RESH: Our interview today, July 6, 1970, is with Mr. Sidney R. Redmond, a prominent St. Louis lawyer and early civil rights advocate. It would take a good portion of this tape merely to list Mr. Redmond's accomplishments. Just a few of these include chief council for Lloyd Gaines, past president of the local NAACP from 1938 to 1944, member of the board of directors of the local Urban League, past president of the board of directors of the local Urban League, past president of the National Bar Association, and member of Mayor Kaufmann's Inter-racial Committee. Mr. Redmond, could you tell us something about your early life, where you were born, something about your boyhood?

REDMOND: I was born in Jackson, Mississippi, and was reared there. It was my home until I moved to St. Louis, then I came here in 1929.

RESH: What were some of your recollections of your boyhood in Jackson, Mississippi? What was it like to grow up there?

REDMOND: Well, it was a completely isolated area with Negroes and whites and at that time, Negroes just weren't able to do a lot of things they do now. I heard any number of them in smaller places around there saying they would have to get off the sidewalks if they would meet a white person. But that was not true in the city of Jackson. I dare say in any of the cities, but in the smaller areas it was much worse, rural areas.

RESH: Could you tell us something about your father and your family? What did your father do, was he a doctor or a lawyer?

REDMOND: My father was a physician. He practiced medicine a number of years, then his health got so bad he had to give it up. Then he studied law and started practicing law.

RESH: Two occupations?

REDMOND: Well, at different times.

RESH: And where did you receive your undergraduate education?

REDMOND: I went to the public school in Jackson until my mother died, I think I was in about the seventh grade then, somewhere along there, and then I went to Tougaloo. And then I went to Rust College. And then I finished high school at Talladega.
RESH: And you decided to go to college where?


RESH: Did you receive a great deal of encouragement in this from your parents? Your father obviously wanted the best for you.

REDMOND: Surely, because he paid for it and as he was paying for it he was anxious that his son go off to school and qualify himself.

RESH: You must have been one of the, were there many Negroes at Harvard at that time?

REDMOND: I would say there were around twenty-five in all of the departments of the university. Most of them were in the college.

RESH: And then after receiving your law degree, did you come directly to St. Louis?

REDMOND: No, I practiced law in Jackson for two years.

RESH: What made you decide to come to St. Louis?

REDMOND: Well, the opportunities in St. Louis were greater than they were there. And you just had more difficulty trying a case there and getting anything like what it was worth. The jury didn't look upon a Negro as being worth anything and you could have a good case and they would give you what they thought a Negro was worth. And it was unheard of to have a Negro on any jury in Mississippi in that day.

RESH: You chose to come to St. Louis then because the opportunities seemed greater here. Did you have many acquaintances here before you came? Had you heard a great deal about St. Louis?

REDMOND: Well, I had heard about St. Louis, I guess most people in the South in those days had heard about it. But it was a large population here, and they were making money here, and where you have that, you ought to be able to go and make some yourself.

RESH: I know in some of my research I found that many Negroes came from the South to St. Louis as a result of the St. Louis World's Fair.

REDMOND: You mentioned, now, coming here to the World's Fair. When I came to St. Louis and for a number of years after I was here, they said there were more Negroes in St. Louis who were born in Mississippi than were born in Missouri.

RESH: That's right. I think the census figures would indicate that, from what I remember.

REDMOND: I just guess the people in Mississippi wanted to get in a greener pasture.

RESH: Right. So you came to St. Louis, that would have been what, about 1920 or so, would you say?
RESH: What were your impressions of the city in 1929? What was St. Louis like for black people? Was it a good city for Negroes to be in?

REDMOND: I wouldn't say it was a good city for Negroes to be in. I would say that it was a tremendous improvement over Mississippi, Jackson. But in St. Louis there wasn't a place downtown where a Negro could get a sandwich, a drink of water, go to the lavatory. So, it was no better than Mississippi in that regard, but you did have a better opportunity with practicing law because the jury would be fairer and the judge would be fairer. Let me tell you this illustration. Attorney Silas E. Garnar came from Mississippi, I knew him when I was a boy and he practiced there. I was in his office for a number of years when I came to St. Louis, and we would reminisce about things there. And he told me two very interesting things. I said to him, "Mr. Garner, I read a case of yours on a simple contract that went to the Supreme Court, how did that happen?" And he said, "That's an amusing thing. After I took it up to the Court and got it reversed, I went back before the judge on another matter and he said, "Sir, how was it you reversed me?" And he said, "Judge, you didn't read my brief. I filed the same brief in the Mississippi Supreme Court I filed with you, but you just assumed I knew no law and didn't read it." And the judge said, "I guess you're right." And another instance he told me about in Mississippi. Mississippi is one of the few states that has chancery courts and circuit courts. And most of the practice of Negro lawyers then would be before the chancery courts. They would be equitable matters, pertaining to land, divorces, and estates. And Mr. Garner had an urgent matter and tried to get the judge in his office, and they said he wasn't there. He called his home and he was out, and he left word that he was very anxious to talk with Judge Garland Lyle. And the next morning at seven o'clock. Judge Lyle called him and said, "Si, you called me. Let me tell you this, if you ever have to call me again, be sure and tell my wife that you are a nigger, because I don't want my wife calling any nigger 'mister.'"

RESH: And he always called Mr. Garner, "Si?" Never "Mr. Garner?"

REDMOND: Oh, no. They didn't call any Negro "mister."

RESH: As a matter of fact, I recall that when Booker T. Washington received an honorary degree at some university, the southern white press was somewhat relieved because they could call him "Doctor Washington" and they wouldn't have to call him "mister."

REDMOND: They never called Negroes "mister." But they do now. It's all together different now.

RESH: So you were here in 1929. The opportunities seemed to be greater in terms of quality of justice, one could expect...

REDMOND: It was a big improvement.

RESH: What were some of your first cases when you came to St. Louis? What kind of matters did you handle?

REDMOND: Well, I would handle personal injury cases, insurance cases, and I would have
some equity matters. And then later on I represented about four insurance companies.

RESH: Were these black insurance companies?

REDMOND: Colored insurance companies.

RESH: So there was a considerable Negro business community here then which needed legal services and were glad to turn to you for help.

REDMOND: Well, I don't know how glad they were to turn to me for help, but I got my share of it. And a lot of Negroes still preferred white lawyers. I believe white lawyers get at least fifty percent of divorces for Negroes in St. Louis today. And it used to be a much larger percentage. I think a lot of them think a white lawyer can do more before a prejudiced judge for them than a colored lawyer can do.

RESH: I remember that was the argument in one of your columns; you used to write a column for the St. Louis Argus during war years, a legal column.

REDMOND: "Legal Hints."

RESH: Yes, and that was I remember the content of one, or several of your columns urging area Negroes to take their legal problems to Negro attorneys and not to always have to rely upon whites. What were some of your reminiscences of the political situation in St. Louis in the 1930's in terms of the Negro population? Who were the leading Negro politicians or what ones seemed promising at the time in the 1930's? You were a Republican. . .

REDMOND: I'm a Republican. The Republicans were running St. Louis when I came. Billy Morant a constable, and Judge Turpin (Justice of the Peace).

RESH: There was a man named Harrison, wasn't there?

REDMOND: Lang Harrison. Langston Harrison. He was also a constable. And both of them were committeemen. They wielded more power in the early days than any other Negroes. But they did not try to get worthwhile positions for Negroes. They would rather get twenty-five jobs with using a mop or a broom than a few jobs with a Negro sitting behind a desk or a young lady being a secretary in an office. They wanted a volume of the cheap jobs.

RESH: What about the editors of the newspapers in St. Louis. Did you have any extensive dealings with Mr. Nathanial Sweets for example and the St. Louis American?

REDMOND: He is a good friend of mine, and has been ever since I've been here. But he is not the editor of the paper and never has been.

RESH: Oh, really?

REDMOND: No. When you use the term editor, you mean the one who writes editorials, I assume. No, Ben Young wrote a number of editorials for the paper. Sweets is a businessman, and he went out and got ads for the paper, and saw that the payroll could be met. That was a full-time job.
RESH: The history of the St. Louis American is a rather interesting paper. It was founded in the mid-1920's, I think around 1925...

REDMOND: Shortly before I came here.

RESH: ...'26, and I understand that in the founding of the paper there was some relationship with Mr. Nathan Young and Mr. Sweets with A. Phillip Randolph. Do you know anything about that?

REDMOND: No. I don't know anything about any relationship. I didn't know that A. Phillip Randolph had anything to do with that paper. Now Young, Nathan Young wrote the editorials for years for the paper and I imagine he still writes them, you know, he's a police court judge now, very capable lawyer.

RESH: Well, perhaps A. Phillip Randolph didn't have anything to do with the founding of the paper, but the St. Louis American in distinction to the Argus, was an early supporter of A. Phillip Randolph in his attempt to unionize the Sleeping Car Porters. And it seemed to be more sympathetic to him and to his views.

REDMOND: Well, there's no comparison between the Argus and the American so far as using the paper to go out and fight for Negroes is concerned. The American has lost a lot of ads because of its fight to get jobs for Negroes. It was instrumental in getting the Clerk's Circle where they formed an organization to get Negro clerks in jobs, and it put up a fight trying to get people not to go where they didn't employ them. And he lost money because of that. Sweets was instrumental in getting Negro operators in the moving picture theaters that cater to Negroes. He has been instrumental in opening up opportunities. The Argus so far as I know, was not aggressive in those days in that area.

RESH: What about the impact of the New Deal and some of its agencies on St. Louis and the welfare of St. Louis Negroes? How did you feel about that at the time or how does it seem now in retrospect?

REDMOND: Well, the New Deal did a lot of good for Negroes, but I just wonder if the over-all effect of it hasn't been detrimental. Because before that most people I believe wanted to work for a living. But since the New Deal it seems that the army of those that don't want to work for a living, just get on relief, is getting larger every year.

RESH: I suppose in the 1930's, from 1932 on through '39 and perhaps early '40, that the Democratic Party gained extensively among blacks in St. Louis.

REDMOND: It did on account of this New Deal set up. And then the fact is that the Democrats have been more generous with giving Negroes jobs, better jobs, than the Republicans. No one can truthfully deny that.

RESH: I wonder if you could tell us about one of your.- first really important cases that's now cited in many, many books, the famous Lloyd Gaines Case. Could you give us some of the background on that? How you got into that case? Who brought you in on it? Something about Mr. Gaines?
REDMOND: Lloyd Gaines is a mysterious person. There's articles that have no doubt led you to believe in one of them. He came to my office and talked to me about going to the University of Missouri. I said, "A man with your qualifications and ability ought to be an asset to the school. And if you really want to apply yourself and study, you should go. And all you need to do is to file an application." And he says, "Well, now, what kind of application should it be?" And I just reached in my desk there and got out a postal card, you know, one of these stamped cards, and told him to write the registrar and ask him to send you an application blank. I did that because I knew that a lot of them would be in to see, were talking to me because the Negro teachers were worked up and a lot of Negroes were worked up about it, and they would come, and I knew that if I didn't see him get that letter off, the card off, some of them would never get it off. And he sent his off, and they sent him his blank and when they found out he was a Negro, that was the end of it. But any number of Negroes sent them in. They, when I say they, the Board of Curators of the University of Missouri, were out investigating me; they wanted to bring disbarment proceedings saying I was out chasing business. Well, I didn't get any money out of this. I was just trying to help Negroes to go further, get educational opportunities that Missouri was offering to the white students. But they didn't get anywhere with it because I didn't send for anybody. I told the people, the teachers when they came to see me, and talked to me about it and wanted to do something, I said, Now don't expect me to get anybody. If you get someone who's really interested in going and will go, I will see to it that the suit is filed and it will not cost them or anyone else a penny. And so Gaines came and others came to me. And they filed applications, several applications were filed. Just like the Blufon Case. She filed an application. Someone gave the NAACP in New York ten thousand dollars, and with that ten thousand dollars they filed any number of these cases.

RESH: So the result of that, as a result of that decision the, there was a law school as I understand or...

REDMOND: Before the Gaines Case, Missouri like a lot of states said they were complying with the law when they would appropriate about ten thousand a year to pay the tuition of Negroes to go to schools in other states. But that ten thousand wasn't a drop in the bucket for the number who applied. Most of the teachers wanted to improve themselves, and in the summer they would apply to go off. And there just wasn't any money there for them to go on. And the Gaines case held that the equal opportunity had to be offered within the state. And then they set up a Jim Crow Law School out at Poro College.

RESH: What happened to Gaines? One finds these references that he disappeared shortly after the Redmond case was decided in his favor.

REDMOND: I heard that he was in Kansas City and got some information I though was true. And his mother and brother lived on West Belle in St. Louis. I got in touch with him, and he went to the hospital in Kansas City and said that it was not Gaines. They were really anxious to find their brother and son. But I have heard reports, I don't know what's to them, someone said that a certain editor in Missouri gave him some money to go to Mexico. You see, we wanted Gaines to go on and use him to try to get him admitted to the law school here. And somebody, or Gaines himself just disappeared.

RESH: I was wondering if we could turn to some of your activities in the National Bar
Association. You were president of that organization?

REDMOND: I was president, they gave me that award over there, see the one on the top. And I was editor of the Journal, that we got out for a number of years. We tried to build up a group of lawyers and interest them in going out and filing suit in these different areas to try to improve the situation for Negroes, and most of the lawyers who were interested in those things joined the Association and would come to the meetings. But naturally, you aren't going to find a majority of any group that's willing to give free services. Don't you see? And you couldn't expect any money, there wasn't any place to get any money. It was a labor of love. And a desire to help yourself as well as others like yourself.

RESH: During the start of the Second World War in 1940, did the Negro or the National Bar Association take a strong stand against segregation in the Armed Forces?

REDMOND: Well, all the Negroes protested it, but the protest of Negroes then was feeble. Nobody paid much attention to them. Even Eisenhower, he was opposed to getting rid of segregation in the Army.

RESH: As president of this association, did you try to reach any of the national Negro politicians, I believe in 1940 the one in Congress would have been Arthur Mitchell, the Congressman from Illinois?

REDMOND: Mitchell was a good man, and he would try, but there wasn't much he could do. It was just that simple. This thing was like asking a man to lift up a ton with his hands. Just like the South today, there are a lot of white people of good will and would like to do things, but the majority of the whites are harder on white people who are fair with Negroes than they are on Negroes. Let me just give you this illustration to show you how cancerous this situation is. During the war all young fellows were interested in aero-mechanics. And they had a course in it in the technical school for whites in St. Louis but not one for Negroes. So the Brewton brothers came to me to get them in the course in the white school. So I suggested to them that they write an application and apply. They did and they were turned down. And we filed suit, the NAACP filed suit and the court here ordered the public schools here to admit these Negroes to the course in aero-mechanics. But do you know the white people closed that course down rather than admit Negroes. And I didn't hear a membling word from a single white person in St. Louis. Now that just shows you how deep seated that feeling was. They would rather go without, than to let three Negroes join the class.

RESH: Was that the class at Hadley Vocational School? I remember there was a great discrepancy in the amount of money spent on vocational training during the war at Washington Technical High School and Hadley.

REDMOND: There always has been and always will be when you have them separate. Just like Judge Coleman, a former governor of Mississippi on the Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, said in writing a dissenting opinion, he said he had noticed that the schools were separate, but he didn't see that they were equal. And these white people are not going to give you equal schools as long as they control the money, and I think one is naive to entertain the thought that they will.
RESH: Well, in your activities as president of the local NAACP, when did your attention first come to the NAACP, had you joined the organization many years earlier?

REDMOND: You mean in Mississippi?

RESH: Or whenever you joined the NAACP.

REDMOND: Well, I joined shortly after I came here when they had the first drive, after I came here. There were a few loyal souls there who were interested in helping the cause and they would meet and talk about doing things and they would try. One big problem we had when I first went in it was police brutality. And we went on and we tried to get them to do things. But here is the trouble that I ran into most. When they would tell me they were beaten, I would get statements from them, and complain to the police commissioner, and then they would set up a hearing. When you go to them with actual signed statements, and then when you would get a hearing set up, other policemen on the beat would go to the man's wife, go to the man, Negroes are sympathetic anyway, and say, "This policeman has eight children, and if you go down there and testify against him he's gonna lose his job and his children will be hungry." And the wife would tell me she didn't want to go. See, that's one of the things you'd run into. It was difficult to get them to go and testify.

RESH: During the Second World War, your department in the NAACP, the local here, handled a number of cases about police brutality. During the war years did police brutality seem to be on the increase in St. Louis?

REDMOND: Well, now, I wouldn't know whether it increased or not. But the police were totally disrespectful of Negroes, generally speaking, in treating them as human beings. And during that time a bus, these busses would be coming along, they'd see a Negro and wouldn't stop to pick up a Negro. Their attitude was, "Well, that's a dog." They'd just go right on. And the police treated you as dogs.

RESH: Did you ever personally have any extremely distasteful episodes in dealing with the police? Did they harass you?

REDMOND: No, no. They never harassed me. I wouldn't be out by myself at night or anything to give them any opportunity, and they would have no reason to suspect what car I'd be in, if I had a car. I didn't have one in the early days, but I have never had any trouble with the police.

RESH: During the World War II period again, when you were president of the local NAACP, what kind of cases did you handle then, what kind of complaints did people come in to present to you?

REDMOND: Well, they would come, you see, after all, we would not compete with the private practitioner. If they had a claim for personal injury or money due, we couldn't take that. That would be unfair competition. So we could come in only when their rights were violated. And I guess we had more police brutality cases than any other kind. Now, I remember one where right after a man was beaten up he came to my office and I went over and talked to the captain and told him about it. And told him what kind of strap he's used to beat him and where he beat him. The captain said, "That could not have happened with my
men, I'll take you to the room." And when we went there, we saw the strap on the floor that I described to him. And he said to me, "I never would have believed this if you hadn't come and told me." I believe that the captain really believed that policemen, some of them, when they told him that they had not struck Negroes. I believe this man was honest with me, and if hadn't been, I'm sure he thought it didn't happen. I don't believe he thought he'd picked up the strap or anything.

RESH: During the war you were also appointed, this would have been 1943, summer of '43, July or August of 1943. You, along with approximately 20 other Negro citizens were appointed to Mayor Kaufmann's Inter-racial Committee.

REDMOND: I don't think they had twenty Negroes there. All of them weren't Negroes. Mr. Meissner was the chairman and if there ever was a dedicated man, he was one in that area. Every time they'd have an announcement of some Negro trouble he would get in the police car and go over himself. He spent many a night out going from place to place just checking to see how bad the situation was. Oh, and let me mention this. Scruggs used to be up here, had a basement cafeteria, and Bishop Scarlett, the Episcopal bishop in St. Louis got Scruggs to open its basement cafeteria to Negroes. It was a big one where people would go and eat for lunch. And when Scruggs opened it to Negroes, a lot of white people cancelled their charge accounts and stopped going in there. But I understand most of them opened them back up and started going back. Now, Mr. Meirssner, who's an individualist, he went over to Famous-Barr and spoke to the president there and offered to guarantee him any losses he would sustain for a year. Mr. Meissner was a multi-millionaire, and the people at Famous wouldn't do it.

RESH: That committee was formed at a time shortly after the Detroit race riot in July or June 1943, and at approximately the same time as the Harlem riot of the summer of 1943. St. Louis was one of the large metropolitan areas during World War II that avoided a major race riot or any major confrontation, conflagration. Do you think this Mayor's committee helped to dilute the passions somewhat?

REDMOND: I have no doubt that it had some effect, but I just think it was really due to the fact that you didn't have the militant leadership here that you had in those other places. The Negroes in St. Louis are more like the Negroes in Mississippi than the Negroes in Detroit. They have been more exposed to being free there than they were here then. Because St. Louis is just a big southern city. And I think that had a lot to do with it. Course, I won't say that this commission didn't help, because the people did see that Mr. Meissner was out trying to do everything he could. No man could have done more than he did. And then we had Rabbi Issermann. He was an outstanding rabbi in the city then, and Bishop Scarlett, they were appealing to the people for racial justice. Only the Catholics wouldn't help us. The Catholics today are all together different than what they were then. It was Archbishop Glennon who became Cardinal Glennon. When the Negroes went to him to ask him to help them get the places downtown to serve them a drink of water or something to eat, he told them to open their own places. It's just like, as Rev. King said, asking a man to pull himself up by his boot straps when he doesn't have any boots. It would cost a tremendous amount of money to open a restaurant up downtown in St. Louis. And a Negro would have been a fool to do so. Hardly any could have possibly done it. Any of them would have gone broke who kept it open any time. So the Negroes saw here that there were some out-spoken voices, but those were the
two loudest ones with Mr. Meissner working as he was. He was right in the center of everything that happened.

RESH: One of the more militant Negro organizations during the Second World War was the March on Washington Movement which had a St. Louis chapter. Were you involved with that, or what was your opinion of it at the time?

REDMOND: Well, I thought it was good. I thought anything we would do to throw light on the injustices couldn't do any harm.

RESH: Did you know, I believe it was Mr. Theodore McNeal who was involved with the March on Washington Movement?

REDMOND: I've known him for a number of years. He's been very active. He's worked mostly with the railroad union.

RESH: But did this organization ever solicit any help from you, this March on Washington Movement during the war? Did they ever ask for any legal help?

REDMOND: No. I don't see, what legal help they would need. Nothing illegal about marching. They wouldn't need any legal help. They'd need financial help. See, that was the big problem with Negroes. We were much worse off then than we are today. And they just didn't have any money to do anything. Just like Gaines, in going to the schools, someone would have to pay the expenses. But the teachers were the main supporters.

RESH: During the period of, oh, say the late '30's and the early '40's, in your opinion who were the most powerful Negroes on the national scene?

REDMOND: Well, Walter White I would think would certainly be the outstanding one. He spoke in a loud voice, and he had the respect of most people. I don't know anyone who was his equal unless it is Dr.. King. The NAACP hasn't been the same since he left. Not that it isn't continuing to do a good job.

RESH: What was your opinion of Roy Wilkins?

REDMOND: Roy Wilkins is very good. I wonder if Roy is letting things get out of hand, like when they wanted to discharge one of the lawyers up there for making a statement. They should not have interfered with that. They lost a lot of good lawyers. Everybody in the department resigned. All of the staff.

RESH: Was that that incident where the lawyer criticized the Supreme Court?

REDMOND: He said that it hadn't gone as far as it could and should have gone. Well, he is not the only one who thinks that. But they just felt that they were having pretty good success there, I guess, and they didn't want to do anything to antagonize them. But after all, it wasn't the NAACP that said it. And you can't be responsible for everything people on your payroll say when you have a large payroll. After all, you can't muzzle people.

RESH: And in any organization like that you're bound to have a conflict of opinion on tactics
and issues.

REDMOND: Look at Nixon's administration now. So many of them differ with him. He can't fire all of the. A lot of them have been let out, but if he let out too many, he wouldn't have enough trained people there to carry on, if he let all of them out who disagreed with him. And then after all, you can't expect people because they work to give up all of their opinions.

RESH: Maybe that's the lesson the Board of Curators today could learn at the University of Missouri.

REDMOND: Did you read the editorial in the paper, the one on them? After all, the Curators only set the policy, and they shouldn't go any further than that. And if the policy isn't executed as they think it ought to be executed, they should go solely to the person in charge of execution and to no one else. Because when you go to others, you are taking over the running of the school. And the Board does not run the school, it sets the policy. I'm on the State Board of Education, all of us see a lot of things up there we don't like, but after all it would be terrible if we would go there and try to run the Department of Education. That is not our duty. While I mention that, I get around to the meeting of different members of state boards of education. There is a National Association of State Boards of Education, and I have talked to different ones and some of them have said that their boards have voted that such and such a policy be carried out and the commissioners refused to do it. And I would say, "Well, what did you do?" They said they didn't think it was sufficient to discharge him. But a lot of these commissioners become czars after they get the job. And you just have to get them out or just go along, one of the two, and you hate to get rid of them, but sometimes you have to. Now the one in Missouri's been there ever since he had the position over twenty years. He's resigning as of December 31st. We're in the process now of getting one and really is an undertaking if there ever was one. I spend a third of my time reading material about the different applicants.

RESH: Mr. Redmond, you've had a very long, productive career in the legal profession and as an advocate of civil rights, what to your mind is your largest accomplishment? What are you most proud of? What you've done in St. Louis since you moved here in 1929?

REDMOND: Well, I'm just pleased with the fact that since I have been here I have done all I could to make St. Louis a better city and to enlarge opportunities of Negroes. That has been a tremendous undertaking. It has hurt me with a lot of white people. But that's a price you have to pay for progress.

RESH: Mr. Redmond, I want to thank you very much for sharing your experiences with us. This tape was made in the office of Attorney Sidney Redmond. My name is Professor Richard Resh with the technical assistance of Mr. Franklin Rother.