

Page Proposal

Main Research Question: How have median income, house occupation, and property values changed over time in the Rondo neighborhood compared to the nearby white neighborhood, Como Park, since the construction of Interstate 94?

The destruction of the Rondo Neighborhood (Shown in Figure 2) was not an unavoidable choice that urban developers and people in power had to make. As shown in the map, the Northern Route, which was on top of railroads, wouldn't cause as much damage as destroying a rising and thriving community. A community that was the heart of St. Paul's Black community, full of churches, social clubs, and successful businesses, where you could find anything you needed. The injustice of this choice is even greater when you consider that other neighborhoods were on the freeway's path. The predominantly white and influential residents of Prospect Park, for example, were able to use their political connections and organize effectively to force significant changes to the freeway's design, saving their homes and preserving their community's character. Rondo, a center of Black life and culture, lacked the same political capital and privilege. If people at the time had chosen the northern route, the freeway would border Como Park (Near Lake Como, as shown in Figure 1), and that's the reason why I'm comparing it to Rondo.

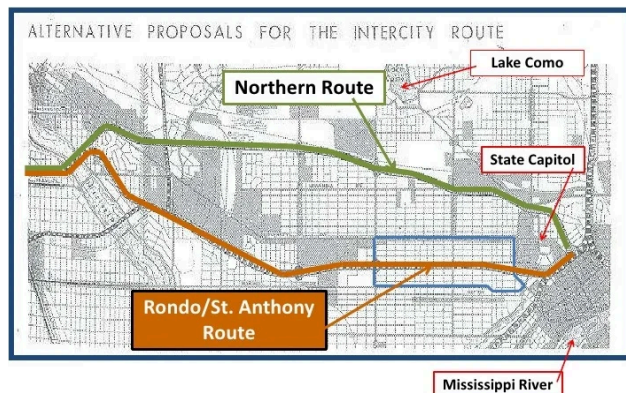


Figure 1

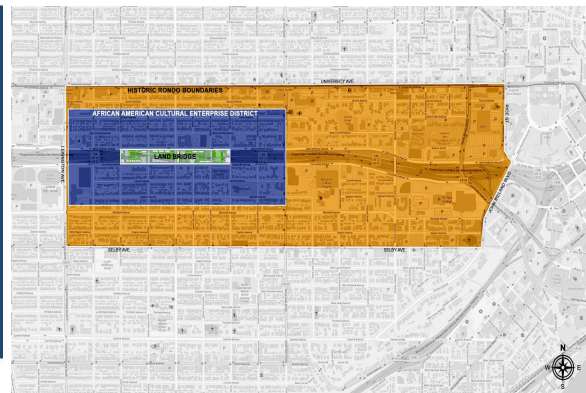


Figure 2

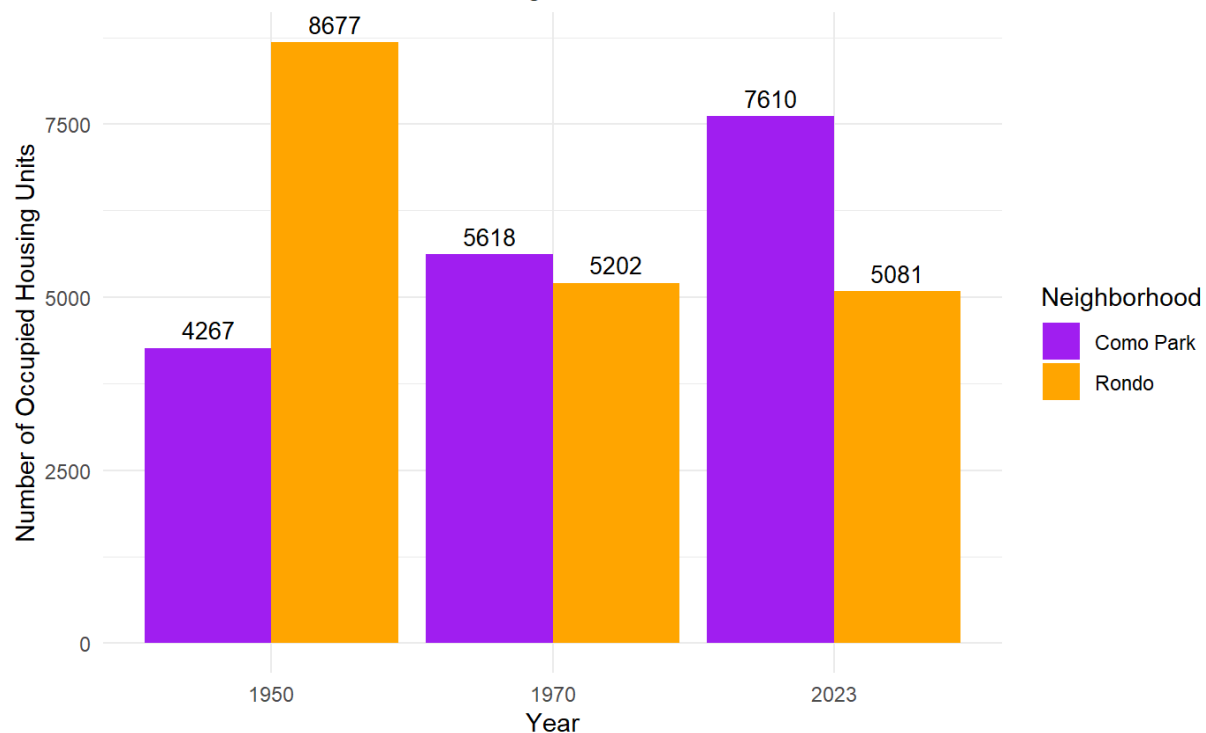
Note: The construction of the St. Paul stretch of I-94 started in 1956 with “The Federal Aid Highway Act”, and it was open to the public in 1968. It lasted 12 years.

The 1950 Census data reveal that Rondo was a big community not only in heart but also in scale, with **nearly 9,000 households**, making it more populous than the neighboring Como Park area is today. The construction of I-94 represents a tremendous change to the households, changing this natural trajectory and lowering its housing units. This was the physical erasure of a massive, established community, which saw its number of homes plummet by over **3,400 units by 1970**. The data allows for a powerful, **data-driven projection** of what was lost. Using Como Park's nearly 80% growth over the same period as a reference, Rondo's 8,677 households could have

formed into a community of over **15,000 today**. In addition, with the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the nearly 3,000 families who owned homes in 1950 would have formed the foundation for generations of new homeowners. The data strongly suggests that without the freeway's intervention, Rondo was on a path to become not only one of St. Paul's largest neighborhoods but also one with a thriving and growing base of Black homeowners, representing a profound loss of community, housing, and generational wealth.

Total Housing Units: Rondo vs. Como Park (1950-2023)

The destruction of Rondo's housing stock is visible after the 1950 census.

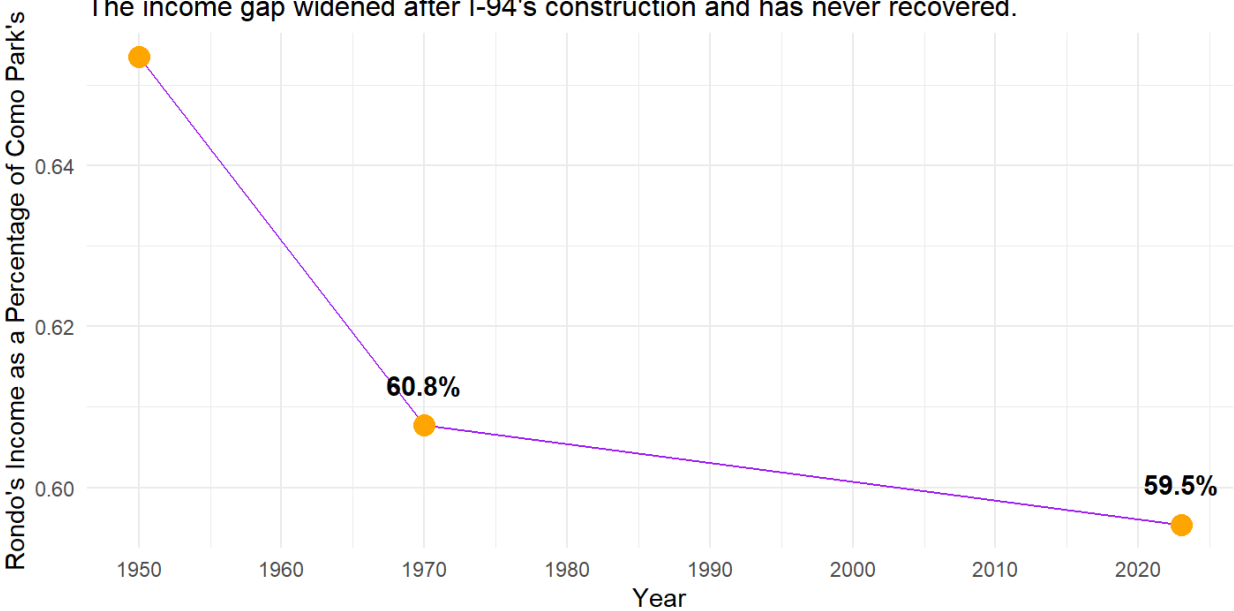


Note: Notice how Rondo's bar shrinks dramatically while Como Park's grows.

The devastating impact of the freeway is further shown in the economic data, which reveals a widening and persistent income gap between the Como Park and Rondo. In 1950, before the I-94's construction, a significant difference already existed, with the median Rondo household earning approximately **65 cents for every dollar earned by a household in Como Park**. However, after the freeway's completion, the data for 1970 shows this economic gap had widened, with Rondo's **median income falling to just 61 cents for every dollar in Como Park**. This economic damage proved to be a permanent feature; decades later, the gap has never recovered and remains at about 60 cents on the dollar in 2023. This trend provides clear quantitative evidence that the physical destruction of Rondo's housing and community fabric directly contributed to a multi-generational economic disparity that persists to this day.

Rondo's Income Gap Compared to Como Park (1950-2023)

The income gap widened after I-94's construction and has never recovered.



Note: Here we are using a ratio that shows us how many cents a household in Rondo earned for every dollar a household in Como Park earned.

The long-term impact on property wealth is also very different, even without data from 1950. The 1970 census, taken after the freeway's construction, serves as a critical baseline, showing that the median Rondo home was worth only **72 cents for every dollar** of a home in Como Park. While this value gap has narrowed significantly by 2023, with a Rondo home now valued at about **86 cents on the dollar**, this apparent recovery tells a complex story. Even if a rise in property value seems positive, we shouldn't forget and also take into account that the ratio could be the same or even more than Como Park if the freeway had not been built, due to the many businesses, normal house appreciation, and many other factors. The ratio also does not count the 3,400 homes destroyed by the freeway, so it was a devastating loss, no matter the small recovery.

Metric	Neighborhood	1950	1970	2023 Estimate
Total Housing Units	Rondo	8,677	5,202	5,081
	Como Park	4,267	5,618	7,610
Homeownership Rate	Rondo	32.70%	28.60%	40.80%
	Como Park	83.80%	79.20%	67.80%
Median Income	Rondo	\$2,593	\$6,863	\$50,397
	Como Park	\$3,968	\$11,293	\$84,650
Median House Value	Rondo	NA	\$14,459	\$261,575
	Como Park	NA	\$19,981	\$304,388

Sub Questions:

- 1.) Has the homeownership rate in the Rondo neighborhood declined or improved over the past two decades?

The ownership rates improved over time. A significant reason for this is the Fair Housing Act of 1968, as well as normal city growth.

- 2.) Is there a relationship between declining homeownership and rising rental occupancy in Rondo?

Homeownership and rental occupancy are the only two categories for occupied housing, so they must always add up to 100%. They are like two sides of the same coin.

This means that if the percentage of homeowners in Rondo declines, the percentage of renters must rise by the same amount. Therefore, when homeownership increases, the percentage of renters decreases. For Rondo, the data shows that as homeownership fell after the freeway's construction, the neighborhood became more heavily renter-occupied.

- 3.) How do median property values in the Rondo neighborhood compare to a nearby majority-white neighborhood like Como Park?

The property values of Como Park have always been higher than those of Rondo, but this is because of many years of oppression of the Black American Community. Redlining was one of the reasons why, even before the I-94 was built, the property values were so low. Realtors telling banks that they shouldn't invest in a community like Rondo.

Methods/Proposed Analysis:

Find the 6 specific census tracts that compose the Rondo Neighborhood of the 1950s, 1970s, and 2023, because census tracts change through time. I did the same thing with Como Park, as it borders the possible Northern Route of I-94.

Using Social Explorer, I looked at all the variables I was interested in: Median House value, Median Income, House ownership Rate / Occupation. I did this for both neighborhoods, resulting in 10 datasets.

Used R to create a double bar chart for the total Housing units/occupancy data. Created a Line graph for the change in time of Median Income. And finally, create a Google sheet with the Median House value (1950 did not record the median house value) and all the other data.

Last update on Monday, August 25, 2025, at 12:08 AM (CDT) by:

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Data sources:

Social Explorer, United States Census Bureau, American Census Survey 5-year estimate, PBS Twin Cities, Minnesota Historical Society, Reconet Rondo.

COMO PARK INCOME DATA:

2023 Como Park Tracts MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME ACS 5 Year Estimate (In 2023 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) :

https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2023_5yr/R13902106

1970 Como Park on 2010 Geographies Tracts Median Family INCOME in 1969 dollars:

<https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/RC1970/R13902109>

1950 Census Como Park Tracts MEDIAN Household INCOME:

<https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C1950TractDS/R13902113>

RONDO INCOME DATA:

2023 Rondo Tracts MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME ACS 5 Year Estimate (In 2023 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) :

https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2023_5yr/R13902107

1970 Census on 2010 Geographies Rondo Tracts Median Family INCOME in 1969 dollars:

<https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/RC1970/R13902108>

1950 Census Rondo Tracts MEDIAN Household INCOME:

<https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C1950TractDS/R13902111>

RONDO HOUSE VALUE:

ACS 5-Year Estimate 2023 RONDO MEDIAN HOUSE VALUE:

https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2023_5yr/R13901984

Census 1970 RONDO MEDIAN HOUSE VALUE:

<https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/RC1970/R13901979>

1950: No data could be found.

COMO PARK HOUSE VALUE:

ACS 5-Year Estimate 2023 COMO Park MEDIAN HOUSE VALUE:

https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2023_5yr/R13901985

Census 1970 COMO Park MEDIAN HOUSE VALUE:

<https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/RC1970/R13901983>

1950: No data could be found.

RONDO HOUSE OWNERSHIP/OCCUPATION:

2023 Rondo Owner Occupied ACS 2023 (5-YEAR Estimate):

https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2023_5yr/R13902146

1970 Census Rondo House ownership percent:

<https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C1970/R13902143>

1950 Census Rondo House ownership percent:

<https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C1950TractDS/R13902137>

COMO PARK HOUSE OWNERSHIP/OCCUPATION:

2023 Como Park Owner Occupied ACS 2023 (5-YEAR Estimate):

https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2023_5yr/R13902145

1970 Census, Como Park House ownership percent:

<https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C1970/R13902140>

1950 Census, Como Park House ownership percent:

<https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C1950TractDS/R13902139>

INTERVIEWS AND PERSONAL STORIES:

Reconnect Rondo:

<https://reconnectrondo.com/vision/history/>

Rondo: Beyond the Pavement

<https://www.amazon.com/Rondo-Beyond-Pavement-Margaret-Lovejoy/dp/B07SQ55HZ8>

St. Paul's Historic Black Neighborhood Destroyed By Highway

https://youtu.be/KyixQ8l0_18?si=vHuFSKOBkhVkbU6S

PBS Twin Cities: Interstate 94: A History and Its Impact

<https://www.tpt.org/interstate-94-a-history-and-its-impact/>

Minnesota Historical Society Neighborhood Resistance to I-94, 1953–1965

<https://www3.mnhs.org/mnopedia/search/index/event/neighborhood-resistance-i-94-1953-1965>

The Brothers of Rondo: A Legacy of Black Resilience (Documentary film)

<https://youtu.be/UpbB8gz9HnE?si=9G97WXpUiAGPwGQk>