

Public self-comment by Russell Yee (applicant #11312)

In my interview I was asked about the change from my college major (Nutrition & Food Science) to my graduate school and career focus (Theology).

I'd like to add that growing up I internalized a belief that being an Asian American male meant I should, stereotypically, be good at math and science. And while I could do that work, I came to realize my passion and calling was actually in the world of ideas, history, and writing.

In similar fashion, applying to this Commission has shifted my self-concept. I was raised to avoid getting openly involved in political matters. But the needfulness of the current political moment has motivated me to "go public" and aspire to this magnificently non-partisan work.

The musical Hamilton inspired me to write a spoken-word piece, "A Non-Partisan Map Artisan," as a reflection on my experience applying to this Commission:

A Non-Partisan Map Artisan
(Redistricting Rap)

How does a quiet, private, a-political teacher, sometime preacher
aspire to be a voting district partitioner--a statewide redistricting commissioner?
How does he decide to go public with his relations,
money, work, ideas, and affiliations?
In all his life, never a campaign bumper sticker, lawn sign, or partisan Facebook endorsement
Raised to lay low, mind his own business—such was his cultural reinforcement
But now he wants to make the State’s biz his
Why?
Because he saw the need, the moment: democracy dangling in dysfunction and frustration
Partisan polarization landing body blows on our nation
Here came a chance to make a difference without taking sides
A chance to pour himself into something transcending partisan divides

.....
Back in 2010 the decennial decree gave us the new numbers
And the 2010 Commission went out and heard all comers
Community cares and concerns, stories and priorities
Weighing the words of majorities, pluralities, and minorities
They puzzle pieced the state so the districts equate
No packing, no cracking, the numbers all even
The Voting Rights Act applied and believed in
Communities of Interest considered respectfully
And then of course there was contiguity
Then compactness and then nesting
Part math and part art--so much wrestling!
Commissioners wielding their brushes and palettes
To paint us a picture of equal weight ballots
The new districts survived legal challenges and criticism,
they won awards and some well-deserved fame
And now today no one can say lay redistricting can’t work:
it can, it has, and it will again!

.....
So now we summon again this non-partisan superpower
The countdown begins for this redistricting zero hour
Now I want to be a nonpartisan map artisan
A remapping practitioner
A precinct partitioner
I hope to become a 2020 California Citizens Redistricting Commissioner!

.....
Ten years from now, in two-zero three-oh
It’ll be another decade, Census, time to give this another go.
May the third Commission continue to create
a more perfect union, a more golden State, a happy sequel
By drawing these lines that help make all our votes equal.