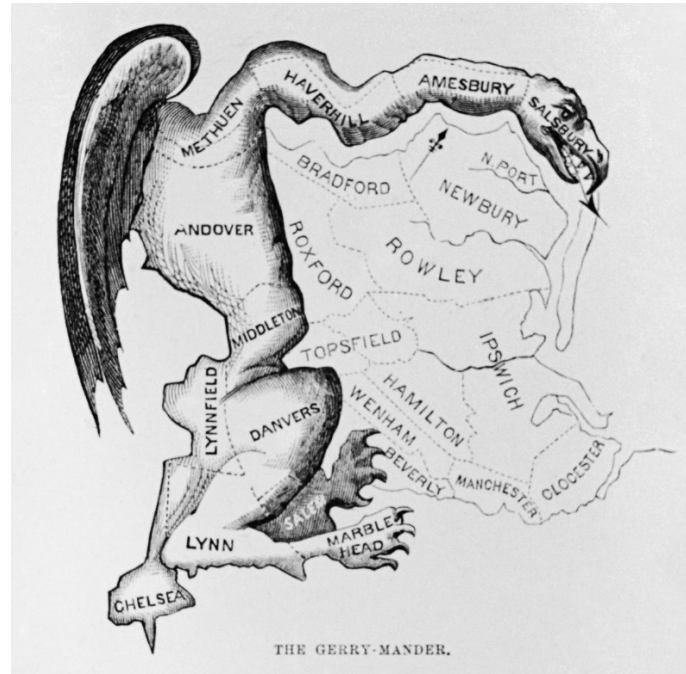# Inspector Rex's History Snippet #33

The Gerymander

THE GERRY-MANDER.

The term "gerrymander" stems from this Gilbert Stuart cartoon of a Massachusetts electoral district twisted beyond all reason. Stuart thought the shape of the district resembled a salamander, but his friend who showed him the original map called it a "Gerry-mander" after Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry, who approved rearranging district lines for political advantage.   Bettmann Archive/Getty Images

Gerrymandering Existed Before It Had a Name

The practice of manipulating voting districts to secure political power predates the fearsome Gerry-mander. In 18th-century England, political operatives created "rotten boroughs" with only a few eligible voters, making it easy for politicians to buy the residents' votes and gain seats in Parliament.

After English colonists founded the United States, gerrymandering "began almost immediately," says Thomas Hunter, a political science professor at the University of West Georgia. There's evidence that Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina drew districts to benefit some candidates over others in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Still, these gerrymandered districts were relatively "normal"-looking compared to what would come later.

For a fuller, interesting description of gerrymandering in the US, see
https://www.history.com/news/gerrymandering-origins-voting?cmpid=email-hist-inside-history-2021-0421-04212021&om_rid=23034b44613780ce571a8c047fe37ddced5047202e9d914e7f461e034f21806b&~campaign=hist-inside-history-2021-0421
Even more fully, as a timeline, see: https://www.history.com/news/voting-rights-timeline