely informed, of all that happened in convention, and *committees of convention*, during the sixty days of his absence?” and “Why is it that we do not see Mr. M’Henry’s verification of his assertion, who was of the *committee* for considering a provision for the debts of the Union?” But if these enquiries *were intended for subterfuges*, unfortunately for the Landholder, they will not avail him: for, had Mr. Martin not been present at the debates on this subject, the fact is, that Mr. Gerry was not on a committee with Mr. M’Henry, or with any other person, for considering a provision for the debts of the union, or any provision that related to the subject of old continental money; neither did he make any proposition, in convention, committee, or on any occasion, to any member of convention or other person, respecting the redemption of such money; and the assertions of the Landholder to the contrary, are altogether destitute of the shadow of truth.

The Landholder, addressing Mr. Martin, further says, “Your reply to my second charge against Mr. Gerry, may be soon dismissed: compare his letter to the legislature of his state, with your defence, and you will find, that you have put into his mouth, *objections* different from any thing it contains, so that if your representation be *true*, his must be *false*.” The *objections* referred to, are those mentioned by Mr. Martin, as being made by Mr. Gerry, against the supreme power of Congress over the militia. Mr. Gerry, in his letter to the legislature, states as an objection, “That

some of the powers of the federal legislature are ambiguous and *others*, (meaning the unlimited power of Congress, to keep up a standing army in time of peace, and their entire controul of the militia) are *indefinite* and *dangerous*." Against both these did Mr. Gerry warmly contend, and why his representations must be *false*, if Mr. Martin's are *true*, which *particularized* what Mr. Gerry's stated *generally*, can only be discovered by such a *profound* reasoner, as the *Connecticut Landholder*.

The vanity of this writer, in supposing that *his* charges would be the subject of constitutional investigation, can only be equalled by his *impertinence*, in interfering with the politics of other States, or by his *ignorance*, in supposing a state convention could take cognizance of such *matters as he calls charges*, and that Mr. Gerry required a *formal defence*, or the *assistance* of his *colleagues*, to defeat the unprovoked and libellous attacks of the *Landholder*, or of any other *unprincipled reviler*.

The Landholder says, "That Mr. Martin thought *the deputy attorney general of the United States, for the state of Maryland*, destined for a different character, and that inspired him with the hope, that he might derive from a desperate opposition, what he saw no prospect of gaining by a contrary conduct: but the Landholder ventures to predict, that though Mr. Martin was to double his efforts, he would fail in his object." By *this*, we may form some estimate of the *patriotism* of the Landholder, for, whilst he so readily resolves Mr. Martin's conduct into a *manœuvre for office*, he gives too much reason to suppose, that *he himself has no idea of any other motive in conducting politicks*. But how can the Landholder ascertain, that "Mr. Martin thought" the office mentioned "destined for a different character?" Was the Landholder *present at the distination?*" if so, it was natural for him, knowing there was a *combination* against Mr. Martin, (however remote this gentleman was from discovering it) to suppose his *accidental* opposition to the *complotters*, proceeded from a *discovery of the plot*.—Surely, the Landholder must have some reason for his conjecture respecting the motives of Mr. Martin's conduct, or be subject to the charge of publishing calumny, *knowing it to be such*. If then, this *great Statesman* was in a secret, which has been long impenetrable, he is now entitled to the honor of giving the public the most important information they have received, concerning, the *origin* of the new constitution: and having candidly informed them *who is not*, he ought to inform *who is to fill that office, and all others* of the new federal government.—It may then, in some measure be ascertained, what individuals have supported the constitution on *principles of patriotism*, and who under this *guise* have been only *squabbling for office*. Perhaps we shall find, that the *Landholder* is to have the *contract* for supplying the *standing army* under the new government, and that many others, who have recurred to *abuse* on this occasion, have *some such happy prospects*: indeed the Landholder puts it beyond doubt, *if we can believe him*, that it was determined in the *privy council* of the federal convention, that however Mr. Martin might advocate the new constitution, *he should not have the office mentioned*: for if this was not the case, how can the Landholder so roundly assert, that Mr. Martin could have "*no prospect by a contrary conduct* of gaining the office, and so remarkably sanguine is the Landholder, that the members of the privy council would be senators of the new Congress, in which case the elections, would undoubtedly be made according to the *conventional list of nominations*, as that he ventures to predict, tho' Mr. Martin was to *double his efforts*, he would *fail in his*

*object.*" Thus, whilst *this blazing star of federalism* is taking great pains to hold up Mr. Gerry and Mr. Mason, as having held private meetings, "to aggrandize Old Massachusetts, and the ancient Dominion," he has confessed enough to shew that *his private meetings were solely to aggrandize himself.*

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