

Hallie Q. Brown Community Archives Oral History Collection:

Vol. 1, Rondo Movement History Interview Project

Overview and Summary Form

Fall 2025

Project Overview: The objective of the Rondo Movement History Interview Project (conducted between September and December 2025) has been to document the activities of Black people in the Rondo community to build political organizations and movements during the American Civil Rights and Black Power eras (roughly the 1950s through the 1970s). This project consists of six oral histories with Rondo community members connected to Hallie Q. Brown Community Center who were politically involved in the '50s through '70s period. This project will hopefully be the first installation of an ongoing series of oral histories conducted out of the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center Community Archives.

Interviewer Biography: As of the fall of 2025, Mackinnon Williams is a senior in History at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota. He created and ran the Rondo Movement History Interview Project in the Hallie Q. Brown Community Archives during an internship position at the Minnesota Historical Society Community Engagement Department. Mack was born and raised in Seattle, Washington, attended Garfield High School in Seattle's Central District, and was introduced to the Rondo community as a college student. He is also an organizer for Solidarity Twin Cities' community program The Nu Skool of Afrikan American Thought, and Macalester College's Black Liberation Affairs Committee student organization. Mack was formally introduced to project interviewees by Hallie Q. Brown Executive Director Benny Roberts.

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- a) **Interview Summaries:** Summaries of the 6 oral histories from the Rondo Movement History Interview Project are listed chronologically below. These summaries are repeated within the respective transcripts of each interview.
- b) **Interview Transcripts:** Transcripts of the 6 oral histories conducted in the Rondo Movement History Interview Project are presented chronologically below in the order of 1) Russel Balenger, 2) Nathaniel Khaliq, 3) Clem Crowe, 4) Yusef Mgeni, 5) Debbie Montgomery, 6) Steve Winfield.
- c) **Supplementary Materials:** In addition to the 6 interview transcripts, materials from this project include 9 pages of physical documents such as interview notes, questions, and protocol which have been digitized. These documents reflect the preparation process for interviews, and any notes written during interview sessions. These documents are presented chronologically.

Interview Summaries:

Name: Russel Balenger Oral History

Date: September 30th, 2025

Place: Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, St. Paul, MN

Interviewer/transcriber: Mackinnon Williams

Subjects discussed: Being born and raised in St. Paul; living south of St. Anthony Ave, where the hole was for Interstate 94; his family's home burning down when he was 7 years old; how his parents Russel Balenger and Lillian Balenger came to St. Paul; his father's work on the railroads; lightskinned members of his family and how they navigated St. Paul; reconnecting with his cousin Nelson Balenger; memories of his father's temperament; his family being separated after the house fire, and moving into a new house on Dayton Ave; an incident with the white Kosa family who rented from his mother; his mother's jobs and temperament; his mother's political involvement with North Central Voters League, Target Area A; childhood responsibilities for maintaining the family's home; exploring the neighborhood as a child; being stopped by police as an 8 year old on Selby Ave; discovering Unity Church and House of Hope; hitchhiking to Winona, MN as a 12 year old; white flight out of Rondo; Black neighbors in the neighborhood; his mother organizing balls for Black people in the community; his uncle Gordon Parks; Black social clubs, the Sterling Club, the Cameo Club, the Regalettes, the Untouchables; his mother leaving the back door of their home unlocked in case someone needed to hide from police; police officers in Rondo back in the day mostly being Black; his family's relationship with Patricia Caponi; being the first Black camper at a youth camp in the Boundary Waters; Judge Archie Gingold paying for his youth camp fees; his mother's work ethic; his hustle in high school; getting his first job; how the North Central Voters League started; his connection to Moorhead State University; how his brothers started Inner City Youth League; talking about Black history in class at Central High School; the riot on Selby Ave in 1968; responses at Central High School to Martin Luther King Jr. being assassinated; going to the Soviet Union as an exchange student while in high school; going to Ghana in his later years; experiences in the Soviet Union as a Black person; segregation in St. Paul, not being allowed in parts of the city.

People/organizations discussed: Thomas Hickman; Russel Balenger (father); Lillian Balenger (mother) formerly Lillian Parks and Lillian Hickman; Gordon Parks (uncle); Charles Balenger and Martha Balenger (father's parents); Laura and Nelson Balenger (father's siblings); Nelson Balenger (cousin); Kosa family; Target Area A; Ramsey Action Program; Russel (grandson); North Central Voters League; Saint Paul Police Department; Unity Church; Hallie Q. Brown Community Center; House of Hope Presbyterian Church; Esther Peake; Anderson family; Chester Oden; Anna (aunt); Anura Si-Asar; Jackie Balenger (brother); Sterling Club, Cameo Club, the Regalettes, the Untouchables; Officer Skelly; James Mann; Urban League Guild; Patricia Caponi, formerly Patricia (Pat) Parlin; Archie Gingold; Merle Harris; S. Edward Hall;

Nancy Parlin; Moorhead State University; Black Panther Party; Bobby Hickman (brother); Eamon Peck (unconfirmed); Ted Hamm; Readus Fletcher; Mahmoud El-Kati; Martin Luther King Jr.; The Circle of Peace Movement; Artika Tyner; Ronald Reagan; Ed Sullivan.

Name: Nathaniel Khaliq Oral History

Date: September 30th, 2025

Place: Residence of Nathaniel Khaliq, St. Paul, MN

Interviewer/transcriber: Mackinnon Williams

Subjects discussed: Being born in 1943 at 304 Rondo Ave and raised in the Cornmeal Valley section of the Rondo Neighborhood; Cornmeal Valley and Oatmeal Hill; Black businesses in Rondo; moral standards in the community; being raised by his grandparents Reverend George Davis and Bertha Davis; the self-sufficiency of the Rondo neighborhood in his childhood; Black men in the community working on the railroad and in the packinghouse; being told certain areas of the city were off-limits to Black people; his grandfather being the last homeowner removed for the construction of I-94; racial housing covenants and eminent domain; riot in Rondo in 1968; the Saint Paul police going buck wild in dealing with Black folks; police officer Allan Lee being killed in 1949 and the city cutting power in lower Rondo; the “true face of life in St. Paul for Black folk”; people in the neighborhood shooting at police and fire trucks; urban renewal; pressures on Black men working as railroad porters; Black women in the community working at the Twin City Arsenal and in domestic roles; educated Black people being barred from work; benign neglect by the St. Paul police towards Rondo; organizing to close an establishment on Dale and Selby which was a center point for crime and violence; the El Rukns gang from Chicago moving into St. Paul; working with Bobby Hickman, Kwame McDonald, Katie McWatt; St. Paul police disregarding gangs; arson fire which killed babies; ad hoc Black radical organizations forming during the Black Power Era; stories of police ignoring crime; police harassing his family at home; major drug sweeps in St. Paul during the Republican Convention; investigating an arson fire that killed five children; getting affordable housing built in Rondo; trying to slow gentrification with the Summit-University Planning Council; the creation of Unidale Mall; the economic engines of other ethnic groups in Saint Paul; his involvement with the Nation of Islam and the Muslim communities in the Twin Cities; friend Abdul Kareem surviving a shooting in North Minneapolis; Islam being one of the greatest experiences of his life along with having children and being married to his wife Victoria Davis for 52 years.

People/organizations discussed: George Davis (grandfather) and Bertha Davis (grandmother); Russel Balenger; Allan Lee; Darrell Cruz; Kwame McDonald; Bobby Hickman; Katie McWatt; El Rukns; MOVE Organization; Inner City Youth League; Summit-University Crime Prevention Council; Black Underground Army; Black Liberation Army; NAACP; CORE; SNCC; SCLC; Minneapolis Star Tribune; Bill Clinton; Janet Reno; Lonnie Atkins; Roy Wilkins; Summit

University Planning Council; Unidale Mall; Help Development Corporation; Kraus Anderson; General Mills; Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, W.D. Muhammad; Abdul Kareem; Masjid An-Nur; Victoria Davis (wife).

Name: Clem Crowe Oral History

Date: October 2nd, 2025

Place: Hallie Q. Brown Community Center

Interviewer/transcriber: Mackinnon Williams

Subjects discussed: Being born in Fort Worth, Texas in 1951 and raised in Omaha, Nebraska until moving to St. Paul in 1968; witnessing Interstate 94 being constructed when he moved to Rondo; recognizing the bond the Rondo community had; growing up in Near North Side, Omaha; a war between Black men and local police in his childhood; a police officer being killed on Victoria St and Selvy Ave by Inner City Youth League; St. Paul riot at Stem Hall in 1968; joining the Black Panther Party at the age of 16 in Omaha; barber Ernie Chambers in Omaha; principles of the Black Panther Party; village atmosphere in Omaha; Black male unemployment and disenfranchisement through the welfare program; the Black family unit and gender; Make America Great Again; his conviction that slavery has not ended but has instead evolved; his work at Teen Teamworks with Minneapolis Parks and Recreation; Black youth not being able to write or pass driver's exams; the U.S. creating a cheap labor force; his parents being sharecroppers in Texas; his father running away from the plantation to Fort Worth and buying the rest of his family out of bondage; the meatpacking industry in Nebraska; communal services in Omaha and Rondo; the Black Panther Party free breakfast program in Omaha; Black wealth and self-sufficiency in Rondo; Nathaniel Khaliq's family being evicted from their home during the construction of Interstate 94; playing sports at Central High School; teaching at Mechanic Arts High School with no resources; women in Omaha also working in meatpacking; memories of his mother being present when he was a child; Eddie Bolden and the Black Panther Party in Omaha; the Black Muslims and Nation of Islam in Omaha; Black servicemembers and professional athletes in Omaha; BANTU organization; the war zone atmosphere in Omaha with the police; the harassment of Black students at North High School in Omaha; Black men in Omaha being disappeared by the police; BANTU taking over North High School in protest; fighting to not have to enlist in ROTC; BPP programs in Omaha, how food was acquired for the breakfast program; Black flight to the suburbs, loss of role models; Black children today being wrongfully placed in Special Education; attending Macalester College from 1969 to 1973 as part of the Expanded Educational Opportunities program; Macalester College almost being a Black college during his time there; the Macalester Black House; campus takeover protest at Macalester.

People/organizations discussed: Inner City Youth League; Black Panther Party; Ernie Chambers; Teen Teamworks, Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board; Allied Universal;

Nathaniel Khaliq, formerly known as Nick Davis; Mechanic Arts High School; Dan Stafford; Eddie Bolden; Nation of Islam; Christchild Community Center; Gale Sayers, Bob Boozer, Bob Gibson; Black Association for Nationalism Through Unity (BANTU); Dennis Womack; Michael Jordan; Macalester College, Expanded Educational Opportunities (EEO) program; Upward Bound; Mahmoud El-Kati; John Patton; Arthur Fleming; Hubert Humohrey; Karl Egge; Robert Bunting; Richard Nixon; James Stewart; Walter Mondale; Melvin Collins; Macalester College Black House; Young Holt Trio; Friends of Distinction; Stevie Wonder; Olatunji and Drums of Passion; Doris Wilkinson; Black Liberation Affairs Committee (BLAC); Imani publication; Sounds of Blackness; Gary Hines.

Name: Yusef Mgeni Oral History

Date: October 16th, 2025

Place: Residence of Yusef Mgeni, St. Paul, MN

Interviewer/transcriber: Mackinnon Williams

Subjects discussed: His great-uncle Fredrick McGhee; the founding of St. Peter Claver African American Catholic Church; being born in St. Paul on July 24th, 25th, and 26th 1948; attending St. Peter Claver Parochial School; a summary of his educational journey; the one year he lived in Washington D.C.; a summary of the lines of work he has been in; Fred McGhee's role in founding the Niagara Movement and the NAACP; his time living in Los Angeles, California; a cross being burned in front of his childhood home; his father not being present in his childhood; people in the Rondo community supporting his educational journey; the close-knit nature of the Rondo community; the Duluth lynching; Northern segregation; the Underground Railroad in Minnesota; being involved in the Expanded Educational Opportunities program at Macalester College; Black intellectuals and leaders visiting the Twin Cities; Rondo and North and South Minneapolis being colonies; the history of the Rondo neighborhood; Black businesses in Rondo; the employment available to Black men and women up until the mid-1960s; the railroads; Hallie Q. Brown Community Center; Black inventors in Minnesota; school experiences at St. Peter Claver; Cyrus Ettinger's investment in his academic career; working as a bomb inspector at John Wood Foundry; finishing high school; the Civil Rights Era in Rondo and St. Paul; the gang era in Rondo; the Black Power Movement in response to gangs and the drug epidemic; story about Mahmoud El-Kati in DeLand, Florida.

People/organizations discussed: Fredrick McGhee; the St. Paul Pioneer; Charles Drew; Daniel Hale Williams; W.E.B. DuBois; Samuel Hardy; St. Peter Claver African American Catholic Church; National Black Catholic Congress; John Ireland; Montreal Star; Stephen Theobald; St. Peter Claver Parochial School; University of Minnesota; University of California, Los Angeles; University of Southern California; the Humphrey Institute; Metropolitan State University; National Rifle Association; Tom Hardy; Corporation for Public Broadcasting; Howard

University; Urban League; Inner City Youth League; African American Leadership Council; NAACP; Hallie Q. Brown Community Center; Norris Bumstead Herndon; William Sherman; Niagara Movement; D.W. Griffith; Arthur McWatt, Katie McWatt; US organization; Black Panther Party; American Civil Liberties Union; Pilgrim Baptist Church; Negro Leagues; Elmer Jackson, Isaac McGhie, Elias Clayton; The Innocence Project; National Lynching Museum; Bryan Stevenson; Moses Dixon; Perfect Ashler Lodge; Hallie Quinn Brown; Martin Luther King Center; Al Stafford; Community Employment Training Act; North Central Voters League; Great Northern, Northern Pacific Railroad; J. Edgar Hoover; Alprentice Bunchy Carter; Mahmoud El-Kati; John Warfield and Jan Warfield; John Patton; Gary Hines; Macalester College Black House; Malcolm X Pan-African Institute; Anyanya; Booker T. Washington; Marian Anderson; Paul Robeson; Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House; Nacirema Club; Cozy's Bar; The Elks club; The Celebrity Club; Joseph Rondeau; Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, A. Philip Randolph; Marvin Roger Anderson; Dred Scott, Harriet Robinson; Francis Scott Key; Billy Williams; Roy Wilkins; Whitney Young Jr.; Maudine Cooper; Frederick McKinley Jones; Garrett Morgan; George Washington Carver; Dennis Lewis; John Hope Franklin; Richard Wright; Ta-Nehisi Coates; Isabel Wilkerson; Benjamin E. Mays; Barack Obama and Michelle Obama; Cyrus Ettinger; Ermin Hogan; Maulana Karenga; Lerone Bennett Jr.; Abraham Lincoln; Antioch University; Stillwater State Prison; Cambone Kamara; Jim Griffin; Vusumuzi Zulu; Spike Moss; James Sackett; Ronnie Reed, Connie Trimble; Nathaniel Khaliq; Kwame McDonald; Gangster Disciples; Crips, Bloods; Sabathani Community Center; Anura Si-Asar; Minnesota Historical Society; Moussa Foster.

Name: Debbie Montgomery Oral History

Date: October 30th, 2025

Place: Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, St. Paul, MN

Interviewer/transcriber: Mackinnon Williams

Subjects discussed: Her birth and upbringing in the Rondo neighborhood; her childhood home at 978 St. Anthony Ave; her childhood home being taken under eminent domain during the construction of Interstate 94; neighbors in Rondo and her family; growing up in the Oatmeal Hill section of the Rondo neighborhood; getting involved with the NAACP as a child; participating in the March on Washington in 1963 and the March from Selma to Montgomery in 1965; racial demographics of Rondo; Oatmeal Hill being where many Black professionals lived; growing up playing sports at Oxford Playground; her talent at speed skating; playing sports with boys; learning from youth in the NAACP about the Southern Black experience; her grandfather's work as captain of the Red Caps and her grandmother's work as a matron at the Union Depot; the home on 889 Iglehart Ave which her family moved into after the first home was taken; fighting in junior high school; joining the St. Paul Police Department in 1975; being tasked with patrolling Rice St on midnights as a new officer; being sent to negotiate with the Hell's Outcasts;

fellow Black officers; being promoted to sergeant and supervising the midnight shift; riding the trains to visit the South and take part in Civil Rights Movement trips; the 56 mile march from Selma to Montgomery; the Selby-Dale riot of 1968; her time on St. Paul city council; African Americans being the only community in St. Paul without an economic engine; student activism at the University of Minnesota, the Morrill Hall takeover; memories of friends at Macalester College.

People/organizations discussed: Hallie Q. Brown Community Center; Robert Montgomery (husband); Isabella Gilbreath and Albert Gilbreath (grandparents); Minnesota Historical Society; James Bradford; Dwayne Gilbreath, Dale Gilbreath, Darryl Gilbreath (brothers); St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Father Denzel Carty; NAACP; Harvey Jones; J.J. Hill Elementary School; Bill Peterson; Mary Meyers; Dave Winfield, Stevie (Steve) Winfield; Jackie Coulter; Jeff Nelson; John Marshall High School; Mechanic Arts High School; Central High School; Sue Compton; Sonny Massey; Humphrey School of Public Affairs; Arthur Naftalin; Jim Gillette; Billy Burton, Hell's Outcasts; Kenny McIntosh; Freddie Slemmons; Gordy Kirk; Ku Klux Klan; Irvin Bruin; Margaret Bruin; Pat Harris; Dan Bostrom; Dave Thune; Minnesota Vikings, Ed McDaniel; Jimmy Lee Recreation Center; Renee Tyler; Melvin Whitfield Carter III; AFRO Department at the University of Minnesota; Matt Stark; Sam Myers; Jeffrey Hassan; Bill Hart, Brian Lozenski, Tia Simone-Gardner, Duchess Harris.

Name: Steve Winfield Oral History

Date: November 25th, 2025

Place: Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, St. Paul, MN

Interviewer/transcriber: Mackinnon Williams

Subjects discussed: Being one of the Rondo sons; him and his brother Dave Winfield being raised in the Rondo neighborhood by Arline Winfield, a single mother; growing up at Oxford playground; never hearing of Oatmeal Hill and Cornmeal Valley terminology growing up; not knowing what was happening when Interstate 94 construction started; having to run laps through the highway construction site for sports; Debbie Montgomery being an idol of his in sports; Rondo being a mixed neighborhood; him and his brother Dave wanting to be professional bowlers as children; Zoilo Versailles on the Twins making him and Dave interested in baseball; streets and sections of the neighborhood that Black people weren't allowed into; James Griffin and Jimmy Robinson coaching and playing mentor roles; getting into coaching and officiating for sports; the relevance of the Black Panther Party and the Nation of Islam in the Black Power Era after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968; forming the Black Student Union at Central High School with Russel Balenger; memories of AAAC at the University of Minnesota; The Way Community Center and riots in Minneapolis; the Stem Hall riot in St. Paul in 1968; the beginning of Inner City Youth League; playing varsity baseball at the University of Minnesota as

a freshman, leaving the team; not regretting choosing community activism over professional sports; Reverend Spence and New Hope Baptist Church.

People/organizations discussed: Dave Winfield (brother); Arline Winfield (mother); Oxford playground; J.J. Hill Elementary School; Marshall Junior High School; Central High School; University of Minnesota; John Cotton; Mack Burch; Bob Carter; Ernie Johnson; Bill Peterson; Tom Hardy; Debbie Montgomery; Kenny McIntosh; Ronnie Reed, Michael Reed, Duane Reed; Kenny Christian, Lenny Christian, Denny Christian, Benny Christian, Quinny Christian; Dwayne Gilbreath; Billy Collins; Zoilo Versalles; Harmon Killebrew; Rod Carew; Bob Allison; Bob Carter; Russel Balenger; Jimmy Martin; St. Paul VFW Hall; Elks Lodge; American Legion; James Griffin; Jimmy Lee; Jimmy Robinson; Frank White; Gail Anderson; Roger Neal; Martin Luther King Jr.; Black Panther Party; Ronnie Reed; Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad; Afro American Action Committee (AAAC); The Way Community Center; Spike Moss; Bobby Hickman; Katie McWatt; Patty Hickman; Inner City Youth League; Gordon Parks; Robin Hickman-Winfield (wife); the Loft Teen Center; Martin Luther King Jr. Recreation Center; Stacy Robinson; Ujamaa Place; Darryl Spence; New Hope Baptist Church.