

A Commissioner's Perspective on California's Redistricting

By Connie Galambos Malloy

When Californians voted to create the nation's first independent Citizens Redistricting Commission charged with drawing Assembly, Senate, Board of Equalization, and Congressional districts, it was with the hope of ending the partisan gerrymandering of the past. Speaking as one of the 14 Commissioners, I believe we have delivered on that promise—against all odds.

We had less than eight months to bring 14 strangers from diverse backgrounds together, hire staff and consultants, develop and conduct an extensive public outreach process, draw 177 individual district maps that incorporated complex legal and technical analysis, compose an extensive narrative report, and certify the maps with a multipartisan vote. And it was done—on time and under budget. The maps were produced through a transparent process: deliberations were conducted and decisions about boundaries made in public, streamed live with transcripts, and archived online. And although the process was called redistricting, it really should have been called “districting” because the Commission consciously chose not to tweak existing districts with their flawed political baggage, but to start from scratch using its constitutionally approved criteria.

As the youngest Commissioner and one of only two with small children, the public service commitment was grueling beyond my wildest imagination. I can remember one Tuesday morning when I woke up, packed my one-year-old son in the car, and drove five hours to a public hearing that lasted until midnight. The next day, I woke up and drove three hours, and did it all over again. And then again. While most Commissioners spent their daily stipend on sightseeing, I spent it on childcare at the hands of strangers!

A Peek Into Hidden California

The Commission heard testimony from an incred-

ibly diverse cross-section of the state that was important to how the maps were drawn. From Salinas to Culver City, from Hanford to San Bernardino, thousands of people attended 34 public hearings at which, over 2,700 individuals provided input. Tens of thousands of others put their thoughts in writing, maps, and even poetry.

As we traveled across the state, I was forced to confront the new socio-demographic reality of California. While Marysville claims significant Hmong and Latino populations in its Census, it was possible to spend 24 hours in the town's prominent public places with minimal contact with either group. At a Latino community center in San Jose with deep roots in the Cesar Chavez legacy, aggressive Tea Party organizing chilled the air, cleared the room, and compelled us to call in extra security. In the Coachella Valley, speaker after speaker insisted the area was an exclusive resort community, but even a minor detour off the beaten path revealed migrant farm worker encampments. In the Antelope Valley, I remember the lone African American person at the Commission's Input Hearing, who later explained to me that we had chosen a location on the side of the railroad tracks that many in his social circle knew to avoid.

Playing it Strictly by the Rules

When it came to drawing the districts, the Commission followed the criteria set forth in the Voters First Act—in ranked order: (1) We complied with the U.S. Constitution—one person, one vote; (2)

The districts were designed to comply with the Voting Rights Act, ensuring an equal opportunity for minorities to elect a candidate of their choice; (3) We made the districts geographically contiguous; (4) Wherever possible, we kept cities, counties, neighborhoods, and communities of interest whole; (5) Our districts are compact and do not bypass nearby communities for more distant ones; (6) Where practical, without violating other criteria, we nested or blended so that Senate districts were comprised of two whole Assembly districts and Board of Equalization districts comprised of 10 Senate districts; (7) The Commission never considered incumbents, political candidates, or political parties when drawing districts.

In fact, current analysis shows scores of candidates drawn out of their districts or more than one incumbent within a district. The 2012 elections—with the combined impact of redistricting and the new top two primary system—may bring significant changes across the state and in the long run, create opportunities for new leadership.

The new political maps are superior to their predecessors from a standpoint of both process and outcome, which is “fair and effective” political representation. The public has never had a seat at the redistricting table before, or a chance to weigh in on the process at so many stages—before and after the draft visualizations. Naturally, public expectations have been high and there is some disappointment that individual requests were not realized—an impossibility in a geographically and demographically diverse state like California. As an Oaklander, I had to constantly challenge myself to make decisions as a “Californian” entrusted with balancing the interests of the entire state—not just my part of the universe. The process involved intense negotiations across party lines and the result, understandably, is a compromise. The new map is not aggressive on behalf

of any one constituent group, nor is it one that any of us personally would have created, but it represents an equitable balance to voters across the state.

Court Finds Maps in Compliance

In keeping with past redistricting tradition, there has been litigation. Two groups filed suit against the Commission’s maps. But on October 26, the California Supreme Court unanimously dismissed the suits affirming that the Commission had followed the Constitution, the Voting Rights Act, and the Voters First Act. After failing in state court, one of the same groups filed litigation in U.S. Federal Court over the state Senate maps. Signatures for a ballot measure to overturn the state Senate maps were also submitted to the state and the verification process is currently underway. It is unclear whether it will qualify for the November 2012 ballot.

As I continue to travel around the state, one thing is clear, the public has fully embraced this new redistricting process and now citizens are demanding the same level of transparency and public input at the county and city levels. I can only hope that California’s precedent-setting, citizen-led experiment in redistricting sets the standard for the nation in the decade ahead. ■

Photo:

Gabino Aguirre (right) of the California Citizens Redistricting Commission talks about the map's first draft at a Capitol news conference on June 10.

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Associated Press



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California Redistricting Preserves Black Voice in State Politics

By Marqueece Harris-Dawson

For years, political pundits and sectors of the media have reported with barely contained glee on the supposed decline of California's black population. There has been much speculation about how the demographic changes will lead to a decline in black political leadership. Proponents of this viewpoint saw this year's redistricting process as a golden opportunity to spin the narrative into permanent changes in political boundaries that would lead to the disenfranchisement of black voters. If these black districts were eliminated, it would be nearly impossible to get them back.

The blows came from all directions. The media led with sensational predictions about African Americans ending up losers in the process. The *Los Angeles Times* quoted a member of the Redistricting Commission saying, "It's very hard for people to accept changing demographics." The message between the lines being, "Their time is over."

Early in the process, a group of African Americans from Democratic Representative Maxine Waters' district testified before the Commission. They were promptly accused of being Waters' "political operatives" by one Republican commission member who, without offering any evidence to support this claim, urged the other commissioners to disregard their testimony. District residents of all backgrounds, races, and ethnicities had testified that day, but this was the only group singled out for discrimination.

Hawthorne-by-the Beach

Other shenanigans included a declaration by the Mayor of Hawthorne that his landlocked city should be grouped with its more affluent coastal neighbors to the West. Such a grouping would have disturbed the delicate balance of the black population in Southeast Los Angeles County and dealt a drastic blow to black representation. The move was a direct attack on Rep. Waters' district and not surprisingly, conservative members of the Commission ran with the bizarre "Hawthorne is a beach city" mantra.

Fortunately, a coalition of black leaders and community organizations came together early in the process to form the African American Redistricting Collaborative (AARC), which was able to anticipate the attacks, mobi-

lize communities, and engage attorneys to provide a legal basis for our position.

Ultimately, all of the current black districts in California were preserved. Additionally, new State Senate and Assembly districts were formed where an African American candidate can run competitively. The Redistricting Commission listened to our collective voices and approved a final map that preserves black political representation.

Redistricting by Committee Risky For Blacks

As we celebrate these accomplishments, it is important to step back and reflect on what this victory was all about. Blacks typically side with issues of equality and have reliably provided the bedrock of progressive coalitions. Redistricting is an inherently progressive activity—if done honestly. The concept revolves around shifting power to reflect population concentrations.

We must not forget, however, that a majority of California voters supported Props 11 and 20, which authorized the creation of the Commission and tasked it—instead of the legislature—with redrawing congressional boundaries because of concerns over political corruption and influence. This has not been the experience, historically, from the perspective of African Americans, who have trusted their elected officials to do right by them. So, although we won this round, redistricting via a randomly appointed citizen's commission—which, by default draws an intellectual crowd with technology access and resources—is a risky game at best for the increasingly dispersed black community. ■

Voting Rights are Local Rights

By Gil Cedillo

To social justice advocates, redistricting is a familiar lever for causing political change. While it sparks the imagination of a certain breed of political junky, in most people it generates something akin to math anxiety.

The rewards of engaging in the redistricting process can be plainly seen in what was achieved in California this year with the first truly open and public Commission drawing the state's legislative and congressional lines. Social justice groups were able to shape the Commission, drive the discussion, and create outcomes that will have ramifications for the next decade. Their success can be measured in the number of majority minority districts created.

According to analysis by Paul Mitchell of Redistricting Partners, the old map provided for 19 majority minority Latino districts, whereas the new map provides for 29, and one that is over 50 percent Asian. In addition, the Commission preserved several districts that, while not majority minority black, are likely to continue electing representatives from that community. "These lines provide a 20-year correction—finally reflecting the true electoral strength of minority communities," says Mitchell.

The primary tool used in statewide redistricting is the Federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1964, which is concerned with matters, such as ballot languages, number and placement of polling locations, poll taxes, literacy tests, and discriminatory redistricting—to ensure that elections are conducted in a way that does not disenfranchise protected minorities. The courts have deemed illegal any electoral structures that deny minority groups their electoral choice, including the practice of creating districts by dividing up ethnic groups to preserve the status quo.

The VRA has resulted in greater numbers of minorities serving in the legislature and congress. Even where members of a protected class are not elected, it still provides for a stronger voice in their

representation. Without access to congress and the state legislature we would not have achieved many of the civil rights gains of the past 50 years.

California Voting Rights Act Provides Strong Tools

The California Voting Rights Act (CVRA) was enacted in 2002 and focuses exclusively on the use of at-large election systems. As defined in the law, at-large systems include any election method other than the system where area voters select their representative in single member districts. If you find yourself voting in elections for more than one candidate, or voting for water board, school board, and council candidates in city-wide elections, you are in an at-large system, although most Californians probably are unaware of the system being used.

The at-large system is not an issue if there is no evidence that a sizeable ethnic group is losing their rights to representation. In the city of Santa Monica, for example, white voters are not voting significantly different from non-whites, so an at-large community college board election is unlikely to be subject to the CVRA. However, the system can pose a problem for the 131 Latino-majority, or the dozens of African American- or Asian-majority cities. A recent analysis of census data and elected boards by GrassrootsLab, a Sacramento consulting firm, shows that over a dozen of the state's majority-Latino cities have all-white boards and 40 more have white-majority boards elected in at-large systems. Most, if not all of these cities will be forced to change to the single member district system to comply with the CVRA.

Moreover, a city, school board or other local elected board does not have to have a majority



minority population to face scrutiny. Recent lawsuits show that local governments with ethnic population concentrations as low as 25 percent could face serious scrutiny under CVRA if they show little history of electing members of that population. There are approximately 1,000 such cities, school boards and other locally elected boards.

To be successful, a CVRA claim has to meet three conditions: (i) an at-large election system, (ii) a history of racially polarized voting that can be shown using statistical methods, and (iii) the ability to remedy the situation by creating districts where the impacted group could influence the outcome of the elections.

The new “influence” standard is particularly important. Under federal law it requires the ability to create districts with a 50 percent concentration, but under state law, the population concentration can be as low as 25 percent, provided that it gives the ethnic group sufficient votes to “influence” the election of their representative.

Reason to Celebrate but Not Rest on Laurels

It took just one year for the social justice community to create 10 new majority minority legislative and congressional districts in 2011! But it would be a mistake for the leadership to rest on its laurels. In

cities like San Jose and Stockton, counties like Los Angeles and San Diego, there are new opportunities to create advancements within the traditional redistricting; as also in hundreds of local governments that may have to convert under CVRA.

The social justice community has a major role to play in pushing their local governments to study the law and if applicable, to create new districts where disaffected minority populations can be in the majority, or influence voting outcomes. Many cities, school boards, water boards, and special districts are making changes voluntarily to avoid public criticism but others are requiring lawsuits. The county of San Mateo, the city of Compton, and the community colleges of Compton and Cerritos are among those being sued by the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights. But that may prove to be just the tip of the iceberg as more groups work to enforce the law.

Ten years from now, the benefits of generating local electoral opportunities for Asians, Latinos, and African Americans under the CVRA should swamp the 10 new legislative and congressional seats created by the Citizen’s Commission. In fact, the 10 new seats will have limited meaning without a pipeline of qualified, experienced, and empowered locally elected officials that can rise to those offices. ■

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Photo:
President Lyndon B. Johnson meets with Martin Luther King, Jr. at signing of Voting Rights Act, August 6, 1965.

Source: United States Federal Government

Senator Gil Cedillo is author of the California Dream Act and is known for his commitment to passing legislation to allow undocumented immigrants to obtain driver’s licenses. He represents the 46th California State Assembly District.

Redistricting 2011: Latinos Want Stronger Voice Based on Numbers

By Arturo Vargas

Latinos throughout the nation eagerly anticipated the 2011 redistricting cycle. Aware that their numbers had increased dramatically during the last decade, they hoped that redistricting would provide a crucial opportunity to ensure fairer representation for them and give them a stronger voice in the nation's democracy.



The release of 2010 Census data not only confirmed the increase in Latino population since 2000, it also revealed that Latinos had fueled overall population growth in many states. Gains in Congressional seats owing to reapportionment could be directly linked to gains in the Latino population. Even among states that did not gain seats, the Latino explosion either helped retain existing seats or prevented greater losses. (See Table 1).

Voter Rights Act Invoked to Ensure Fairness

The Latino community approached the 2011 redistricting fully aware that they may need to enforce compliance with one of the nation's most powerful protections against discriminatory electoral practices, i.e. the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA), enacted by Congress during the civil rights era. Initially, the Act primarily protected African Americans

from discrimination in voting, forbidding such practices as literacy requirements and poll taxes. Section 2 of the VRA, however, protects underrepresented populations from discriminatory voting and election practices nationwide. And Section 5 mandates that states with a history of discrimination against underrepresented groups submit their redistricting plans to either the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) or a federal district court for "preclearance." The DOJ or the courts can block the redistricting if it diminishes electoral opportunities for underrepresented voters.

Busbee v. Smith, 549 F. Supp. 494 (1982), which is about the 1981 congressional redistricting plan adopted by Georgia's state legislature and the DOJ's refusal to grant it preclearance is a vivid example of how the VRA has protected African American voters during redistricting. The court upheld the DOJ's action, finding that the legislature's plan to split cohesive African American communities into separate districts diluted their voting power, while keeping white communities united throughout the state. The case served to highlight Georgia's history of discrimination against African Americans in previous redistricting efforts and the rampant racism within the House Committee responsible for it. Committee Chair, Representative Joe Mack Wilson, decried the DOJ's scrutiny with the remark: "[The] Justice Department is trying to make us draw nigger districts, and I don't want to draw nigger districts."

Using the VRA to Protect "Language" Minorities

In 1975, Congress amended the VRA to extend its

protections to “language minorities”—essentially Latinos, Native Americans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders. In 2003, advocates had to invoke the VRA to protect Latino voters in Texas when Republicans, having gained control of the legislature, decided to conduct a mid-decade redistricting for partisan advantage. In *LULAC v. Perry*, 549 U.S. 399, 435 (2006), the U.S. Supreme Court found that the Texas legislature’s plan divided the heavily Latino areas of Webb County and Laredo city to protect an incumbent and required the district lines to be redrawn to comply with the VRA.

The dynamics of redistricting vary depending upon the formal requirements of each state’s redistricting processes, its political environment, and the composition of its population. As the 2011 redistricting proceeds, line drawers in each state are charting very different courses for the Latino community, which has made VRA compliance a top priority in its 2011 redistricting advocacy.

Following is a state-by-state look at the 2011 redistricting—through a Latino lens:

Texas

Latinos hoped that the state’s gain of four new congressional districts (the largest increase in the nation) would lead to greater opportunities for representation. But their optimism was tempered by their historic experience of redistricting in Texas, where persistent discrimination against Latinos has resulted in several successful VRA lawsuits.

Last July, rather than submit its redistricting plan to the DOJ for preclearance, the Texas legislature decided to file it in federal court. The DOJ countered with its own filing in the court, claiming that the legislature’s congressional and House redistricting plans fail to comply with the VRA. Now Latino civil rights advocates have brought a lawsuit, which argues that the legislature should have created additional Latino majority congressional districts in the Dallas-

2010 Congressional Apportionment and Latino Population Growth for Selected States

State	Congressional Seat Gain/Loss	Total Population		Latino Population Increase 2000-2010	Latino Share of Population Growth 2000-2010
		2000	2010		
Texas	+4	20,851,820	25,145,561	2,791,255	65.0%
Florida	+2	15,982,378	18,801,310	1,541,091	54.7%
Arizona	+1	5,130,632	6,392,017	599,532	47.5%
Nevada	+1	1,998,257	2,700,551	322,531	45.9%
Georgia	+1	8,186,453	9,687,653	418,462	27.9%
Washington	+1	5,894,121	6,724,540	314,281	37.8%
Utah	+1	2,233,169	2,763,885	156,781	29.5%
South Carolina	+1	4,012,012	4,625,364	140,606	22.9%
California	0	33,871,648	37,253,956	3,047,163	90.1%
Colorado	0	4,301,261	5,029,196	303,086	41.6%
New Mexico	0	1,819,046	2,059,179	188,017	78.3%
Illinois	-1	12,419,293	12,830,632	497,316	120.9%*
New Jersey	-1	8,414,350	8,791,894	437,953	116.0%*
New York	-2	18,976,457	19,378,102	549,339	136.8%*

*In these states, Latino population growth exceeded total population growth, and there was a net decline in the non-Latino population. Essentially, Latinos helped ensure a total population increase during the decade.

Fort Worth area, Harris County, and the southern and western parts of the state. The lawsuit also challenges redistricting plans for the Texas House of Representatives on the grounds that it dilutes Latino voting strength. The Texas redistricting preclearance lawsuit will continue in the U.S. District Court in Washington, DC, where a three-judge panel will make the final decision on VRA compliance.

Nevada

In Nevada, where Latino growth helped the state gain an additional Congressional seat, fair representation for the Latino community is at the core of the redistricting impasse between Republican Governor Brian Sandoval and the Democratic legislature. Sandoval vetoed plans submitted by the legislature twice, on the grounds that they do not create a congressional district with a large enough Latino population to enable them to elect the candidate of their choice. But the Democratic legislature and some Latino advocates believe that the plans are more advantageous to Latinos because they will be able to choose representatives more effectively if they can influence the outcome of the election within a wider spread of Congressional districts. Other Latino advocates, however, believe that the Governor's congressional plan does a better job of uniting Latino voters.

As yet, no final redistricting plans are in place in Nevada but several lawsuits have been filed and the new districts will likely be determined by the courts.

Arizona

Latinos are at the center of a tug-of-war between Republicans and Democrats in Arizona, where Latino population growth helped the state gain an additional congressional district. The state's redistricting plan will undergo special scrutiny because it is subject to the requirements of Section 5 of the VRA. Although redistricting has just begun, there is already an intense public debate about the value of VRA compliance. Under Arizona state law, redistricting plans must promote competitive elections where both Republicans and Democrats have an equal opportunity to be elected in a single district. However, there is significant tension between creating competitive districts and complying with the VRA, which

requires districts to unify communities that share similar demographic characteristics and voting patterns. Since Arizona Latinos are more likely to register as Democrats (51 percent) than as Republicans (17 percent), districts that unite Latinos with shared voting patterns may not be competitive in general elections, although many districts have very competitive party primary races.

Some Arizona groups are critical of the VRA and are advocating for it to be a lower priority than partisan competitiveness in the state's redistricting. Late last August, Arizona Attorney General Tom Horne filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Section 5 of the VRA. In light of Arizona's recent history of enacting anti-Latino and anti-immigrant legislation, Latinos in the state will need to actively fight back to protect Latino voting rights during the redistricting process.

Florida

Following a gain of two congressional districts in the state owing to Latino population growth, Latino civil rights groups are advocating for a Central Florida congressional district where much of the state's population increase occurred. As it proceeds with redistricting, the Florida legislature must apply new redistricting criteria that voters added to the state Constitution through ballot measures in the November 2010 elections. The controversial new criteria prohibit the legislature from drawing districts with the intent to favor or disfavor a political party or incumbent. Although the purpose of this prohibition is to prevent unfair partisan gerrymandering and incumbent protection, some civil rights advocates are concerned that it might impair the legislature's ability to draw VRA-compliant districts.

California

Latinos were responsible for 90 percent of the state's population growth in the last decade, which prevented the state from losing a congressional seat. For the first time, a Citizens Redistricting Commission drew the lines for California's congressional and state districts. Latinos were actively engaged in community mobilization and advocacy efforts to ensure that the divisions would provide greater Latino elec-



toral opportunities. Though the Commission did draw two new strongly Latino congressional districts in the Northeast San Fernando Valley and the San Diego/Imperial County areas, advocates believe that the Commission's State Senate map will severely diminish fair opportunities for Latino representation and that an additional strong Latino congressional district should have been drawn in the state's Central Valley. Latino voting rights advocates are reviewing the map to determine whether a VRA suit is warranted.

New York

The state lost two congressional districts through reapportionment and must eliminate them during redistricting. However, Latino population growth helped prevent the state from incurring a greater loss. During the last decade, the Latino population grew by 19 percent, while the non-Latino population actually declined by 1 percent. Advocates are working to ensure that the Latino voice remains strong even with the elimination of two districts, particularly in New York City.

Latinos and the Future of American Democracy

Latinos throughout the nation have recognized the critical importance of the 2011 redistricting cycle and actively worked to shape the drawing process. Groups, such as the National Association of Latino

Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), and LatinoJustice PRLDEF have conducted extensive efforts to mobilize the community to testify at redistricting hearings. Community members have gone before state legislatures and commissions to talk about their neighborhood concerns and the common issues that unite them. Latino voting rights organizations have submitted maps and initiated legal challenges.

Ultimately, decisions yet to be made by state legislatures, redistricting commissions, or courts will determine whether Latinos fully gain opportunities for increased representation in the 2011 redistricting cycle. Latinos are America's second largest population group, and the nation's prosperity and well-being depend on the strength of this community. It is therefore critical that Latinos choose elected representatives who can fashion policy solutions that address their community's concerns.

Compliance with the VRA during redistricting will help the nation leave behind its legacy of discrimination against Latinos, ensure an accountable democracy, and provide all Americans with leadership that will help the nation surmount its social and economic challenges. If the lines drawn during the 2011 redistricting provide opportunities for fair Latino representation, they will also become a roadmap for a stronger and more vibrant American democracy. ■

Photo:

People hold signs and show support for a redistricting proposal. Hundreds of speakers gave emotional testimony on creating a Latino majority district.

©2011 Irfan Khan/
Los Angeles Times

Arturo Vargas serves as executive director of the NALEO Educational Fund, an affiliated national nonprofit organization that strengthens American democracy by promoting the full participation of Latinos in civic life.

GOP's Redistricting Plans Impede Latino Representation in Texas

By Khalil Abdullah

The surge in Latino population has made it possible for Texas, the state with the second largest Congressional block, to add four new seats to its current total of 32. Florida, too, gets two additional seats for the same reason. But it will not be easy for Latinos to turn this into political clout.

According to Luis Figueroa, legislative staff attorney for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), bad case law requires ethnic communities to demonstrate a critical mass of voting age population—a high hurdle to cross in Texas where a large percentage of the Latino community is under the age of 18. “We also have a significant non-citizen population,” Figueroa points out.

“We don't talk about that enough in the media,” says Greg Wyeth, senior redistricting initiative consultant at Outreach Strategists. The public discourse on low Latino voter turnout usually turns into a blame game rather than a dispassionate analysis of the numbers.

In Nueces County, which has three Latino-dominant House districts, the legislature's plan eliminated the smallest one, packing those voters into other districts. Such voter dilution tactics can violate Sections II and V of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), says Figueroa. States must seek permission from the Department of Justice (DOJ) before changing voting procedures or district maps—especially if the changes make voting conditions worse for groups covered by the statute. The DOJ has ruled that Texas can move forward with its senate and state board of education maps, but has not granted permission to move on the congressional map. Texas is challenging the ruling, setting the stage for yet another acrimonious chapter in the state's redistricting history.

Caroll Robinson, a law professor at Texas Southern University, says that the goal of the Texas Anglo-Republican dominated political system is to hold the status quo, which is consistent with the state's Con-

federate-era history of obstructing minority rights. Even the DOJ-approved plans for the state senate and board of education, upon close examination, are weighted toward that objective. But, Robinson contends, minorities need to get out of their silos and find means to cooperate to achieve parity in political empowerment.

His vision is shared by Rogene G. Calvert, director of the Texas Asian American Redistricting Initiative. Although the Asian American community is still small, under the VRA, they are a “community of interest,” with shared languages and cultural affinities. And they have achieved electoral success at the city council level in Houston by working with other ethnic communities. “Coalition politics is going to be the wave of the future,” Calvert says, “where we minorities work together more, so that we can elect candidates of our choice.”

What makes coalition politics critical is that housing patterns are changing. As communities become more integrated and ethnic populations more diffuse, it will be difficult to achieve the 50 percent concentration required to create a district that reflects a group's numerical dominance. But the goal, Robinson points out, is to provide communities with the opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice, not necessarily a candidate from their own ethnic group.

“Demographics [are] on our side,” says Robinson. “Somewhere between now and mid-decade, if we do the things we need to do in terms of voter participation, voter education, voter registration, we have the ability to win some of these districts outright—and redistricting will take care of itself.” ■

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Geography of Race

Economics of Equity

On Occupy



Photos: (Left) President Lyndon B. Johnson meets with Martin Luther King, Jr. at signing of 1965 Voting Rights Act. (Center) National Day of Action for Public Transit Funding. ©2011 Joe Feria-Galicia. (Right) Occupy San Francisco protest. ©2011 David Bacon

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