Eugene B. Redmond Oral History Interview October 11, 2011
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Library and Information Services
Interviewed by: Mary Rose
Recorded by: Virginia Stricklin

EBR Oral History MR 11 Oct 2011

0:00:00 [Description of East St. Louis Center physical location; meaning of 'Alestle'; reaction of community to the school]

Rose:
Alright, well today is Tuesday October 11, 2011, my name is Mary Rose and today I'm interviewing Dr. Eugene B. Redmond for an oral history interview.

So Dr. Redmond, we here at SIUE [Southern Illinois University Edwardsville] feel extremely honored that you've chosen to give your Collection [the Eugene B. Redmond Collection] to the university, so one thing we'd like to do in these interviews is to describe your relationship with SIUE. So your connection with SIUE started in the very early days of the university. Would you talk about what it was like to be an SIUE student in the early 1960s?

Redmond:
Yes. Actually my relationship began, with SIU began in the 1950s. In fact the same year the SIU came to the Metro East and to East St. Louis in particular. I finished high school in 1957, in the January class. The high school in East St. Louis later adopted a policy where there would be just one graduation a year, but for decades the schools the high schools had two graduations, one in January and one in June. So I finished in January and immediately enrolled in classes at SIU (pauses) E. Now we didn't say "E" in those days, we said "SIU" and it would be the East St. Louis Center or the Alton Center or the Edwardsville Center. There was no SIU-"E," it was SIU and then a hyphen and then the city. The classes were located in two buildings, you know individual buildings. One was Morrison School in East St. Louis on 59th Street also known as Kingshighway. And the other, which held the larger number of the classes and was actually the seat of the East St. Louis Center, was the old East St. Louis Senior High School, which in the late forties early fifties moved to outer State Street, built a new building, a complex. So I would take classes mostly at night, 'cause I was, I finished high school, so I was working. It was quite a time; we dubbed the East St. Louis Center "Tenth Street Tech," so you'll see that throughout the writing, even got into places like yearbooks and issues of the *Alestle* [the student newspaper].

I was around at the *Alestle* (ah-LESS-tul) was coming into being and it tickles and troubles me that most of the students wouldn't be able to tell you now, tell you what 'Alestle' is the acronym for. There was a Scottish professor named Murdoch, a very very deep and resonating Scottish brogue and he would say, (mimicking a Scottish brogue) "You shouldn't call it the 'Ah-LESS-tul,' you must call it 'Ah-LEST-lee,' it has to be called the 'Ah-LEST-lee,'" otherwise you leave out Edwardsville, 'cause Edwardsville got the least number of letters: A-L for Alton, E-S-T-L for East St. Louis, and Edwardsville only got one. Ironically

Edwardsville is the major seat now. At that time it was not. It was the administrative seat, but it was not the major, was not the most populous campus, it was East St. Louis and Alton. Edwardsville didn't really have the facility. Where we're sitting now was where squirrels and possums and raccoons and snakes roamed and prevailed.

And there're so many stories to tell about the reactions of the neighbors, the inhabitants of the three cities. That's another whole thing, is to tell about the reaction, including people in Edwardsville, at least one farmer literally shooting at a helicopter. I don't know if you read this story, literally shooting at a helicopter of people flying over to survey the land and media folks.

Rose:
So people weren't happy about the school?

Redmond:
No, no, no, some people weren't, some people weren't happy.

Every campus or every site or satellite had its own ambience, its own history. And the buildings reflect that, you know, Lovejoy and Alton [i.e. Lovejoy Library named after Elijah Lovejoy], Dunham and East St. Louis [i.e. Dunham Hall named after Katherine Dunham], the buildings all reflect what was happening around. The Shurtleff College in Alton. Buildings here that belonged to people who'd been around for decades, a century or more. The fact that several governors of Illinois came from Edwardsville; you know those famous Lincoln-Douglas debates. I mean, rich, rich history, we're sitting. Some of us were aware or became aware of the fact that this area was like the Washington, D.C., of Indian nations of North America, which is true. It was like the capital of Indian nations in North America, where we sit. I mean there was just so much going on, and we launched all of the different activities. Civil Rights. All kinds of marches and protests. I left here going to march on Washington -- [left from] East St. Louis -- in 1963. Covered it for the *Alestle* and a string of midwestern newspapers. There's so much was going on.

0:07:21 [Description of East St. Louis Center physical location; Illinois GI bill]

Anyway I started out in 1957 and I took classes in both the Morrison School and Tenth Street Tech in East St. Louis. And Tenth Street Tech, the old East St. Louis Senior High School was physically attached and in terms of land contiguous to and with Rock Junior High School. And that was fascinating because you had a building, you had a college or a university connected to a junior high school.

Rose:
And they were still having classes in the junior high?

Redmond:
Exactly!

Rose:
Oh I see, yeah.

Redmond:
I was a Saluki patrolman, that was how I earned my keep. I came home from the Marine Corps. I went in a bit too late to get the GI bill but Illinois had a scaled down, you know watered down GI bill which gave you tuition. I mean, the only reason I went to college in East St. Louis, in the Metro East, was because I couldn't afford to go off anywhere. And also the state of Illinois, the GI bill had been, had ended in '55 I think, at the end of the Korean war, so I took advantage of the more simplified GI bill that Illinois offered, you know, tuition.

Rose:
For being in the Saluki Patrol?

Redmond:
Yeah, yeah.

Rose:
So what was the Saluki Patrol?

Redmond:
No it's the tuition to go to school [i.e. the Illinois GI bill was for college tuition and was not connected to the Saluki Patrol]. Saluki Patrol, because SIU [i.e. the group of Southern Illinois University campuses at East St. Louis, Alton, and Edwardsville that later became SIUE, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville] was an appendage of SIUC [Southern Illinois University Carbondale] we were Salukis [the SIUC mascot]. And that's something I always stopped and gave a lecture in every class on the origins, 'cause a lot of students didn't know and don't know. There're two things I said to them: You have to know how you got here, and you must know who Elijah Lovejoy was. Don't leave this campus and go somewhere, be embarrassed on the job in New York, England, India, when someone comes up to you and starts telling you about Elijah Lovejoy; and you were here for four, five, or six years and you don't even know who the man is. That's the teacher in me talking, the old man talking. Anyway, the Saluki Patrol was a group of young men, all males, who patrolled the parking lots around Tenth Street Tech and to some extent Morrison. But Morrison -- which was farther east in East St. Louis, we're talking Tenth Street and then we're talking 39th Street going deeper into East St. Louis -- it was still holding elementary school classes, so you could only go there at night. Whereas at Tenth Street Tech which had been vacated by the East St. Louis School District you could go all day. So that was the physical environment.

Now alongside the, on the street across the street from Tenth Street Tech SIU academic facility, classroom, student center were houses that had some administrative staff and there was a faculty lounge. And some stately houses running north and south on Tenth Street and on Ninth Street which, both of which bordered or bookended Tenth Street Tech and Rock Junior High School. There was also a place called the Beulah House across the street from SIU-East St. Louis and that had been a women's

residence. And then across the street in another direction was a Boy's Club. A very very stately brick building. Down the street a block away, block and a half, depending on where you're talking about, SIUE or Rock, was the YWCA, which later became Katherine Dunham Dynamic Museum. The houses that used to be occupied by SIUE were originally homes and one dental office. In fact I had a tonsillectomy in one of those, one of those buildings, when I first came home from the Marine Corps. But the three buildings are now part of the Katherine Dunham complex on Tenth Street. You know, her home, her residence, her office, and a hostel, they're all still standing. They were private homes. Later turned into one nursing and then administration buildings, and then Dunham moved in and occupied all three later, this was like ten years after SIU started.

Life was quite, quite active. The world was, the world was on fire. With wars, with movements of various kinds. I remember that the phrase 'feminine mystique' -- this, I'm coming back, in '57 I come, I'm in school for a year then early '58 I go to Marine Corps, I return to SIU in early '61. I took classes at both Morrison and Tenth Street Tech, in 1957. I remember a class in Introduction to Business toured Granite City Steel and those are the kinds of things that we did, I suppose those kind of things still happen, I don't know. That was fascinating to see that huge open vat of molten steel and whatever else they were boiling, you know, in those cauldrons. (laughs) And I had friends, my uncles and father and others who worked, but I'd never been there. It was only thanks to a class that I took at SIU I finally saw the inside of Granite City Steel.

0:15:10 [The sixties; classmates; Dick Gregory performance]

Redmond:
But as I said, the world was inflamed with all this stuff going on, and as I said that phrase 'feminine mystique' was thrown around a lot, and Peter Paul and Mary. You know, they were the emblematic freedom singers. Josh White, these kinds of people who either came through town and we went to hear them or they came to a campus nearby and we went to hear them. I remember caravans of students leaving to go to participate in civil rights activities in different places whether it was Cairo [Illinois] or the Deep South, you know. Whether it was to go to a restaurant or a series of restaurants in Alton or somewhere downtown in East St. Louis where say at JC Penney's or Kresge's. Where black people couldn't eat at the counters. And where black women tried on something, you know some intimate garment, you bought it because the assumption was that no white person would want to try it on.

That, that, so we couldn't help, I mean the places around the university were segregated and friends of mine I can call some of the names: Bruce Cook, F. Beasley LeFeu [spelling?], Carl Salber [spelling?], who was a young economics teacher, but he hung out with students, a young guy, Ed Schaffer, who just died, he worked for the AP, Associated Press, and was based in the Post-Dispatch building for many year, I mean he's a friend, Taylor Jones was black, the ones I just mentioned were all white. And we would go together to a place called Tony's which was a bar and most of these guys and the women were, they were grown like me. I was in the Marine Corps so when I came home I was into my twenties, and one of my best friends Bruce Cook -- a very wealthy lawyer who lives in Belleville, and who won the Similac case you know. And gave his $600,000 commission [$650,000, with lawyer Harriet Hamilton] to the Land

of Lincoln legal aid people [Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation] in East St. Louis. 'Cause he said to me, "Gene," he said, he said, "they work forty, fifty hours a week and make $38-$40,000." So I mean just saying that's the kind of fulcrum that we came out of. I mean, I leapt forward several decades to talk about Bruce and that case, but everybody was as we said "on the mark" in terms of, you know, very very conscious.

We had several groups of players and poets and writers. We had the Neo-Thalesian Club. Thales was the first important Greek playwright and philosopher so we named this club Neo-Thalesians. And we did all kinds of satirical plays like in one we did *Julius Siezure, or, Mum's the Word*. (laughs) And one play we erected a sixty-story filter tip top on the riverfront, we were dealing with that kind of pollution. There was an all-black cast and Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty*, you know, plays with statements.
Dick Gregory came to the campus, he was an alum -- didn't finish but he was at Carbondale -- and he was big at that time, and he came to the campus. And I remember going into the auditorium with three of my professors and the first thing the professors asked me afterwards was "Why were there some jokes that the Negro students," -- which everybody was 'Negro' -- "there was some jokes that Negro students laughed at and they laughed heartily. The white students laughed but they didn't quite get it, and there were some jokes that the white students laughed heartily at than the Negro," and I was explaining to them the nature of black comedy, that some of it had to do with a strut, for example. Or a dip, like a hip walk, and just something that most of the white students wouldn't have picked up, that two-thirds of that particular joke, the hook of that joke was in the way he moved, the way he spun around, you know. The blacks would have picked it up. And you know the more cerebral jokes, the white students got, you know, and so you mix, it's a mixture you know. (laughs) That's just an example of some of the kinds of changes that we had. Intramural sports.

0:21:37 [Kennedy assassination; General LeMay; Ted Hornback; Saluki patrol]

Redmond:
I was in school and at school when Kennedy was killed. I remember walking down to the student lounge which was the basement. A couple TVs mounted high on the wall. And one of my classmates, a beautiful woman whom I had a crush on. (laughs) She was from Philadelphia or New York. She just fell into my arms and I said oh lucky me. (laughs) But she was crying. (laughs) And I said "What? Oh my God, what?" and she said, "He's dead." And I looked up over her shoulder at the tv mounted in, you know, in the air. And there it was, that very day. You know that saying, it was, woo, you know.

So every time there was any slacking, which was very rare in the sixties, any slack up of pushes in the movement, there was something else happening, something that would jump-start it. Like General LeMay saying things like "We're going to bomb them into the Stone Age," talking about the Vietnamese, right, during Vietnam. You know, it's the General, I mean we were horrified. Oh no, that's a quote, "bomb them into the Stone Age." We were like "What do you mean? What are you talking about?" I mean the idea, 'cause a lot of us, we were studying that, civilization and you know, we understood what that meant in a way that a lot of other people may not have understood it. May not have picked it up.

And then as I said the 'feminine mystique.' The Beat movement. We identified with that. We identified with the folk singers that I mentioned. Education. Teachers said to me, professors who had taught in other places, they said it to me then and they said it to me later -- and one of them was my mentor who later facilitated my coming, going to California to teach there for almost thirteen years -- they all said that they had never had an experience before that or since where you, you were in the middle of things, in media res as we say in drama. You were in the middle of things.

Rose:
Who was your mentor? You mentioned your mentor, who was that?

Redmond:
Yeah, that was Vernon T. Hornback. Called him Ted Hornback. He used to put -- he had a Fiat, the car? He just put books in the car, left it unlocked. He would put books, they'd be up in the window in the back seats, all you did was grabbed a book and left a note that you'd borrowed it. (laughs) It was wonderful!

I as a Saluki patrolman, I mastered the art of getting into locked cars. These absent-minded professors would arrive on the parking lot, rush into class. Those were the days when you could lock your car from inside. And then, you know, how do you get in? Your key is in the car, car's running. Cars were built more simpler, so I had the wire, (gestures to mimic using a wire to open a car door) but I could open any car. And it happened three or four times a day, on any given day, especially if it was cold, snow, professors ran in. So I would have to open the door. Sometimes I would open the door and bring in the key, the professor might not even have realized, unless the car key was on the key to his or her door, office door. Then they went "Ahhh," you know. It happened a lot, those days when you could lock your car from inside. It happened all over the place. So that was one of the things we did.

So we just patrolled the lot and gave tickets if we had to. Sometimes we knew people who were parked, we'd go in and tell them "You gotta move your car." We weren't wanting to give people tickets. So that was the job of the Saluki patrol, you know just to kinda, you know, no weapons or anything. We had our uniforms; they looked like bellmen or maybe security people, sort of watered down security people, who didn't have. … Attendant, doormen, that's what the uniforms looked like.

Rose:
I have actually seen a picture of you in your uniform in the yearbook, so, yeah. Very official-looking.

Redmond:
(laughs)

0:27:15 [Virgil Seymour's funeral]

Redmond:
I just want to mention, one of the guys, Virgil Seymour, who was, each campus had its Vice President and its administrators. There was no president, because the president was down in Carbondale. The highest person that you could have in Metro East -- Alton, Edwardsville, East St. Louis -- was a VP. And I remember some of those names but there was a Virgil Seymour who was over the East St. Louis campus. And he went in for heart surgery. And at that time heart surgery, heart surgery was in its primitive stages. And the interesting thing about it, he made out a will and he wanted me and another black Saluki patrolman to be pall bearers along with a U.S. senator, a state senator, lieutenant governor. It was really eerie; I mean here we are undergraduates. And he died. And we went to this little town, I'm trying to think of the name, little town in Illinois, and it was very unusual, we were. … I was a little bit more together than this guy was 'cause I was ex-Marine, and he was sorta like right out of high school, Lawrence Beckam, Larry Beckam. And Seymour's move, that act, just told everybody something about where we were.

As one of my doctors who's retired now used to say all of the time, if we had stayed on that track -- you know, that Kennedy track? We wouldn't have -- "America would be a different place," he said, "but we slipped." He's a Haitian doctor. And I think, I'd never thought of it quite like that. You're talking fifty years ago, almost. And he said, if we stayed on that track we'd be okay now. But that man [Seymour]; Larry and I were shocked, like "Why?" You know, why, how, we felt it was a curse and a blessing. On the one hand we were with these big wheels, but on the other hand we got to carry a casket and sort of, we were a little uneasy about it. But that just told you what that man's mind was, what his consciousness, what he wanted to say in a dramatic way, as he left here. What he wanted to say in that little Illinois town that we went to, little town in Southern Illinois, he had a statement he wanted to make to his people, to the world. 'Cause it was covered widely, you know, because of the people who were carrying the palls.

Rose:
Because it's an honor.

Redmond:
U.S. senator, you know. And that kind of thing. So it was going to get a lot of attention. So anyway, that's one of the things that I think typified that period for the most avant-garde and the foot soldiers. You know, people left here and went to different places.

There were lots of student editors' conferences all over the state and we would go. We had a fleet of Nash Ramblers, the little cars, egg-shaped. So we would go to Jacksonville and we'd go to, well Lebanon, and all around to Mount Vernon, to various colleges where it was big. I don't know if that's happening now but it was really big, and the student editors were mostly radicalized. I mean, it was a radical time. Anti-Vietnam, pro-civil rights, pro-free speech, women's rights, I mean that was on our tongues every day, that was on our minds every day, and it was in the classes, you know. The fact that East St. Louis

was at least half black but didn't have one city council person. The teachers were talking; the political scientists were speaking about changing the form of government from city councilmen to aldermen, to aldermanic. If you had a city council it meant that you could have all of your city representatives come from one block in the city. Was not representative. And indeed they did, they came from the white neighborhood. If you had aldermanic you had to have wards; it would guarantee you at least two of the three, of the five aldermen, and a good shot at the mayorship. So that was, they would talk about it in political science classes and sociology classes. The man who wrote the first book on the riot was here.

Rose:
Right. We talked about him before: Elliot Rudwick.

Redmond:
Elliot Rudwick, yeah.

0:33:35 [First black editor of the *Alestle*; doo-wop; unpublished novel]

Rose:
Well I'm kind of feeling we should move on and talk about the Experiment in Higher Education for awhile, and how you were a teacher-counselor there. But if there's something else you want to talk about as your experience as a student before we move on? Is there something else you want to add?

Redmond:
Yes I think that, in connection with my Collection [the Eugene B. Redmond Collection], we took lots of pictures. I became editor of the *Alestle* [the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville student newspaper] after being an assistant editor, and an associate editor. I was the first Negro editor of the *Alestle* and it made national news because SIUE [Southern Illinois University Edwardsville] was part of SIUC [Southern Illinois University Carbondale] then; it was like the first Negro editor in a hundred years of the school, that kind of thing, which is really, so. Since I was editor then I think about ten more 'cause I met two or three of them when I was teaching. But I covered the civil rights, my editorial aimed at raising the consciousness of the students and that was something to me that was very special. Now I was a little bit older than the teens 'cause I had been in the Marines and the group of people around me, my special friends -- posse -- they were a little older too. Not everybody but many of the core group. The taking of pictures started then. We had pictures, vivid and illustrative displays. We had, we began a Spring Arts special supplement where we published reviews of books and art and poetry and excerpts of other kinds of writings with photographs.

I helped to found three other newspapers, outside, this was all while I was a student before I actually finished SIUE, and one of them is still operating: the East St. Louis Monitor. I worked on one called the Evening Voice and another one called the Beacon, the East St. Louis Beacon. I had some great mentors too that maybe we could talk about another time. One in particular, a man names W. Nicholas Buoy [spelling?] who used to smoke pipes, and he called me ‘The Professor.’ "Hey Professor!" It was really

really funny. That sort of reminded me of a nickname I had in the Marine Corps which was ‘Dictionary.’ (laughs) 'Cause I read dictionaries, so that was one of my nicknames in the Marine Corps.

Rose:
I read somewhere that you first started writing poetry when you were in the Marine Corps? Do I have that right?

Redmond:
Well, I guess you can say that that I got more serious about it. I was writing doo-wop lyrics as a boy, as a youngster, yeah. There were groups in the neighborhood. In my community, and I think most African American communities. In fact I know, in the country, and a lot of non-African American across the country regardless of make-up had the street corner symphonies. You know, you'd be coming home or going out somewhere and there'd be a bunch of boys under a street lamp. Or on a front porch. Or maybe in the alley, or maybe under a trestle, or under a roof of some sort. And they'd be "doo-doo doo-doo doo-doo WOP! doo-doo doo-doo" working on their harmony. The mainstream called them barber shop quartets, known as doo-wops and rhythm and blues. And then you had girls out there who'd be trying to sing like the women groups. So I would write some banal lyrics for some of the people.

But yeah, in the Marine Corps I got going a bit more. So happened that there were a lot of officers who had degrees in English. They were from, not from West Point but from these military academies like Virginia Military Academy. And here and there you'd find one or two from one of the big, you know, academies, but mostly from lesser known. And for some reason, I don't know I was attached to a unit that had a helicopter, for some reason a lot of them had degrees in English. And they would read my stuff. My first novel was written -- well my first and only novel, *A Superb Obituary* -- was written in the Marines, yeah. So yeah.

Rose:
So. Okay, so.

Redmond:
And we have the manuscript in the [Eugene B. Redmond] Collection, of that first novel.

Rose:
Oh really? That was never published though, right?

Redmond:
No, no no. It's just short of 200 pages.

Rose:
Wow. Substantial.

Redmond:
You know. I call it a training novel.

Rose:
What was it about?

Redmond:
It was a kind of cloak and dagger, love story. I was reading, I hadn't been directed, you know. Until I got in the Marine Corps, I had read a novel by Faulkner, but I thought, it was kind of a potboiler, you know, I mean. So I didn't realize that Faulkner was as important literarily. (laughs) Really until I got, well getting out of the Marine Corps and then when I got to college 'cause I read a couple of novels that were closer to the stuff. That Dashiell Hammet, and uh, oh, the man that had the detective named Hammer. Before your time, but.

Rose:
Sam Spade?

Redmond:
Yeah, Sam Spade novels.

Rose:
Peter Marlowe?

Redmond:
Yeah I read him, but the one that I really liked was. … *One Lonely Night*, was the title of one. *House on a Hill*. I can't think of it right now [Mickey Spillane]. Anyway, I was reading detective fiction. Now Sherlock Holmes I loved early on. I was reading his stuff too.

0:41:10 [Work at the Human Development Corporation; Washington University]

Rose:
Okay, well we should probably continue. So after you graduated SIUE [Southern Illinois University Edwardsville], went to Wash U [Washington University in St. Louis], and got your master's and then, then you ended up becoming a teacher-counselor at the Experiment in Higher Education pretty soon after it began, right?

Redmond:
Yes, yes.

Rose:
Why do you think you decided to become a teacher-counselor at EHE?

Redmond:
Well you know after I left Wash U I became, I had a number of jobs by the way, maybe we can go into it later, having to do with writing and then bordered on activism and social development, cultural awareness. I'll just sort of run through. Some were simultaneous with my work in journalism and some came afterwards.

I worked one summer for the Human Development Corporation which was the name of the St. Louis anti-poverty agency. That was a Great Society that Kennedy -- and New Frontier -- that Kennedy and Johnson, you know, projected and set up. And I wrote $11 million-worth of proposals that one summer. So I gained a knowledge of proposal-writing then. Just quickly: What you would do was, the program was aimed at creating jobs. And actually empowering people who normally wouldn't have been empowered: single mothers, and some retirees, and young people, there were street academies, neighborhood opportunity sectors. So people would come to me or be sent to me and then explain to me what they wanted to do. Like if two barbers wanted to train say ten barbers over say eight weeks training them, or three months, train young men and women to cut hair. I would then interview them and write the proposal. And the proposal had certain steps, same kind of steps that proposals have today where your theoretical overlay and then you describe what was going to happen and you put equipment and budget. And so, and I'd knock that out and then go on to the next one. The next person might say, "Okay we're going to upholster furniture. I've got three assistants and I want to train twelve people or eight people to do this." And they explain their business to me carefully, right. So then you know that would happen. And so it went on like that. Maybe somebody was going to do summer program sports and literacy program for girls or boys in a park or playground. So I wrote $11 million which was a lot of money then, $11 million-worth of proposals. I also became the director of the Head Start or preschool program for Grace Hill Settlement House in St. Louis. That was after I finished the summer work writing of proposals and in part while I was at Wash U, 'cause I finished my courses.

Interestingly enough, and one thing I wanted to say about SIUE, I was intimidated when I got to Wash U. I remember when I got the scholarship I rode over with some friends of mine, rode up Lindell. We used to go down Lindell. It was like a date, you borrowed your uncle's car or somebody's car and you get your girlfriend or boyfriend and you'd go down Lindell and that was a date, looking at those houses. Especially after you crossed Kingshighway like "Woo!" and each one had a carriage house in the back, you know? So when I got the scholarship I remember driving there with my then girlfriend driving, I did it several times with friends, straight up to Wash U. And since I was an English major I knew that Wash U had been founded by T.S. Eliot's grandfather. And I applied to like 33 schools. Later on I felt so sorry for my teachers because they were all using typewriters. And I didn't really take that into consideration. You know I applied to Princeton, you know, and everywhere. And one of my teachers who had gone to Wash U said -- well actually he said it and two other teachers co-signed what he said -- that the best school for what you want is right over the [Mississippi] River. I'm thinking, like "Oh, I can go way away somewhere." But at the same time I was sort of grounded here because you know I was working, you know, and doing things in the community and so on. So I rode straight out and you know Lindell ends at Wash U. I was like "Wow!" and walked around the campus. This was like the summer before I was going

to go there. Wow, looking at the buildings and thinking. And so that was a high, one of the highlights of my senior year. And graduation.

0:47:13 [Head Start program; Experiment in Higher Education]

Redmond:
But anyway, also, I directed this Head Start program and I was there, let's see. Before the Head Start program I worked for the Institute, the Sociological Institute at SIU [Southern Illinois University]. It was in a house in Edwardsville. 'Cause when I graduated there were only two buildings on this campus, I think I told you that before. There was only the Peck Building and Lovejoy Library. So Peck had everything, it had administration and classrooms, and, you know. So, so I was working here but it was on the outskirts of the campus, in one of the homes. And we were doing a fifty-year population projection of the state of Illinois. I was feeding data into computers. The computers were the size of refrigerators. (laughs) The old 1600, 1501, 1600 -- did you ever see one of those? So I had that job before I went to Grace Hill Settlement House, which was run by St. Louis Presbytery and had seven centers. I asked the man, "How did I get a job running a Head Start program when I have no background working with youngsters?" Or I didn't get the credits needed to even teach in public schools. And he said to me, "You're a journalist and you know deadlines." So I said okay. I still didn't quite get it, as to why I was hired. So I had that job for about a year and a half. And it was while I was there that I interviewed with the Experiment in Higher Education based at Tenth Street Tech, and got the job as a teacher-counselor.

Interesting program. Exciting, daring, a richly conceived, oh by three brilliant men: Hyman Frankel -- Dr. Hyman Frankel, a Dr. Donald Henderson, and a Dr. Edward Crosby. And the idea was to take forty students who, most of whom would not have considered going to college, and if they had they might not be admitted. And guarantee in the school and the world that when we finished with them they'd be ready for a junior year. Might take two years, might take three, might even take four. But when they left us they would be ready for a junior year anywhere. Harvard, Oxford, Spellman, U of I. That was ambitious, you know, that's what we did.

And that's where I met Henry Dumas; Joyce Latna [spelling?], the great sociologist who had written a book about the socialization process of black girls, teen girls, based on her research at Pruitt-Igoe project, housing project in St. Louis. Had been a neighbor of mine while I was at Wash U, so we knew each other already. But I met a number of different exciting people, ex-patriots, South African ex-patriots, people in exile. There was a cross-section of students and faculty, mostly black students but not exclusively so. Katherine Dunham's Performance Training Center, which arrived the same year. Actually the Experiment in Higher Education or EHE set up shop in '66 and then started to hire -- actually '65 the negotiations began and then shop was set up in '66.

The teacher-counselor was seen as a very unique person, you know, somebody with street smarts and intellectual tools. And each person was picked, the three administrators were like that, they'd come out of something call the World Planning Organization, which was based in D.C., consulting firm. And so that's what they, we even had one teacher-counselor who was an ex-convict. So that's where we, and

then we assembled these men and women, mostly young men and women under forty and started the daily process where the teacher was a counselor, they would counsel with the teacher.

So there was a three tiered approach, you know, in terms of staff and administratively. You had a teacher-counselor at the very bottom there, working with those students, literally counseling those students. Next you had a smaller group called curriculum specialists or designers. These were the people who, with the advice and consent of the both the teacher-counselors and the administrators, shook up the first two years of courses. Shook them up and kind of cut like dice and redistributed the general education curriculum, you know. What should a student know by the time he or she gets to the junior year, and how can we make sure these students know that, based on where they come from. And then the third stage of course was the administrators.

Rose:
We're going to have to take a break here pretty soon but I just kind of wanted to follow up on something that you just said, about, you know, making, making the courses relevant to the students. And I think in an interview with Sascha Feinstein you said something like it was almost like a very early black studies program?

Redmond:
Exactly.

Rose:
You know, and I think around the same time black studies programs were just getting started out in California, so this was sorta, sort of like that.

Redmond:
Exactly. In fact I say that we were, we were the first. You know there are several that compete: San Francisco State, UCLA/USC you know, that southern California, and us. Now we didn't get as much publicity for black studies because we weren't avowedly that, but that's what it was. And even the few white students that were in the program lapped it up. Because you were getting what you would get in a general education program, but at the same time readying for a degree, you know readying for the last two years of school, they were getting this all this hip stuff, you know all this soul stuff. And the restaurants around, you know the soul food restaurants that were around. And working on integrating or making more open and more inclusive the different establishments that ringed, ringed the university, ringed the campus you know. Yeah, it certainly was. And that's another aspect that can be talked about another time. The curriculum. What did the curriculum look like, what did it sound like, what did it smell like, what did it taste like. What did, what was Katherine Dunham's role in the curriculum. What was EHE's role in PATC? PATC was under EHE, and that created some tension. I remember hearing and overhearing things and I straddled both. I was a senior consultant to Katherine Dunham and I was a teacher-counselor and later director of language workshops in EHE. Later poet-in-residence and director of language workshop. After Henry Dumas died, so for the last year and a half that's what I did, you know.

I also learned to write a resume. 'Cause you know you didn't, you really don't -- up until recently you didn't learn to write a resume and you didn't learn to write a syllabus. You just went through school; you had to do it on your own. One of the things that I did after EHE was like consult with people on doing syllabi and resumes. When I first -- Dr. Crosby said to me write a resume, we want to get you cited for, you know, poet-in-residence, director of language workshop. And I said Okay, so I gave him a paragraph, and he said -- he interviewed me. I told him, I said, "Well, I did this stuff in the community but that was Negro stuff, you know. They don't want to hear about that up here." And he said, "Put that down." So I came back with like two pages. He interviewed me again and asked me about my life. "Well, I did this in the Marine Corps and I used to write, published in this, that." [Crosby said,] "Put that down." I came back, I had six pages. He interviewed me again; he pushed me to eleven pages.

Rose:
Oh my goodness.

Redmond:
He wanted something very meaty to you know send up to the hill as here. And ended up with eleven pages; that just astounded me. You know I mean the awards I won over at Wash U in writing, you know I didn't think that was, you know you have your degree and scholarships, fellowships and that's it. He wanted different things that I did, the papers, and the columns that I wrote and all that. So that's one of the more memorable experiences that I had.

0:58:22 [The 1940s and 1950s; meeting Katherine Dunham]

(interrupted for a break)

Rose:
I guess the next thing we were going to talk about was your relationship with Katherine Dunham and how you, how you first met her. There's a lot of materials in your Collection [the Eugene B. Redmond Collection] about Katherine Dunham, so could you talk about you know how you met her and her influence on you.

Redmond:
Sure, sure. Let me just back up quickly to the 1940s. I was, during the period of segregation we had separate institutions and I would go to -- and publications which, some of which we still have -- but I would go to the movies, and the movies had often what they would call shorts, movie house shorts, these would be like little cartoons but also newsreels about what was happening in the world, with an emphasis on black people in the black movies in the black neighborhoods. So I would see Miss Dunham dancing, there'd be actual newsreels, well naturally because there was no DVD and all that stuff. (laughs) But, so between the movies, the magazines in the forties and fifties, *Ebony Magazine*, *Negro Digest*, magazine called *Sepia*, one call *Bronze Thrills*, the black newspapers like the *Atlanta World* and the *Chicago Defender*, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, the Philadelphia paper, which came into the shops and drugstores in the black neighborhood, the black newspapers. And the radio programs, we got

everything we had Cab Calloway, we got Duke Ellington, you know we got what black troops were doing in the war, we got everything, everything, Pearl Bailey. We knew Pearl Bailey was married to a white man, you know. Louie Bellson the drummer, you know all this stuff came into our community. So I knew who Katherine Dunham was when she got here. That was a sense of pride to me, you know whenever somebody said "Who is she?" and I would say who she was. And I was into intellectual pursuits and already had a master's degree in English when I met her so I was, you know, I had a few things going for me.

Anyway, I had, I met Miss Dunham through her, through the Performing Arts Training Center, which she was just organizing. She had come into the state, her state, her native state, to choreograph and stage the opera Faust at SIUC [Southern Illinois University Carbondale], '64-'65, and she worked her way on up, you know, moved around a bit, and then came as artist-in-residence to SIUE [Southern Illinois University Edwardsville]. Which still was not SIUE yet, SIU, still it was just becoming SIUE, still, you know Cougars [the SIUE mascot] instead of Saluki [the SIUC mascot]. So I went to one of the, there were welcoming parties and I went to a couple of receptions for her and I went to observe, to watch the drummers and the dancers, and I met her and at the same time I told her who I was and what I did as a poet. We started talking about T.S. Eliot, she had met T.S. Eliot, she knew a lot about literature. Found out that we'd been in Japan at the same time. We didn't see each other but I'd seen some reference to her in the public tour and the publications. She was there in 1959 and that was when she wrote *Touch of Innocence*, she wrote her book, her first of a series of biographies, more or less, on up to *Island Possessed*. And so we talked about it. And one of the more memorable pictures in the museum is her, her in flight, near a huge statue of Buddha, wonderful photo. It's almost like she's just flying past the statue you know. Anyway, so that's the background.

When Miss Dunham, she asked me at the same time, I met her and she asked me to become a senior consultant to help her put together proposals that were going to Danforth, Rockefeller, the proposals asked for $400,000 and they were awarded, they were funded, and they were annually renewable as I said. So I helped write some of it and put some components in. She asked me to be senior consultant as I said at the same time I was interviewing with EHE and being hired. So I started working with Miss Dunham that summer of '67 but didn't go to EHE until the fall of the academic year when the academic year began.

Meanwhile Miss Dunham, several things happened. One was the rebellion that took place in July of '67, (inaudible) Miss Dunham got here. Miss Dunham, when she first came to Metro East she went to Alton and set up a little museum and a home there. And then she, she has roots there, back from her stepmother. And that, they came through here going from Chicago to Alton, they came through East St. Louis, and when Miss Dunham was in her teens that would have been like 1925. And she talked about a Rosa Parks-type incident which involved a bus driver telling her to go to the back of the bus, and her mother, her stepmother saying, "Katherine don't you move." And so it was a sort of standoff between the bus driver and Miss Dunham, or the bus driver and the mother. You know, so she's doing this, doing that, (moves from side to side) finally she stayed where she was. But she said, she recalls it as a Rosa

Parks-type incident but it wasn't time for it to get the kind of exposure that Rosa Parks got, it was thirty years later. So anyway, she had roots in the area.

1:06:32 [1967 riot; *Ode to Taylor Jones III*]

Redmond:
Then I began, two things happened that affected her life and my life and the life of the community. One was the rebellion, called a riot, that took place in July, exactly one month to the day that a race riot took place fifty years before that in 1917. I have some talks built around that and what that might mean, you know. What the racial memory was doing with that. Exactly fifty years later, the month later, the same day give or take a day or two, that this eruption in the black community. Fifty years after black people were slaughtered, literally, in 1917. Anyway, that happened and then in the fall -- that impacted Miss Dunham a great deal -- and in the fall of 1967 Miss Dunham witnessed an outpouring of grief, young men and women marching in the street with torches and flashlights after Taylor Jones a local hero activist leader who was chair of the midwestern region of CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality? And had been my classmate at SIUE [Southern Illinois University Edwardsville] he was killed, he and his wife were killed on their way to Chicago, killed in a car accident. Under what we viewed as suspicious circumstances.

So Miss Dunham mounted a play called *The Ode* -- ballet -- *The Ode to Taylor Jones III*. And I worked with her on that, and I was in the play. I had an important voice in the play and did some narrating also. And I remember the line that (in a singsong rap style) "Taylor Jones said 'When I die/I don't want my brothers to cry." (accompanies recitation with arm movements) "'When I go out oh death to meet/I want fire and dancing in the streets.' "And, "Taylor Jones was never caught/in life or after never bought./All he wanted in that last hour/was one final word: 'Blaaack Power.'" And (in a dramatic voice) "Night. A highway in the rain they met. Death was taken by surprise, but not my brother. 'Let's have no weeping in the streets,' he said," and then that (in a singsong rap style) "Taylor Jones said 'When I die/I don't want my brothers to cry." (a library announcement over the speaker system interrupts) "'When I go out oh death to meet/I want fire and dancing in the street.'" And these were dancers. I'm, you know, watering down the. … (laughs) This incredible choreography that Miss Dunham put. I'm saying her words, she wrote the section I just was reciting, the poetic. …

So we performed it here in the region, took it on a tour of the East Coast, a tour of the Midwest, the ballet *Ode to Taylor Jones III*. Sixteen high schools in Connecticut alone, we toured up and down the East Coast, New England, the Southeast, with that, with that ballet and some other pieces, some other smaller pieces of, that had been developed within the Performing Arts Training Center. And the EHE administrators, my bosses, let me go on the road to do it, and some of the EHE people. In fact they were, they were cross-listed, many of the students, I would say half of the students in EHE were also students in the Performing Arts Training Center, because Miss Dunham taught in EHE, taught anthropology and dance and some cultural history. And then there was some, there was speaking courses, courses in speaking Wolof, from Senegal, Haitian Creole, and French. So on another occasion we can talk about the curriculum. Basket weaving. Capoeira, Afro-Brazilian martial arts.

1:11:48 [Interaction between EHE, PATC, and the East St. Louis community; writing proposals for Katherine Dunham]

Rose:
Would you say that Katherine Dunham sort of introduced you to or at least expanded your awareness of, like, Pan-African type of ideas?

Redmond:
Of course, of course. Of course. We were reading Pan-African texts in EHE, that's something we really have to spend some time talking about sometime? But we were reading those texts, you know, EHE was the heart or intellectual, you know, more proscribed course of study. Similar to what you get in an academy. Miss Dunham, it was, it was no, no less rigorous but the emphasis was on performance and culture, the cultural arts. And so you performed. PATC performed what EHE did in classes, except that both did some of each, because we also had plays within EHE, that included some of the people from PATC but they were EHE in origin and design.

I thought it was very fascinating too, some of the approaches that we took. For example, we did one play that we needed a casket, went to the funeral home, got the casket, that kind of thing, you know. They delivered the casket, you know. So it was very, very community-oriented. Very community-directed, very community-sprung, very, everything was so indigenous as I used to say. And whatever we needed, we would just go out to a restaurant, we would go to an office, we would go to a church, we needed fans, you know, to approximate a choir, we just went right out. 'Cause we didn't have any standing things, you know, costumes and all of that. So, robes, we'd go to the church. We'd go to the judges' chambers, (laughs) get a bench brought over. I remember that very vividly how we went out and solicited those kinds of things and how happy the community was to have, you know and how it broadened the audience. And the things that I learned, I learned about audience development, you know what you see now harks back, hearken back to that. My, my training and development of audiences.

I also, from Miss Dunham I got what I call post-graduate work, one, in audience development, administering cultural programs. I'd already done that proposal writing in '64 but then I learned to write proposals for more money, individual proposals. The proposals I wrote at the Poverty Program, for the Poverty Program, the Human Development Corporation, they were, very few of them were hundreds of thousands of dollars but I wrote so many. For Miss Dunham we were writing like 300, 4 or $500,000, now we didn't get them all, some of them were watered down. Like the Ford Foundation, they reduced the amount.

1:15:49 [Redmond demonstrates a dance; the 1960s]

(interrupted to adjust camera position to record dance demonstration)

Redmond:
(Redmond is standing) I later encouraged, early on and later encouraged my writers to take courses in dance, take Dunham technique. And study martial arts. And voice. Because my writers perform in a way that a lot of writers don't. They write well and they perform, and it's something that I got, I brought from Katherine Dunham. The whole idea of if you know your audience, and you know your culture, and you bring them something that's similar what they see in church, you know. You know, it's their theater. So it's the people's theater. So if you want to, if you may be reading, some people get down and they do this. (crouches slightly and swings his arm) But we will often do the yonvalou which is an homage to Damballah, the Haitian deity, represented by a snake. By serpentine movements, and it's like this. (demonstrates the yonvalou dance) Torso. The pelvic. You see the serpentine? (continues dancing)

Rose:
Let me give you more room.

Redmond:
(finishes the dance and remains standing) And you go all the way down to the floor. As you see, I would go. … So, and there's several different movements that I learned, and each one correlates to a deity in one of the pantheons of one of the religions that, in the Third World or the Pan-African world. So you have to know, you know, which orisha, which loa, which deity you're going to evoke, you know. (begins dancing) That was, pardon me, invoke, well evoke? Invoke, you know. (laughs) (finishes the dance by flapping his bent arms to mimic a bird) And so that's, that's something that the cross-fertilization of the poet's work and the dancer's work or the poet's work and the choreographer's work is very central to my being, what I became.

Later I talk about how I was born again in the sixties? And I think so many people from my generation were born again in sixties. Whether it was a feminist thrust, a womanist -- Alice Walker -- a womanist thrust, whether it was a cultural thrust, if it was a cross-gender thrust, maybe it was activism in gay communities. Whatever it was, it was cross-fertilized, people had to somehow stage it and have a narrative or narratives. And so all of this worked quite handily as we were recruiting and raising consciousness and informing and forming the people, you know. (sits down) It went along with street academies that were cropping up at the time, even in, like with the Black Panthers there was a breakfast program, there was an education program, there was a, a, there was the protest part of it. What they say called ME and PE, military education, you know, how do you, self defense, and, and PE is political education. So you have different troupes for different elements, for different things, you know, different components, different phases.

1:19:54 [Managing the PATC road company; stranded in a bus during a snowstorm]

Redmond:
So those are some of the things that I learned from Miss Dunham. On the day-to-day basis there were the classes, as I said, basket-weaving, languages, African and multicultural thought or philosophy, attitude. There was the costume and costume-making. When went hit the road we traveled with people who could sew, people who could. … Miss Dunham was like a lay doctor 'cause she studied with doctors, and she could get equipment, and she could even give injections. 'Cause she was always -- she talks about this in her books and talked about it to us. You know the different thing, ailments that plagued people in Third World countries that we take a pill and would knock out, they might suffer with for weeks. Sores and a need for salves and bandages and you know all kinds of things like that. And, and portable food, you know, compact containers they kept -- so she made sure that those were, those kind of things were available to the troupes that moved about.

So I was the manager of the road company. And you know, everything from discipline to making sure that everybody was ready to hit that stage. And I would have to go in, plow in among those dancers and they'd be in various stages of being clothed or unclothed, and sometimes they'd laugh at me 'cause I may be the only male in there. But you know, if they were all, if they were going to put on corsets for a can-can, I mean, “We need some help!” you know. (laughs) They may be sweating, in a dressing room or backstage they might be sweating with their birthday suits on as we say. And your thing was to get them zipped up because you had like, "Three minutes!" somebody said, "Two minutes!" somebody said (in a high, panicked voice) "Forty-five seconds, oh gosh!" (gestures as if zipping up a dress) So you know (claps) back out for the next number, or for the, your segment of that larger ballet. So it was, it was exciting.

Rose:
It sounds exciting.

Redmond:
There's so many anecdotes you could talk about that. I mean the drummers getting used to coming on stage with no shoes, 'cause that's the way it was. You didn't go out there with shoes on. We had one dancer who liked to wear. … You know she was a very beautiful -- and she's in her sixties now and we joke about it. She wanted to wear these huge rings. She was always getting these gifts from men. (laughs) And she was just a, a real fancy lady you know, so she had these diamonds, and I said, “Look, the dance is Mali circa 1400. You can't wear that diamond ring.” [She said,] “I ain't, I ain’t takin’ my ring off, then somebody, for somebody to steal!” I said, “No you can't do it, you can't go out there in that ring. This is a period, I mean Miss Dunham, this research has been done.” And she always wore a fur coat sweeping the floor, I mean she was just a interesting lady, but we would just have to say, “You can't wear that necklace in a dance that takes place in Medieval Africa. (laughs) Can't wear a tiara that came from Tiffany's.”

I'm just thinking of different kinds of things, including the three days that we were stranded at the airport, I think I mentioned that? Yeah for three days -- two and a half, three days -- we were stranded outside of Kennedy Airport. We were only about a hundred yards from the actual airport, but, but snow was up to the window of the bus. That the troupe was riding in, right? Miss Dunham had gone on ahead in a plane, you know, so she wasn't on the bus. I was manager of the road company. We had two kids that we were tutoring, that would go on the road, they had a little act, two boys, they slept up in the baggage compartments. You know they're not, you know on the buses in those days they weren't like -- the whole rack was open, they would just put them up there like they were in hammocks, you know. And the Beatles and, who was it? The Beatles and Diana Ross and the Supremes were in the airport, so they gave impromptu performances, 1968 [possibly February 1969], cars all around us covered with snow, some people died. Snow up to the window of the bus. We reached out when our water ran out? Our bottled water ran out? We reached outside the bus window and grabbed snow for, to hydrate ourselves, right? 'Cause you could. … (gestures as if reaching and grabbing some snow) Then we had had a bunch of Hershey bars and bags of peanuts and chips of various kinds, so, and Twinkies and stuff, we had a bunch of that stuff so we were able to survive for a day or so. And then I sent a search party out, you know gave them a little lesson in, in how to read where the sun was and directions like from Marine Corps days, using a compass. And so I talked to them and sent two or three strapling young male dancers up to the airport. I mean these waded through snow like you wade through water. And they came back, most stuff was sold out. 'Cause people in the airport, they were buying everything! Everything in the vending machines, everything in the, you know in the cafeterias and the snack bars, and the bars; people were drinking you know (laughs) they were drinking ourselves (laughs) into oblivion because we're holed up here in this snowbound airport. So they came back with the backpacks with some stuff.

It was a, it was a unique experience to say the least. And I see people today who were there and they say "'68! Kennedy airport!" you know what they're talking -- they don't even have to say anything else. "1968 Kennedy airport" meant they were on that bus, stranded, and as I say while some people around us were dying. And cars like Volkswagens, which was popular in the late sixties, they're coming back now, but. … Cars like Volkswagens and lower, I mean most of the cars were covered because if the snow was up to the window of the bus, you know, that's higher than most automobiles.

Rose:
Right

Redmond:
So that was one of our experiences. We performed for Coretta Scott King, shortly after Martin Luther King was killed, and so, so those are some of the things that the PATC did and Miss Dunham did.

1:27:36 [Notable East St. Louisans; Dunham consecrating new businesses]

(recording interrupted)

Rose:
Actually something that you mentioned made me think of something. Your book, the *Drumvoices* about the African American poetry over two hundred years, and then *Drumvoices Revue*, the word 'drumvoices.' Was that something that you started to think about, knowing Katherine Dunham?

Redmond:
That's right, that's right.

Rose:
The idea about 'drumvoices'?

Redmond:
Had I not met Miss Dunham I probably would not have used the word. Because I'd come out of a fairly rigorous study in modernism, classical and modernism, in literature. You know, at Wash U. And Wash U was a stiff experience. You know, it had its merits but it was, it was at a time when the world was on fire and I was, said to one of my advisors, "I'm tired of reading dead white poets," you know. There was, "There's something happening out here," I said to him, "blowing up." In fact I have a little poem that says "In the sixties we stopped reading dead white poets and started reading dead black poets," and the little poem goes, "The difference was that the dead black poets were still alive," meaning that what they were saying, all that talk about lynching and the struggle, you know, the kinds of topics, the kinds of images and allusions and references that they were using were still with us, the issues were still with us, and that's what is meant by saying, well, "the dead black poets were still alive." and so, I just said to him, " I'm going to get out of here and see what's going on." And so, yeah, we were, we were really in the whirlwind as some of our colleagues would say, and were saying, we were in the whirlwind at that time. So yes the, the -- Miss Dunham took what we, what was happening in the street. In fact one of her plays is called *The Lesson*. *The Lesson* was actors talking about -- and kids talking about -- learning to do the, the work that needed to be done to free people, to advance the movement, to advance the struggle, to continue the struggle. And so that was, you know, part of the -- *The Lesson*. That's what *The Lesson* was about, a little play called -- playlet called -- *The Lesson*.

The, there were so many things going on. Miss Dunham picked up a lot from us too. She brought us sophistication; I thought that was very interesting. I mean East St. Louis had a tradition of some sophisticated people. Some people who went off to Julliard, people who went off to U of I [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign], people went off to the little black colleges, the HBCUs, people who had performed in, in plays and movies, *Showboat* -- Barbara Ann Teer, Miles Davis, Eugene Haynes. A man named John Hicks had worked for the United States Information Agency, later becoming Deputy Director, Associate Director; Reginald Petty was Deputy Director of the Peace Corps, spent fourteen years in Africa, you know, I had my -- you know, I'd been going to Wash U. People doing -- I mean we

had people doing some of everything. But as far as the rank and file people? Miss Dunham brought a kind of sophistication, intellectual urbanity, the way she talked which blended all the different languages that she spoke and all the places she had been. And so you listened, like “Where is she from?” the language she's using. She brought *Missa Luba*, a dance ballet; she brought *Psychedelia*, a dance ballet. She created a whole ballet play around a local hero. I mean he was a local hero but then Katherine Dunham enshrines him in a stage play and takes it across the country and the world. And we're saying “Oh wow, he's ours and she's doing this?”

Whenever there was the opening or the installation of some new business -- you know, fast food, the fast food industry was coming, so there're two or three that opened while Miss Dunham, not long after Miss Dunham got here. She would bring a dancer, she would expunge the, the evil spirits or call up the native spirits, lighting some powder or a candle and have the drummer, you know, do something to bless the place. People had never seen that before! Here's Kentucky Fried Chicken opening and right there in the, in the area where people sit and eat or order, Miss Dunham has these drummers and these dancers in the native costumes, she might have two Native Americans and three or four young black girls and a, four drummers and a (inaudible) come in and they consecrate the place, right? It happened frequently! When the Old Man River establishment opened Wyvetter Younge -- was a collaboration between Wyvetter Younge and R. Buckmaster Fuller -- and she had the drummers come out, she had the service, the king's drummer or the oba's drummer or the chief’s drummer come out and bless the place and expunge the, you know, any evil spirits. And call in the good spirits from the Native American culture, the African culture and the slave ancestors, you know.

And all that was taking place across -- I mean you couldn't walk more than three or four blocks in East St. Louis at that time and not hear some drums coming out of a window, off of a balcony, from a porch, from a rooftop, from a basement. And Africans walking around and Indians walking around, in the neighborhood! Living in the neighborhood! I mean you saw some as missionaries and here and there but nothing like that. We had a whole company of people come in; they live in the community, get put up in houses. I mean that just transformed the city. What we had been used to in my generation of youth was hearing the “Flight of the Bumblebee” come out, you know, of a window. Or seeing young ladies tip off to take their ballet lessons. Like, you see them with their shoes, (stands up) you know with the tips? And the little skirts? And they'd be going off, (begins walking) walking down the street, (stops walking) to get a bus or meet the, whoever’s going to pick them up, to go to downtown to take ballet. From a German or someone upstairs over the bank in one of those studios. They'd disappear into that white world and come back and you see them twirling (twirls, stands on tiptoe) on occasion in the yard or on the porch, and that was the culture. The other culture, our real culture, the blues and jazz and rhythm and blues, (sits down) that you could dance by or sing to, we took that for granted. It was during that period that we started saying 'black' instead of ‘Negro.’

Rose:
So you think Katherine Dunham helped people feel more proud of their own culture? Or realize the value of their own culture?

Redmond:
Of course, of course, you know. I mean, when I when I say, we used to beat on boxes and oatmeal boxes and tubs. But when you go, when we get to a point when as I said you can't walk too far in any direction without hearing some drums, and these are authentic African drums. Or facsimiles thereof. Then you know that this has, this movement has penetrated, has pervaded the culture.

1:36:39 [Mor Thiam; people Dunham brought to East St. Louis; comparison of Redmond and Dunham]

Redmond:
And people coming with names like Mor Thiam and Rene Calvin from Haiti, and you had to get to know these names, you know. Louis, Rachelle Louis [spelling?] from Haiti -- I mean there were names that we didn't, people didn't use before, they didn't pronounce them before. And *Missa Luba*. And S*haka Zulu*, the names of dances and so on, you know. *Woman with a Cigar* even, like, one of Dunham's pieces of choreography, right? So you had these people coming from all these cultures, you had them wearing what they wore at home. You had them speaking -- I was assigned to Mor Thiam, he didn't have one word of English when he got here in '68. You know he'd be somewhere and he would call me, he knew how to call me, but he didn't know how to tell me to come and pick him up. So I would tell him to go outside and draw what he saw on the street sign and bring it back in to the phone … (recording edited per interviewee) … he would end up somewhere, he'd be in Brooklyn, Illinois, he'd end up somewhere and people would have gone to work. He'd stayed overnight at some people's homes, you know, and he would have gone to work, they would have gone to work or whatever. So I instructed him what to do. And he would go outside and draw the letters that were on the street sign, come back in, and he'd begun to learn to say some of the letters. He'd describe to me what the letters looked like. "Line. A line, line," and then I said, "Oh you're in Brooklyn, Illinois, and you are on Alpine [Adams] Street, so I'll be there in about ten, fifteen minutes." This, you know, it was just. Little things, like that you know? And that's how on several occasions I was able to go and collect him.

So you have all this, these are people, Dunham's people. These are people that Dunham brought here. And there's a woman named Nordall, [spelling?] Indian, who was a dramatist and she did plays. Miss Dunham made it a point of mixing the cultures, you know. We had a French dancer who choreographed one of my pieces with Dunham's assistance and supervision; she choreographed a poem of mine. There was, dancers came from Brazil, our chief teacher of Capoeira, the Afro-Brazilian martial arts? Was a man, was a doctor from Brazil. So, okay now EHE complemented that because some of the teachers were from South Africa and other parts of Africa and some came from other countries. And there were European Americans along with Black Americans. So it was a time like no other time in the city. There was just no other, no other time in memory -- well there had never been a time unless you go back to the original days when there were Native Americans and then the French Jesuits who came, people who came down from the north, St. Lawrence and down from Chicago and the, and the people, French people who came from Louisiana, and the settlers who came in from Ellis Island, you know, the Indian fighters like James Piggott, which is one of the names East St. Louis used to be called by, 'Piggott.' And there was a Piggott's Landing on the riverfront. And all these people, John Robinson, a black man who had fought with the Union in the Civil War and witnessed the execution of John Brown, you know at

Harper's Ferry, that was early East St. Louis. You know, Native Americans were visible and moving about. And then of course you know you get the flight of the whites and then you get the kind of East St. Louis that Dunham helped to jump start or trigger and started and, and come to us anew.

Rose:
I kind of -- as you're talking about this I know that you've spoken of yourself as a son of Katherine Dunham. And I think about how you've brought so many people to the East St. Louis area, just various writers from across the country, you know, looking through the photos that you've taken, you know of all the different people that you've brought here. And you've brought some people I think, some East St. Louis people to other places, like some, some of the people with the [Eugene B. Redmond] Writer's Club, you know, that you know you've traveled with them, you know to -- so I guess I'm seeing that in a way you're sort of carrying on Katherine Dunham's legacy in terms of bring the world to East St. Louis and bringing East St. Louis to the world. That you're, you sort of have followed in her footsteps in that way.

Redmond:
Yeah, I think so. I think so. And I, it's funny because Miss Dunham kept telling me to leave and see the world. I've seen the world. And then right after I left she called me and said, "What is your commitment to East St. Louis?" she would call me like every other day, and I said, "It's strong and it's deep." [She replied] "Well, when're you coming back?" She was the one who said "Leave," you know, "get out I've seen the world, I've done everything now you get out, you don't want to get stuck here." And so I took off, went to Oberlin for a year as writer-in-residence, then I went on to California. But Miss Dunham would call me every few days and ask me, "When are you coming back?" (laughs) So it's kind of interesting, well I said, "You know, you're the person who told me to leave." [She said] "I know it, but," you know, so.

And, and the same thing that she did is something that I'm doing, like Miss Dunham was always going somewhere. And I'm always going somewhere, I always say, you know, to people, "You know, I can, I can stay, here, and I can stay other places too, but I need a pair of skates, I need a sled, I need a helicopter or bus or a car or a train or a van a tank a (inaudible) (laughs) 'cause I need to move, you know, and then come back. So you gotta give me some way to get to other places. I'll be back, but I've gotta go too, you know. And that's, that's the way I've always been. Miss Dunham was like that too.

She took us to see Erich Fromm, I think I mentioned that, and we spent three days with Erich Fromm, he was the reigning psychiatrist at the time. The successor to Freud, you know in some people's minds. They talk about mob violence and movements and history, and you know, psychology of groups and how a group can be, you know, a peaceful group can be turned into a mob by agent provocateurs, and people who jump the gun.

1:44:02 [Associates of Dunham; “Black Witch of Tenth Street”]

Redmond:
So that, that was good. I mean I helped recruit --and there were a lot of wonderful people who were working with Miss Dunham. Like Darryl Braddix, whose assistance she went to when he was jailed in 1967 during, you know, his interaction with some other Black Powerites on the corner in East St. Louis. There's Ruby Street, the dancer. There's Theo Jamison, who directs the East St. Louis Performing Arts program. I mean on and on and on. Her, her confidante and assistant who died five, six years ago, Jeanelle Stovall. There's a man named Robert Lee who filmed everything, he videotaped; -- we used to say in those days "videotape" -- videotaped everything and recorded everything and on and on and on. There’s so many people that were helping, you know that served as bodyguards. I always I refer to myself as Miss Dunham's bodyguard, confidante, chauffer, translator, (laughs) you know 'cause she would ask, like "What are they saying?" I mean she'd hear what's sometimes referred to as Ebonics, she'd hear black people talking and she’d say, "Translate for me," she'd hear kids talking. And I'd tell her what was happening, 'cause it'd be speedy, speedy give and take and if you don't know it, it's so fast “Here go!” and that means “I'm going to tell you something” or “Something is about to happen.” But “Here go” -- ? You know. (laughs)

Rose:
Well we're about out of time. Was there any last thoughts you want to leave us with regarding anything that we've talked about today?

Redmond:
That learning experience, that there were a lot of people involved who left us some wonderful things to think about and some challenges, who are dead now. A lot of people helped welcome Miss Dunham: Wyvetter Younge, Lila Teer, Lena Weathers who's not dead, but she gave a reception for Miss Dunham at her home when Miss Dunham came in from Senegal where she had been, she had been an attaché to the president of Senegal at the First World Festival of African or Negro [Black] Arts in '66. Miss Dunham -- there're people that gave their lives literally for her, she did not know it, and wasn't supposed to know it. We used to drive through, by her house all day and all night, just to look make sure. There were threats; you know death threats to her and some other people because she was doing something new. And the threats came from various sources. You know they thought, some people thought like in ancient, (laughs) like in Athens when they thought that Aristotle and Plato were poisoning the minds of the youth. Well some people thought that Miss Dunham, with that voodoo. … Her nickname is the ‘Black Witch on Tenth Street.’ There's in a chapter in one book about her that's “The Black Witch of Tenth Street.”

Miss Dunham performed an incredible almost unimaginable chore or job. She came into East St. Louis, worked with all of East St. Louis but the black community primarily. If you were going to move a black community you cannot not be in a sorority, like she was. You cannot not be in a sorority; this is how black communities operate. You cannot not be in a, be married to a white [i.e. black] man. (laughs) You cannot not be a teacher. In other words, she came into a city that says," Okay the first thing you got an

education, what do you, what do you do? Do you teach? Are you a nurse? Are you in the undertaking business?" You know, at that time. "What are you doing?" (and then in a tone of disbelief) Anthropology??" (continuing) "Are you, what Christian church do you belong to?" (and then in a tone of disbelief) "Voodoo?? " Just, just think about the incredible work that this woman did. You can't do it. "Now what does your husband do?" "Oh he's white, and he's a designer." Not that people'll run you out, I'm just saying, you know. What do you -- to run a black community if you're educated, which sorority or fraternity are you in, what is your degree from, and what did you major in. What does your husband do, what does your black husband do. (laughs) What Christian, Christian church do you belong to. And I could go on; I used to have a lecture on just that, ten things. And people, you could see those people out there bowing and some shaking their head like they do in church, like women can't believe it like, how do you, how could she go there and turn, you get run out. If it'd been Detroit she'd be run out of town. You know people sort of speaking -- what do you call it, what's the word -- hypothetically. You don't do that, you don't go into the gut of a black community, you're not a Christian, you're not a soror, you're not a, a schoolteacher (laughs) or a nurse, or, you know about four things. (laughs) You're not married to a black man.

Rose:
She's very unconventional.

Redmond:
And you go into the community and organize. You want those children. So you have to get native sons and daughters, you have to pick some people that the people trust, that the people know, knew like that. So you get a representative Wyvetter Younge, who's not a representative yet, she becomes a state representative, right? But at the time she's a practicing lawyer and she works for an anti-poverty program, so. And you get these people, intellectuals, who understand, and even basic people like Darryl Braddix's mother, who didn't have all those credentials and they say, "This is good." But still you got to win them over, you know. I mean it is, it doesn't happen, and you come right up the center of that community? And sit like Buddha? Commanding all that respect? Voodoo queen? Not in the Bible Belt. (laughs)

Mary:
(laughs)

Redmond:
You get my point? I mean that just, that's an aspect that's overlooked, I mean because people, the right people just haven't looked at it. A lot of books have been written, a lot of articles have been written, but you have to understand it from the ground up. The -- you have to understand her achievement in the black community 'cause the people, the first woman superintendent of schools for example is a Delta, she's AME, talking about Dr. Lillian Parks, she (laughs) you know was a teacher before she was superintendent, she's a Delta, married to a man, you know a coach and a teacher, black, you know. And you go on and on and on, all the things that you were supposed to do. And she's powerful, maybe the most powerful woman in, in the city. But she has all those right credentials. The same thing with Dr.

Lena Weathers, you've seen her, same thing with Wyvetter: Wyvetter's an AKA, she's a lawyer married to a lawyer, that's what she was, she died, you know. On up the line. Here's somebody runs right through the center of it with none of those things.

Rose:
She still got it done.

Redmond:
Yeah, yeah, I mean it's just. That in itself needs to be, needs to have a book written about it. Just that point. You know, looking at the community and looking at her feat, you know. The Black Witch of Tenth Street.

Rose:
Remarkable woman.

Redmond:
Yeah, yeah.

Rose:
Well I think that's a good note to end on for today.

Redmond:
Yeah.

1:54:19 [End]