

I was immediately delighted to read about my city council member Russell Balenger's efforts to restore the name Rondo to a main east/west street in St Paul's historic Rondo neighborhood. St Paul has been my home for twenty years and we currently live at Blair House, corner of Selby and Western, on the literal edge of historic Rondo.

Though we moved to St Paul from Grand Forks, North Dakota, I've long known bits and pieces of Rondo's legendary history. I remember my pleasure at first noticing the name "Old Rondo" on a street sign for the first time, and how good it felt to see Rondo Community Library go up at Dale and University. Not to mention the fine neighborhood collections and services Rondo Library offers.

Since moving to Blair House I've come to appreciate much more of Rondo's history: its associations with legendary NAACP president Roy Wilkins and Labor leader Frank Boyd, for whom the park across our street is named. And so many more: baseball players Dave Winfield, Toni Stone, and Roy Campanella. And for me, especially, a writer and former English professor- Penumbra Theatre on Kent, and the great American playwright August Wilson. He thrived at Penumbra and lived nearby. We've all seen knots of tourists making the obligatory stops at F. Scott Fitzgerald's St Paul places but it's not long before August Wilson's name will draw much more general recognition as his many great plays become film classics.

But Rondo is not just a recovering neighborhood where important Black people lived. It's a community, ongoing, and gathering strength again as truly great communities do. It appears to be well on its way to standing for urban recovery after the devastating mid-20th century automobile worship and urban removal of Black communities.

For anyone who hasn't seen the half-block-long Rondo Commemorative Plaza at the corner of Fisk and what is called "Old Rondo," it's well worth a half-hour or so visit to let the rich history of the photographs and texts sink in. You'll see and feel the taste of what makes a thriving community. The exhibit generates its own little energy field on that corner, like cultural solar panels.

Rondo is one of America's great historic Black neighborhoods, though not without an earlier history of Germans, Irish, Jews, and others (and other diversity now). Its original name was spelled R-O-N-D-E-A-U after a French settler in St Paul's Territorial days.

Rondo is strengthening again. All of St Paul should welcome so economical yet meaningful gesture of reparation for that I-94 frenzy of the 50s and 60s. Drop the "Old" and call it what it is again--"Rondo." Extend it to the boundaries Councilmember Balenger proposes. Invite all of St Paul and its visitors from near and far to encounter that name again on our maps and on our drives. It evokes a rich history. It's healthy for all of us, especially in these times.

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