

# Floyd M. Riddick

Senate Parliamentarian, 1964-1974

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## **Interview #1**

### **Early Years**

(June 26, 1978)

Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

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**Ritchie:** I thought we could discuss today your early years and the events that led up to your coming to the Senate, and your early research, to get a general idea of your background and interests. I was reading recently that your interests outside the Senate lay in a farm in Virginia. I wondered if that was a continuation of your family's situation. Did you grow up on a farm?

**Riddick:** It was childhood experience, I guess, which brought me back to that. My second interest, of course, was teaching. I anticipated being a professor of law at the university, and not only did I not go into law but I taught political science. I got shifted from my first interest completely by a professor I had at Duke University named Robert Rankin.

**Ritchie:** How did you come to decide on a career in political science and law? Was your father a lawyer?

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**Riddick:** No, my father was not an educated man. He was a very intelligent person, but he didn't finish primary grade school.

**Ritchie:** Was he a farmer?

**Riddick:** Yes, a farmer and merchant.

**Ritchie:** And you grew up on a farm?

**Riddick:** Well, I grew up in a village, Gatesville, North Carolina, but we farmed during the period that I was in high school.

**Ritchie:** You said he was also a merchant, did he run a shop?

**Riddick:** He ran stores, grocery stores, a general merchandise store.

**Ritchie:** And you lived in the town near the store?

**Riddick:** Yes, at first we had a little store next to the house, at the edge of the little village, and then we moved into Gatesville proper, however large it was. I left there in 1928 to go to Suffolk, Virginia. So, while I was reared (in my childhood days) in Gates County, North Carolina, I became a resident of Virginia after 1925.

**Ritchie:** Why did you go to Suffolk?

**Riddick:** My father's health had broken and he couldn't stay on fresh ploughed ground

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anymore because of head difficulty, and so he moved to Suffolk where he could work in stores all together.

**Ritchie:** Did you have other family there?

**Riddick:** Oh yes, well, let me put it this way. Our family came from a very old family. As a matter of fact, Lemmuel Riddick, from who we came, signed the Stamp Act passed by the House of Burgesses, between the signatures of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

**Ritchie:** Was he from Virginia?

**Riddick:** Yes, they were early comers to Virginia, and then some moved down into Carolina. As a matter of fact, there's a sign in Gates County, near Corapeake, they call it, the town is long since gone, at Speed's Ditch which George Washington surveyed. And when he was down there he stayed in the home of one of my original family.

**Ritchie:** And you also had family in Suffolk.

**Riddick:** Well, we had some, but we weren't born in that area, nor did my immediate family come from people living in Suffolk. But

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going back several generations they all came from that area.

**Ritchie:** Did you attend public schools in North Carolina?

**Riddick:** In North Carolina and Suffolk.

**Ritchie:** And then when you graduated you decided to go to Duke.

**Riddick:** That's right.

**Ritchie:** What prompted you to go to Duke University?

**Riddick:** I hardly know, to tell you the truth. It was a growing school, and two or three of my advisors thought that I should go to Duke. I looked around at several different schools, but never applied anywhere else. I just went down to Duke during the summer before that fall. It wasn't so hard to get in school then if you had money enough, that was the big problem.

**Ritchie:** Did you have any idea when you started at Duke what you wanted to do, or was this something that developed while you were there?

**Riddick:** As I said, I wrote on my entrance papers in which they were requesting what my interests were, that I wanted to take

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law and be a professor of law. But later on, I believe it was in the second year in school, I was working at a soda fountain at a pharmacy, and the city had a requirement to close on Sunday evening during the church services. During that time one evening I was walking around on the Duke campus before going back to work, and encountered Professor Robert Rankin. He said, "Sit down, let's talk a while." He, at that time, was the assistant dean of the graduate school as well as a professor of political science. So I sat and talked with him and he convinced me -- not just in that one meeting but in several pursuing thereafter -- that I should switch over from law school, even though I was taking pre-law, and go into political science.

**Ritchie:** Did you take any courses with Rankin?

**Riddick:** Oh yes, took several.

**Ritchie:** Was he a very influential or impressive teacher?

**Riddick:** He was a very good teacher, a very good teacher, and he's made his mark in the

field; he was author of a number of books. He was also on the Civil Rights Commission here in Washington for ten or fifteen years. He established himself very highly in the academic world.

**Ritchie:** Were you interested in politics as well? Was that one of the reasons that you switched?

**Riddick:** Well, I had an interest in politics from childhood, because of our teacher in high school, who would take us down to the county court. I met some of the people, one who later became the governor of North Carolina, who was then solicitor general for the superior court. That created my interest to begin with, but I never anticipated a political career, I never had an interest in that. But getting into political science caused me to have a great interest in government and its operation. Then after I took my A.B. (I finished my A.B. in three years, including summer) I went over to Vanderbilt, and there I had a Professor Irby R. Hudson, under whom I

took my Master's. He had been a student at Columbia, working under one of the great men in international law, John Bassett Moore; if you go back to the records in the State Department in those years I guess you will find more opinions were written by him than anyone else. He was a close advisor to Teddy Roosevelt, for example. Irby R. Hudson was very interested in politics and suggested that I write my Master's thesis on the Triumverate Rule in the House of Representatives, which consisted of [\[Nicholas\] Longworth](#), [\[Bertrand\] Snell](#), and [\[John\] Tilson](#); they were the Speaker, Majority Leader, and Chairman of the Rules Committee, which I did and I found it most fascinating. Then when I went back to Duke to take my doctorate I decided to expand the study and wrote on the Political and Parliamentary Procedures in the House of Representatives for my doctoral dissertation.

**Ritchie:** When you started the Master's thesis did you come to Washington at all?.

**Riddick:** No, I just depended on records and journals. Finances didn't permit me to come to Washington; I had to work with newspapers, journals, and records.

**Ritchie:** Longworth was a fascinating character, one of the more influential speakers, a very powerful figure in the 20's.

**Riddick:** He certainly was, that's correct.

**Ritchie:** I suppose working with these people really helped develop your interest.

**Riddick:** Yes, but when I did come up, and stay up for quite a while -- when I was working on my doctorate -- Longworth had passed on. The first speakers that I knew were [Henry Rainey](#), of Illinois, [Joseph Byrns](#) of Tennessee, and [William Bankhead](#), and others as they came, [Sam Rayburn](#) and so forth.

**Ritchie:** Well, you decided then to go back to Duke University after you finished your Master's work at Vanderbilt. Was there any particular reason?

**Riddick:** I would say primarily it was the scholarship or the fellowship that I got, which paid my expenses

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**Ritchie:** That's one of the reasons why I went to the graduate school I did, also.

**Riddick:** And you see, it was advantageous to continue school then because that was almost in the middle of the Depression and you couldn't find jobs anywhere. So when they offered me the fellowship, which took care of my expenditures, what else could I do?

**Ritchie:** Did you teach as part of your fellowship?

**Riddick:** Yes. For my Master's scholarship I worked in the library in the evenings, which was an interesting thing, and educational, too. But when I went back to Duke I got in on a teaching fellowship. I would give one course each semester.

**Ritchie:** American government?

**Riddick:** Yes, introduction to American government.

**Ritchie:** How would you describe Duke University in those days, was it a small institution?

**Riddick:** Yes, I'd get lost there now. I think we had a total student enrollment of about 2,000 at that time, and that's on both the girls' and boys' campuses. Now, the first two years I was on the girls'

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campus, but we were looking forward to moving over to the boys' which they were building; we were looking forward to moving over to the west campus where there would just be boys!

**Ritchie:** So I guess there was a sort of closeness between the students and the faculty, at such a small school.

**Riddick:** It was much more friendly than it is now. I doubt if a student now would know a tenth of the student body. At that time if I didn't know the names I knew nearly everyone -- being on some of the athletic teams.

**Ritchie:** Then when you started working on your dissertation you did come to Washington.

**Riddick:** Yes, I stayed up here a year.

**Ritchie:** Was that your first visit to Washington?

**Riddick:** Well, no, I was on the boxing team, and track team, and I got around some. I had been here once when I was on the team boxing against the University of Maryland. We stayed up here three days. But then I came back once or twice again that way before I came up to do research.

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**Ritchie:** Did you do most of your research at the Library of Congress?

**Riddick:** The Library of Congress and the Capitol. I sat in the gallery with a special pass for nearly a whole session, studying them very closely, and watching them, and then when the House wasn't in, why I would go back to the Library and work and read.

**Ritchie:** That's very interesting, you basically just watched the whole proceedings.

**Riddick:** Watched the proceedings from beginning to end.

**Ritchie:** What kind of an experience was that?

**Riddick:** Oh, it was very educational, because if I were devoting some of my study to the Rules Committee of the House, why I would go to the morning session, or before the House convened I'd go into the Rules Committee meeting to hear them discuss the giving of a rule on a particular piece of legislation. You could get the feel of it.

**Ritchie:** And then watch it develop on the floor.

**Riddick:** That's correct. The greatest break I had came when Representative

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[\[Clarence\] Cannon](#) of Missouri, who brought the Hinds and Cannon's Precedents up-to-date; his volume I think was published in '35, but in order to get my dissertation ready I had to have some info before then, and he advanced me the galley proofs of all of the copy that was going to be printed later, without any changes being made, and I could work from these galley proofs. That was a great break.

**Ritchie:** Did you get to know Cannon?

**Riddick:** Oh yes, knew him very well. As a matter of fact, my first volume printed on Congress, he insisted that I give him two copies free, autographed, because he said he had two daughters and he wanted each daughter to have a copy. He'd get everything in duplicate that way.

**Ritchie:** He certainly knew the procedures of the Congress.

**Riddick:** Oh yes, I remember a very interesting case in the House -- one day, he took a stand on the procedure pointing out

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that this is the way it should be. And then a member on the opposite side got up and said, "Why Mr. Speaker, the author of his work says just the opposite of what he's now trying to convince the House." Cannon immediately said, "Mr. Speaker, I defer to my publication."

**Ritchie:** I guess, in the House in particular, the rules are so much more restrictive . . .

**Riddick:** And exacting.

**Ritchie:** . . . specific knowledge on the part of the members of the rules would be so important.

**Riddick:** Absolutely, and you must have it immediately, because if the moment passes it's too late to make a point of order, it's too late to take a direction that would save your case. So it's important to know immediately. Now, my experience in the Senate, of course, is that any member can have access to all the knowledge about the procedure, if he knows ahead of time what he wants, because he

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has access to the parliamentarian, and he can speak and work for hours with him, about how to map out and plan his program. But this knowledge of your own, so that you can momentarily respond or take advantage of the rules, is very helpful.

**Ritchie:** And the House rules and precedents are voluminous, even beyond the Cannon publications.

**Riddick:** Oh, good gracious yes, that is correct.

**Ritchie:** And they are not as accessible, apparently, as Senate rules. Some of the members of the House object that they don't have access to the manuscript form of precedents and have to go through the parliamentarian.

**Riddick:** But they're being brought up-to-date. Of course, we've had that same criticism of Senate procedure. It was not until 1954, I believe, that the first volume of Senate Procedure was published, which dealt with the modern precedents and practices of the Senate.

**Ritchie:** But it's been published every ten years now since then.

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**Riddick:** Yes, and I'm working on another volume now, supposedly. What I'm proposing is recodification of the rules. The rules of the Senate have not been completely readopted since 1884. After I retired as parliamentarian, that was why the Rules Committee acquired my services -- to come over and join the staff and prepare a recodification, which I have now done and presented a copy to the Majority Leader for him to look over. He's so busy, though, he doesn't have time to get to it now, so I don't know when we'll do it. But I'm sure of holding up on



the revision so that all of the provisions of the legislative reorganization acts can be in the rules, and I can then quote the rules as opposed to such-and-such a section of the legislative reorganization acts.

**Ritchie:** Going back to your year in Washington, while you were working on your dissertation, since you were there in the House almost every day you must have come in contact with a lot of the members.

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**Riddick:** I take pride in saying positively that I could recognize every member in the House before I left my study of the House.

**Ritchie:** I suspect most of them could recognize you after seeing you around every day.

**Riddick:** Well, I'm not sure about that. But watching them perform and always trying to remember who was speaking I got to the point where I could recognize 95 percent of them, and call them by name.

**Ritchie:** What impressed you most about House procedures? Did you find it a very workable system? Were you enthusiastic about what you saw?

**Riddick:** Well, I was at that time. Of course, after I got to the Senate I had to try to forget all of the rules of the House because their rules are so different. The biggest contrast I'd say is unlimited debate in the Senate as contrasted to very limited debate in the House. And the use of the previous question in the House as contrasted to no limit on debate in the

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Senate, or restriction on bringing a bill to a final vote except through cloture. It's only in the last ten years that cloture has been used successfully to any degree.

**Ritchie:** I suppose with the size of the House there's almost no other way they could operate.

**Riddick:** I think that's true, I think it's a problem of numbers.

**Ritchie:** Do you think that makes the House more responsive to the administration?

**Riddick:** I don't know, I've watched both bodies for many years now, and it's sporadic. Sometimes the House ignores the president and responds to the people, and sometimes the Senate does that. I remember for a long period of time it was a common saying around here that the House would cut appropriations -- then the administration would take their appeal to the Senate and get their cuts restored. So it's varied, depending upon the temperament of the people. I would say, by and large, that the House obviously is closer

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to the populace or the constituency than the Senate, but campaigning on the part of senators in the last two decades I think has become almost a continual assignment. As long as they stay in the Senate they're continually campaigning.

**Ritchie:** But you don't think that the rules make the House more of an efficient machine in terms of the administration's proposals, by cutting off unlimited debate?

**Riddick:** Well, I think the restrictive rules have a tendency to keep the members more in line with what the leadership wants. I think there's that natural tendency. So if the leadership is sustaining the administration, whatever it be, whichever party it might be, there's a tendency for them to be able to control them. Even now, for example, House conferees can use the excuse that these changes in the rules that they've added not to take non-germane, Senate amendments in conference prohibits the conferees from even compromising or even taking them in consideration for compromise.

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They can always say, "We can't take that." And it just blocks the Senate from getting any consideration at all. Of course, obviously, if the Senate conferees are effective, and convincing, and influential over the House members, even if they can't get it in the conference report they can work out a tentative agreement with the House conferees to go back to the House and move to recede and concur in the Senate amendment with a certain amendment which would have been in the conference report had they been free to put that in the conference report itself. As you know, a conference report is merely, technically speaking, the language that the two bodies concur in, or agree to compromise. Those amendments that they can't agree on, which they report in disagreement, are not a part, technically speaking, of the conference report and then you dispose of those amendments in disagreement.

**Ritchie:** And in some cases a strong chairman from one side or the other can very much influence the outcome.

**Riddick:** There's no question about it.

**Ritchie:** I understand that Sam Rayburn was particularly wily when it came to conferences.

**Riddick:** On his commerce bills,, when he was chairman of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce.

**Ritchie:** Well, you came then at the height of the New Deal, that year that you did research.

**Riddick:** Oh yes, as a matter of fact I worked for a while in the old FERA (Federal Emergency Relief Administration). Money at that time for a young student was hard to come by, and I felt fortunate to get a job to sort of supplement some of my costs to finish school.

**Ritchie:** This was while you were still at Duke?

**Riddick:** Still at Duke, before I'd received my doctorate.

**Ritchie:** Were you working for FERA here in Washington?.

**Riddick:** Yes.

**Ritchie:** What kind of work did you do for them?

**Riddick:** Sort of a statistical analyst. I'm trying to think of Roosevelt's main protege in relief projects, what was his name?

**Ritchie:** Harry Hopkins.

**Riddick:** Harry Hopkins. I worked in the same building one floor under him at the old Walker-Johnson Building down across from the old emergency hospital, close to the State Department. I was there for about eighteen months off and on. That little extra fund came in very handy.

**Ritchie:** I can imagine that while you were watching the House you were getting quite a view of New Deal legislation also, that was a period of a lot of administrative initiative and new, very dramatic programs.

**Riddick:** Yes, that was very interesting, Later I worked with the federal government as an analyst from 1935 to 1936, before I went to teach at American University.

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At that time I changed jobs and was with [Rexford] Tugwell's outfit, the Rural Resettlement Administration, and it was there that I worked in the same office with [\[Frank\] "Ted" Moss](#), who later became Senator from Utah. That's where I got acquainted with him, and when I went out to Utah to get married he served as my best man out there. He later became Senator; he wasn't Senator when I was married.

**Ritchie:** What brought you to the Rural Resettlement Administration?

**Riddick:** Just employment, until I could get myself adjusted. At that time I was still doing research and writing articles for the *American Political Science Review*. I wrote an annual article for either the *American Political Science Review* or the *Western Political Quarterly* for over a period of thirty-nine years.

**Ritchie:** How did you start doing those? They had been running articles like those on the year's events in Congress before.

**Riddick:** Yes, I forget the man who wrote them just before I started. He died and

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that's how I got in. The man before him was Arthur Macmahan at Columbia University, with whom I worked for quite a long time on different occasions, doing research and so forth with him. Schuyler Wallace, he was with Prentice-Hall as an editor, he was a professor at Columbia also, and wanted to publish my doctoral dissertation but they couldn't get quite the insurance policy they wanted, you know they insure these "popular" books with scientific studies to be sure they would break even. He couldn't work out quite the agreement with another book so that he could do it, and they never published it at that time. But I got to working with these people very closely; they were all informed on Congress; and that led me to become a close associate of Lindsay Rogers, who was the Burgess Professor at Columbia. We stayed pretty close together. As a matter of fact, he tried to get me to work

on his book on the Senate. In his last years before he died he wanted me to co-author it with him and bring it up to date. But at that time I was so busy I just couldn't do it. That was a great experience and a great help to my education, to work with these people of such high standing, and particularly with Charles A. Beard, who used to, every time he'd come to Washington, have me up to his hotel room and talk at length about what was developing in Congress. It was all very educational, I assure you.

**Ritchie:** Well, you were developing quite a reputation at this time, as a man who knew how the Congress operated.

**Riddick:** Yes, Raymond L. Buell of *Time* magazine began staging some conferences, and he picked me up through the publications I'd written; I got to attend conferences at Princeton and different places. They anticipated World War II and they were trying to build up strategy and procedure, and what kind of legislation

was essential and necessary to get ready for World War II.

**Ritchie:** By this time you were a teacher at American University.

**Riddick:** Yes, after I'd worked with the federal government for a while, in 1936 through 1939 I went to American University as an instructor in political science, and in between, that is '37 and '38, Professor [Ernest S.] Griffith, who was then the dean of the American University graduate school, wanted me to go abroad a year; he felt I should have a year abroad. So I got the Alexander Von Humboldtstiftung (stipend) to do research at the University of Berlin on the *gemeindeordnung*, which was the constitution of local government that they'd adopted under the Hitler regime. That translation and work was later reproduced by the Army and used at the school of military government down at the University of Virginia for the Army of Occupation. It came in handy.

**Ritchie:** What an incredible time to be in Germany, in 1937.

**Riddick:** I saw it first hand.

**Ritchie:** It must have been quite startling to you.

**Riddick:** It was, absolutely. It was so regimented though that you didn't fear getting in trouble as long as you didn't try to do something off-color. Nearly everywhere you'd see police, they were in pairs and they were all over town, everywhere I went. So you had little fear of being robbed or harmed, as long as you kept your passport in your pocket and behaved yourself.

**Ritchie:** Did you ever go to the Reichstag to see the German parliament?

**Riddick:** No, that had been obliterated when I got there and Hitler was running the show completely.

**Ritchie:** Then you worked mostly out of Berlin?

**Riddick:** I worked, except for Christmas holidays when I went down to Freiburg, at the University in Berlin itself for the whole year, and met a lot of interesting people who later showed their mark in different fields.

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**Ritchie:** Then you returned to teach.

**Riddick:** I came back and taught one more year at American University.

**Ritchie:** Did you teach congressional procedure at all?

**Riddick:** Yes, that's one of the things that Professor Griffith wanted me for -- to give a course in legislative procedure, which I did.

**Ritchie:** What type of students would you have attracted.

**Riddick:** I taught out at the campus on Nebraska and Massachusetts Avenues. I gave one course downtown on congressional procedure, but it was not a highly organized one. It was primarily to accommodate certain students who were interested in that, at that time. After I finished there, I didn't feel I was reaching enough students. They had small classes out at the campus and I just didn't feel I was getting enough students and I wanted to get a broader touch with things and with more people. So I joined up with a little

outfit called Congressional Intelligence, Inc., which had an office where the Rayburn Office Building now is. That gave me an opportunity to study Congress still at close range. That was a reporting service on legislative activities. It prepared and sold special services, on a weekly and monthly basis, to individuals, corporations, pressure groups, local governments, or anybody else who happened to be interested in a particular bill pending before Congress. They'd trace that bill from its very beginning until it was either enacted or defeated. They were interested to accommodate or to serve anybody who had money enough to purchase the services. I stayed there for nearly five years. Which again was not only interesting to me, but filled in a background that I needed to master, if I were going to become an authority on the procedures and operations of Congress. They not only published these special reports but also prepared and published regular newsletters, of one

type or another, which were sold on a monthly or annual basis.

**Ritchie:** They published something called *Congressional Daily*, didn't they?

**Riddick:** Yes. And then a man named Jim Ingebretsen became the head of the governmental affairs department of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. I'd encountered him while I was working with the *Congressional Intelligence*, and had a number of conversations with him about procedure. When he went down to work with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce he interceded to hire me. I was dickering whether to go with David Lawrence's publications, which later became *U.S. News and World Report*, or to go with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, but Ingebretsen finally convinced me to come with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. I was glad I did because it was there that I became editor of the *Legislative Daily* of the Department of Governmental Affairs, which was a daily publication whenever Congress was in session, which was the forerunner of the "Daily Digest" published in the back of the *[Congressional] Record*.

[End of Interview #1]