

## Stewart Lee Udall's Life Sketch Part I

“A pioneer and a visionary in protecting America’s natural resources and cultural heritage, who exemplified his family’s commitment to public service.”

By Susan Sherwood Arnett, for the Scudder Association Foundation, © 2021



Stewart Lee Udall

If our cousin, Stewart Lee Udall could see the environmental degradation happening to our planet today, he would roll over in his grave. But he would not be surprised. He saw it coming. He predicted it. He warned that if we didn’t take action, this would happen! But Stewart took action. He spent a lifetime of vigorous action and bold leadership in defense of the Earth and humanity’s future.

Among those remembering his contributions, the *Huffington Post* stated, “Stewart Udall loved the West and had a greater influence on the protection and enjoyment of its wild places than any person since President Teddy Roosevelt.”<sup>1</sup>

It has been said that, “If you enjoy fishing a clean, unpolluted free-flowing river, walking along a national seashore or duck hunting in a national wildlife refuge, chances are Stewart Udall had a hand in making that possible. Now that is a legacy of public service few can ever hope to match.”<sup>2</sup>

“Any wilderness area, any national park and national monument — wherever you live in the United States now, there is one relatively close to you.” Mr. Udall “made all those things possible,” said Carl Pope, chairman of the Sierra Club. “In 1960, most Americans lived thousands of miles from any national park,” he said. “They don’t anymore.”<sup>3</sup> Many have called Stewart the

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<sup>1</sup> Pat Williams, *Huffington Post*, March 24, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Chad Love, *Field and Stream*, “In Memory of Stewart Udall”, March 23, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Jessica Garrison, “Stewart L. Udall dies at 90; Interior secretary championed national parks,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 21, 2010, <https://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-stewart-udall21-2010mar21-story.html>.

father of the environmental movement. Some called him Steward of the Land, as well as Advocate for Planet Earth.

### **Early Life**

Stewart Lee Udall was the third of six children of Levi and Louise Lee Udall and grew up on the wind-whipped high desert plateau in St. Johns, Arizona, the son of Mormon ranchers.<sup>4</sup> He loved the desert land and its scenic beauty. Living there he saw the need for conservation of resources and the reclamation of the arid landscape through irrigation.



**Louise Lee and Levi Udall**

Stewart believed that an active federal government could help solve social, economic, and later, environmental problems. His family was without electricity and running water until Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal relief and recovery programs brought both. This may have possibly influenced their family to shift from Republican to Democrat.<sup>5</sup>

His father, Levi, was a religious leader, lawyer, and judge in St. Johns, Arizona, and was one of the most respected individuals in Apache County. Later he served as the Chief Justice of the Arizona Supreme Court, authoring 401 opinions there.<sup>6</sup> In 1948, Levi S. Udall wrote the majority opinion granting Native Americans living on reservations in Arizona, the right to vote. Levi and Louise passed on to their children strong values and the Mormon traditions of community

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas G. Smith, *Stewart L. Udall Steward of the Land*, (Albuquerque NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2017), chapters 1 & 2.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, 10.

spirit over rugged individualism, respect for the land, commitment to help the less fortunate, and dedication to public service.<sup>7</sup> Stewart told *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1961, “I was taught that a person may aspire to nothing higher than to be a public servant.” He recalled, “our father instilled in us kids the belief that if we were fitted for such service, we should not avoid it. He set the example of that.”<sup>8</sup>

In addition to his father, many of the Udall extended family have served as public servants. His grandfather, David King Udall, was a representative to the Arizona Territorial Legislature. A favorite saying of David King Udall was, “The best we can offer to our family, the Church and our country is none too good.” Four of David’s sons (Stewart’s father and uncles) served in public office: Jesse Addison Udall was a member of the Arizona House of Representatives and later served as chief justice of the Arizona Supreme Court; John Hunt Udall and Don Taylor Udall served in the Arizona State Legislature. Stewart’s younger brother, Morris Udall served in the U.S. House of Representatives for 30 years. Both Stewart and Morris have sons who served in the U.S. House of Representatives and also the U.S. Senate as Democrats - Tom Udall from New Mexico (House 1999-2009) (Senate 2009-2021) and Mark Udall from Colorado (House 1999-2009) (Senate 2009-2015). Stewart’s nephew, Mark reported, “Stewart told us to take the ‘United States’ in our titles very seriously. United States senator, then your district and then your political party. His allegiance was in that order. ‘Out of Many, One; E Pluribus Unum.’ That really resonated with Stewart.”<sup>9</sup> Gordon Smith, second cousin to Tom and Mark through Stewart’s uncle Jesse Udall, served in the U.S. Senate as a Republican from Oregon (1997-2009). Another second cousin, Mike Lee, has served in the U.S. Senate as a Republican from Utah since 2011. Mike’s father, Rex Lee, was Solicitor General of the United States during the Reagan Administration.<sup>10</sup>

Stewart’s first cousin, Nicholas Udall, shared the story in his life history of when Levi and his brother, John Hunt Udall began their life of public service.

“In 1914...when election time came around that year, an interesting family political scenario developed. At that time, the parties selected their candidates at a county caucus rather than through a primary election as we do now. The ‘powers that be’ of the respective parties

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Jason Blevins, “Former Interior Secretary Stewart Udall dies at 90”, *The Denver Post*, March 21, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Blevins, “Former Interior Secretary Stewart Udall dies at 90”, *The Denver Post*, March 21, 2010.

Clarification: Sen. Gordon Smith and Sen. Mike Lee are cousins to the Udall brothers but are not Scudder descendants.

decided to nominate a young man whose father [David K. Udall] was prominent in the Church [over 30 years of service as bishop and stake president] and in the community [representative in the Arizona Territorial Legislature] to run for the office of clerk of court. The parties held their caucuses on the same afternoon. After the selections had been made, John H. and Levi went to their father's home to announce that they had each been selected by their party caucus as a candidate for clerk of court.



Left to right: Eloise, Burr, Levi, Louise, Morris, Elma, Stewart, Inez, 1960

That is when they found out they would be running against each other. They asked their father whether this would be appropriate, or whether they should draw straws or flip a coin to see which one would withdraw. They were told to continue their race, act as gentlemen, and do the best they could and see how it came out. John H. and Levi put on spirited campaigns, and when the votes were counted, John H. won by just a few votes...Despite the difference in their political parties, John H. selected his brother, Levi, to be the deputy clerk of court.”

“John Hunt Udall eventually resigned as clerk of court after his wife died, and the board of supervisors selected his brother, Levi, to replace him as the full-time clerk of court.”<sup>11</sup>

Later John H. was elected twice to the Arizona House of Representatives and much later was elected mayor of Phoenix, Arizona. John's son, Nicholas also served as mayor of Phoenix.

Stewart's mother, Louise, influenced Stewart in a different way. She was fun-loving, easygoing, a schoolteacher, a champion of the underdog; she sang, played the piano, and introduced him to art, classical music, literature, and poetry.<sup>12</sup> Louise wrote a book, “*Me and Mine*”

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<sup>11</sup> John Nicholas Udall, *The Wonder of It All, the Autobiography of John Nicholas Udall*, (Orem, UT: FCP. Publishing, January 2006), 13–14.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, 23–24.

about her very dear friend, Helen Sekaquaptewa, a Hopi woman.<sup>13</sup> Louise also wrote a poem for Stewart when he left home to go to war. The third of four stanzas reads:

“You can go from the house that loves you  
From the place of your birth depart  
But while there is breath in my body  
You cannot move from my heart.”<sup>14</sup>

He was remembered by his mother as a child with tremendous energy and an unquenchable curiosity. Eighty or so years later a journalist spoke of Stewart’s endless curiosity. “I had the great fortune to know Stewart; stayed at his home in Santa Fe, New Mexico where we would talk from breakfast until late afternoons. Our conversations were always guided by his questions. Endlessly curious, he would inquire and seek. Talking with Udall was to watch and listen to a man on the hunt for information, knowledge, and opinions.”<sup>15</sup>

At night while a lad, Stewart read furiously, until 10:00 o’clock when the town’s electric light service would sputter out. Then he had to continue reading by a coal lamp. Even from a young age Stewart possessed a fascination for language and carried around a dictionary to learn new words. He would aggravate the entire family (according to his younger brother, Burr) by repeatedly using a new word he had learned throughout the day. “I could have choked him!” Burr remembered.<sup>16</sup> But Stewart’s love of words and language served him well as a Congressman, cabinet member, lecturer, lawyer, environmental activist and author of numerous books.

After serving a two-year mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Stewart served four years in the Air Force, including as a gunner on a B-24 Liberator, flying fifty missions over Western Europe from Italy with the 736th Bomb Squadron, 454th Bomb Group, for which he received the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters.<sup>17</sup>

In his free time during the war, Stewart voraciously read newspapers and news magazines keeping up with the nation, government and political current events along with attending music and cultural events. He also occasionally published articles in the post newsletter, “Cadet.” In

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<sup>13</sup> Louise Udall, *Me and Mine, the Life Story of Helen Sekaquaptewa, as told to Louise Udall*, (The University of Arizona Press, 1969, Tenth printing 1993), can be read online at:  
[https://books.google.com/books?id=7lecCgAAQBAJ&pg=PA3&source=gbs\\_toc\\_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=7lecCgAAQBAJ&pg=PA3&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>14</sup> Louise Lee Udall, “*To a Son on Leaving Home*,” poem, November 21, 1944.

<sup>15</sup> Pat Williams, *Huffington Post*, March 24, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, 26.

<sup>17</sup> John de Graff, *Sierra, The Magazine of The Sierra Club*, April 25, 2020.

preparation for a law career, Stewart devoured books by jurists. He also read his father, Levi's, court opinions.<sup>18</sup> Stewart often said that "reading is the one food that I cannot live without."



Stewart Lee Udall

Stewart's letters home from the war showed concern for minorities who suffered casualties and who gave service out of proportion to their numbers. He wrote about inspiring Native Americans and Japanese Americans. He joined the NAACP and was embarrassed by the fact that the U.S. military was fighting to preserve individual freedom abroad while practicing racial segregation at home.<sup>19</sup>

Many letters were written back and forth with his father on political developments. His father once wrote, "I am proud of you and your humanitarian ideas, your interest in the little fellow and common man. I too claim to be for them and one of them, but I do want to keep my feet on the ground and be practical; sometime soon we have got to stop this deficit spending or the country will be on the rocks." Stewart also wrote to his parents, "You will never realize the full extent of the influence that your lives have had on me."<sup>20</sup> Coming home, Stewart was a liberal idealist committed to international economic and social justice. Like his father, he had a sense of civic responsibility.<sup>21</sup>

The cause of racial justice was a high priority throughout Stewart's public life. When Stew and his brother, Mo (what they were known by) were at the University of Arizona, the cafeteria was segregated; black students could not eat there. Mo and Stew were respected student athletes and Mo was student body president. They were against racism or discrimination in any form and

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, 58.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, 59.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, 58.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, 60.

they in protest invited a freshman African American friend, Morgan Maxwell Jr., to share their table. This was seven years before the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision, which ended segregation in schools.<sup>22</sup> This forced the university's administrators to decide whether they would discipline these three students or change the racist policy. They changed the policy. After that incident, the school cafeteria at the U of A was integrated. Morgan Maxwell was in attendance at Stewart's Memorial Celebration where this remembrance was shared.<sup>23</sup>

While in law school, Stewart met and married Ermalee Webb, his life-long love and soul mate. In 1948, Udall received a law degree, was admitted to the Arizona bar and started practicing law in Tucson. After Morris graduated a few years later, he and Mo established the law firm of Udall and Udall.

Stewart Udall became increasingly active in public service. He was vice-chairman of the Democratic Party's Central Committee in Tucson. He served as treasurer of the Pima County Legal Aid Society. Stewart was also elected to the School Board of the Amphitheater Public School District in Tucson in June 1951 and, as a school board member, he participated in desegregating the Amphitheater School District before the Brown v. Board of Education federal mandate. Stewart also became president of the Amphitheater school board, and trustee of School District 16.<sup>24</sup>

"I guess there is a strain in my makeup, which is strong in both of my parents, and in the kind of Mormon culture I grew up in — always trying to improve things," he recalled. "Every generation should try to make significant changes and improvements. To me, that's the way you renew and improve life. That sort of basic conviction was at the root of my reformist impulse."<sup>25</sup>

## U.S. Congress

Stewart was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1954 as a Democrat representing southern Arizona and served with distinction from 1955 to 1961.

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<sup>22</sup> *Alchetron* "Stewart Udall," *Alchetron*, Aug 15, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Bob Stanton former director of the National Forest Service, Stewart Udall Memorial Service - "Stewart L. Udall: A Celebration of Life and Legacy", Paolo Soleri Amphitheater, Santa Fe New Mexico, June 20, 2010, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?294237-1/stewart-udall-memorial-service#> "

<sup>24</sup> "Stewart Udall: Advocate for the Planet Earth," *Stewart Udall Papers*, University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, <https://speccoll.library.arizona.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/stewart-lee-udall/career-chronology>

<sup>25</sup> Smith, 97.



“As a liberal, Udall looked to an active federal establishment to help remedy social and economic injustice and used his position in the House of Representatives to advocate for America’s disadvantaged and powerless. He also sponsored legislation to outlaw false mining claims on federal land throughout the country, which he saw as a loophole for developers to seize picturesque landscapes. He pushed the U.S. Forest Service to expand its commitment to outdoor recreation and protection of wild lands. He passionately believed that scenic trails should be available to the public in every corner of America. He quickly made a name for himself as a conservationist who wrote and spoke against the widespread use of pesticides that were bringing 78 of the nation’s numerous bird, mammal, fish, and amphibian species to the brink of extinction, including the bald eagle and the grizzly bear.”<sup>26</sup>

“While in Congress Udall championed for more assistance to American Indians, federal aid to education, the speedy desegregation of public schools following the Supreme Court’s 1954 Brown decision, a civil rights bill, statehood for Alaska and Hawaii, an increased minimum wage to \$1.00 an hour, a crackdown on labor racketeering, and liberalizing the quota on immigrants.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Scott Raymond Einberger, *With Distance in His Eyes: The Environmental Life and Legacy of Stewart Udall*, (Reno, NV.: University of Nevada Press, 2018).

Sally Denton, “Nature’s Advocate: A new biography illuminates Stewart Udall,” for *The New Mexican*, Jul 20, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Smith, 97.





Scott, Denis, Lynn, Stewart, Tom, Lee, Lori  
1957

Stewart was appointed to two major Congressional committees: Interior and Insular Affairs, and Education and Labor, where he worked closely with Senator John F. Kennedy on labor reform. He was also a member of the Joint Committee on Navajo-Hopi Indian Administration.

Stewart sponsored a bill which authorized the Secretary of the Interior to transfer nine acres of land on the Hualapai Indian Reservation, Arizona, to a school district. He sponsored a House bill authorizing the Papago Indian Tribe to lease 2,400 acres of land at Kitt Peak to the National Science foundation. He also worked on legislation which created the Glen Canyon Dam.<sup>28</sup>

Stewart served in Congress from Arizona for 3 terms (six years) when he was then chosen by President Kennedy to be his first cabinet appointee, Secretary of the Department of Interior, at a time when there were no environmental laws or lawyers.<sup>29</sup>

### **U.S. Secretary of the Interior**



Stewart Udall and Pres. Kennedy

Udall served as Secretary of the Interior from 1961 to 1969, under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, becoming the first ever cabinet member from Arizona.

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<sup>28</sup> “Stewart Udall: Advocate for the Planet Earth,” *Stewart Udall Papers*.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *Stewart L. Udall Steward of the Land*, Chapter 7.

Following the appointment, Senator Barry Goldwater serving from Arizona wrote to Stewart, “Regardless of our political differences, I feel you are most qualified to make an excellent Secretary of the Interior.” And a month later, at the confirmation hearings, Goldwater stated, “Stewart is just another Udall who is carrying on a family tradition of service that dates back a hundred years in the Territory of Arizona and our state.” At those same hearings Arizona’s senior senator, Carl Hayden, informed his colleagues that the “Udalls are good people . . . I cannot conceive of anyone better qualified to be Secretary of the Interior than Stewart Udall.”<sup>30</sup>

Udall counted the famed author, Rachel Carson, a fellow environmental pioneer, as a personal friend and he considered her book, “*Silent Spring*” the forerunner to the environmental movement. Her website stated, “Stewart L. Udall served as a Mormon missionary and was once dubbed the Kennedy Administration’s ‘peripatetic apostle’ of outdoor life. He was a fierce advocate for the conservation of scarce resources and national treasures as well as a crusader for clean air, clean water, and the value of natural beauty.”<sup>31</sup>

These often-repeated quotes of Stewart Udall may have reflected what he saw as his mission as the Secretary of the Interior:

“Recreation and fish and wildlife will finally be given a seat at the head table in the federal government.”<sup>32</sup>

“Nature will take precedence over the needs of the modern man.”

“Plans to protect air and water, wilderness and wildlife are in fact, plans to protect man.”

The *Deseret News*, a Salt Lake City newspaper, in December 1960, described the work of the Interior Secretary:

“A job that involves responsibility for 800 million acres—a third of the United States would seem big enough for any one man. But that’s only part of the task that Stewart L. Udall will be assuming as Secretary of the Interior.

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<sup>30</sup> Smith, 125–126.

<sup>31</sup> Linda Lear, “In Memoriam - Stewart L. Udall,” *Rachel Carson*, (website), <http://www.rachelcarson.org/mStewartUdall.aspx>

<sup>32</sup> Anne Ferrer and Miles Weiss, “Obituary: Stewart Udall/U.S. Interior secretary under JFK and LBJ, *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*. March 21, 2010.

“At 40, Mr. Udall has had six years of experience in Congress serving on the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee and the Joint Committee on Navajo-Hopi Indian Administration. So, Mr. Udall has been familiarizing himself with those problems.



“The Department of the Interior’s responsibilities cover an astonishing amount of ground. Those responsibilities include:

**The Bureau of Land Management** which is partially or totally responsible for mineral reserves, grazing, forest and other uses on 800 million acres of public owned land.

**The National Park Service** with its great Mission 66 Development Program, so important to the personal enjoyment of Westerners and the economic growth of the tourist industry.

**The Fish and Wildlife Service**, an agency that has real problems on its hands in preserving salmon runs and other wildlife values during giant dam-building programs on the West’s major rivers.

**The Bureau of Mines**, charged, among other things, with carrying out work in fuels technology—a field that can be of tremendous importance to Utah with its vast oil shale and coal beds. **The Geological Survey**, responsible for the surveying that has been so long delayed but is so important in determining, in Utah, for instance, which lands are owned by the state and thus should contribute oil and other royalties to state coffers.

**The Bureau of Indian Affairs**, faced with the continuing question of whether to continue the debilitating wardship. that has been saddled on Indians for so many decades, or to make real efforts to make the Indian a free, full-class citizen.

**The Bureau of Reclamation**, the giant of the department as far as Utans are concerned. The all-important participating projects of the Colorado River Storage Project are still a long way from

reality. Patient, wise and forceful leadership. is still necessary, particularly in view of budget difficulties.

**Oil and gas development**, the use of saline water and a number of area-wide power administrations are also under this department. All have great potential effect on the American economy, particularly in the West.

The DESERET NEWS, along with his many Arizona and Utah friends congratulates Mr. Udall on this appointment and wishes him well in carrying out (his) vast responsibilities.”<sup>33</sup>

Soon Stewart got to work. Just weeks after becoming the Secretary of the Interior Udall told the Washington Redskins owner, George Preston Marshall, that he had to integrate the football team and hire black players as every other franchise in the NFL already had, or risk being evicted from the Washington, D.C. stadium, which was federally owned and under the Department of the Interior. Marshall integrated the team in 1962. With its newly hired black players, the Redskins were a much-improved team; some sportswriters humorously suggested Udall for NFL coach of the year.<sup>34</sup>



Jay, Lee, Tom, Denis, Stewart, Scott, Lynn, Lori -  
about 1961

At Stewart’s Memorial, Bob Stanton recalled what Stewart said when he became Secretary of the Interior, “I’m going to change the complexion of the work force.” Additionally, in 1962, Stewart appointed Stanton, who is black, as a seasonal park ranger. At the time of the memorial in 2010,

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<sup>33</sup> “Rep. Udall’s Excellent Promotion,” *Deseret News, Salt Lake Telegram*, December 8, 1960.

<sup>34</sup> de Graff, April 25, 2020.

Stanton was the U.S. National Parks Director. Stanton remarked, “Stewart didn’t wait for Congress or the Civil Rights movement. He believed in equal rights and moved ahead.” Stanton also mentioned that Stewart said to “never, never, never lose zeal to build a better world. Stewart was without equal.”<sup>35</sup>

Herb Brown, also at the Memorial, said that “Stewart was brilliant, an environmental visionary, a fighter, an outdoorsman. He was a complete man, always reaching for a higher hand hold just beyond his fingertips, and he always got it. He enjoyed his work and created new perspectives for us. He put principle above money. Big corporations would come in and offer him a lot of money. He would say, ‘My name’s not for sale.’ He wanted to take money out of politics. He was an example of optimism, realism, boldness, integrity, decency. He lived those ideals. A timeless man. A hero in any age.”<sup>36</sup>

Under his leadership, the Interior Department aggressively promoted an expansion of federal public lands and assisted the enactment of major environmental legislation.

Few corners of the nation escaped Mr. Udall’s touch. As interior secretary in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, he presided over the acquisition of 3.85 million acres of new holdings, including 4 national parks — Canyonlands in Utah, Redwood in California, North Cascades in Washington State and Guadalupe Mountains in Texas — 6 national monuments, 9 national recreation areas, 20 historic sites, 56 wildlife refuges and 8 national seashores and lakeshores. He also helped save Carnegie Hall from destruction.<sup>37</sup>

Later in life Stewart warned regarding the nation’s parks, that “the idea will flourish only if it is constantly restated and made relevant to the values esteemed by future generations.” He called upon a new generation to take up the mantle of “a new conservationism.”<sup>38</sup>

Often forgotten about, Stewart spearheaded the beautification of the nation’s capital with “Lady Bird” Johnson, that led to the planting of thousands upon thousands of cherry trees, dogwoods, magnolias, and daffodils native to the mid-Atlantic region.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Stanton, “Stewart L. Udall: A Celebration of Life and Legacy,” 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Herb Brown, Stewart Udall Memorial Service - “Stewart L. Udall: A Celebration of Life and Legacy”, Paolo Soleri Amphitheater, Santa Fe New Mexico, June 20, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> “Stewart Udall,” *Alchetron*, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Editorial: “Stewart Udall was a true hero of the West,” *ShareThis Buzz up!* 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, 355.



Stewart Udall & President Lyndon  
Johnson

Udall played a key role in the enactment of landmark environmental laws such as the Clear Air, Water Quality and Clean Water Restoration Acts and Amendments, the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (which draws from taxes on offshore petroleum drilling to fund parks, trails, open space, and outdoor recreation sites), the Solid Waste Disposal Act of 1965 (Udall insisted there was no “divine right” to dump wastes into lakes or streams “because the industry provides jobs.” He argued that “pollution control is a normal part of the cost of doing business.”)<sup>40</sup>, the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966, the National Trail System Act of 1968, and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968.<sup>41</sup>

Speaking of a vital point in environmental issues, Roger G. Kennedy, who was director of the National Park Service in the 1990s, said Mr. Udall “escaped the notion that all public land was essentially a cropping opportunity — the idea that if you cannot raise timber on it or take a deer off it, it wasn’t valuable.”<sup>42</sup>

A pioneer of the environmental movement, Udall warned of a conservation crisis in his best-selling book on environmental attitudes in the United States, “*The Quiet Crisis*” (1963).<sup>43</sup> Stewart wrote about the dangers of pollution, overuse of natural resources, and dwindling open spaces. He appealed for a new “land conscience” to preserve the environment. *The Quiet Crisis* is partly credited with creating a consciousness in the country that led to the environmental movement.

“If, in our haste to ‘progress,’ the economics of ecology are disregarded by citizens and policy makers alike, the result will be an ugly America,” Udall wrote. “We cannot afford an

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<sup>40</sup> “Stewart Udall was a true hero of the West.” *ShareThis Buzz up!*

<sup>41</sup> “Stewart Udall: Advocate for the Planet Earth, Stewart Udall Papers.

<sup>42</sup> Keith Schneider and Cornelia Dean, “Stewart L. Udall, Conservationist in Kennedy and Johnson Cabinets, Dies at 90,” *New York Times*, March 20, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Stewart L. Udall, *The Quiet Crisis*, (New York: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston, 1963).

America where expedience tramples upon esthetics and development decisions are made with an eye only on the present. We live in a land of vanishing beauty, of increasing ugliness, of shrinking open space, and of an overall environment that is diminished daily by pollution and noise and blight. This, in brief, is the quiet crisis.”



In the introduction to the book, President Kennedy warned “that unchecked technology might clutter and contaminate the environment, disrupt the balance of nature, and endanger the lives of humans and wildlife. The crisis, he intoned, was not only quiet but urgent. Americans must take steps, he declared, to improve the quality of life by protecting the environment.”

During Udall’s tenure as Secretary of the Interior, fearing the possibility of nuclear war, Stewart advocated cooling down the Cold War. In September 1962, he traveled to the USSR with the U.S. poet, Robert Frost, on a peace mission and was summoned unexpectedly into a meeting with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev while on a tour. It was during this meeting that Khrushchev famously hinted at his secret deployment of nuclear missiles to Cuba by telling Udall: “It’s been a long time since you could spank us like a little boy. Now we can swat your ass.” This was a prelude to the Cuban Missile Crisis.<sup>44</sup>

Stewart Udall also helped spark a cultural renaissance in America by setting in motion initiatives that led to the Kennedy Center, Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the revived Ford’s Theatre. Upon Udall’s recommendation President Kennedy asked former U.S. Poet Laureate, Robert Frost, to read an original poem at his inauguration, establishing a new tradition for that occasion.<sup>45</sup> While Stewart was in the Cabinet, his wife Lee, enthusiastically opened a Native American art gallery in Washington. She learned to love their art and culture as a youth.

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<sup>44</sup> Smith, 164.

<sup>45</sup> de Graff, *Sierra*.

One complicated and vacillating issue for Udall was the building of dams on the Colorado River. Early on, he believed in one major dam initiative—the Central Arizona Project, a series of hydro-electric projects to bring water and electricity to the southwestern deserts. As an Arizonan, he knew how important these factors were to the economic vitality of the region. The initiative culminated in a plan to build two power dams right outside Grand Canyon National Park, backing up water into the canyon itself. Massive economic and political power—and, at first, Udall’s own instincts—stood behind the dams. Against them were environmental groups, most notably the Sierra Club, led by David Brower.

The Sierra Club had earlier agreed to one Colorado River dam, the Glen Canyon Dam, just above the Grand Canyon. But Brower had never seen Glen Canyon. When he did, his failure to stop it became the great regret of his life. He was determined that such a thing should not happen to the Grand Canyon. Brower and the Sierra Club published a book of photos, *The Place No One Knew*, about what was being lost as the waters of Lake Powell began to fill Glen Canyon. Brower sent it to Udall. Harold Gilliam, a Udall aide, would later recount that Udall’s eyes glistened as he looked through the book. “I was in Congress when we voted for this dam,” Udall said sadly. “We had no idea what was there.” Soon afterward, Udall took his family and rafted through the rapidly filling canyon and then down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon, having second thoughts about the dams.

Udall decided he’d seen enough and stopped the project for the second dam. His son, Tom Udall remembers it well. In a NPR, *All Things Considered* interview, he shared, “When Dad got off the rafting trip and out of the canyon, he held a press conference and said, ‘We’re not going to build dams in the Grand Canyon. It’s a magnificent place, and we should leave it alone.’”<sup>46</sup> And so Stewart overruled the Commissioner of Reclamation, and saved the Grand Canyon from the proposed power dams. In the PBS documentary, *For Earth’s Sake: The Life and Times of David Brower*, Udall spoke softly but with determination about how David changed his mind. “The most important thing for any public official,” he told me, “is to be open-minded. And Brower changed my mind about the Grand Canyon. He showed me I was wrong. And for that, I’m in his debt, no question about it.” In the Grand Canyon at least, the Colorado River still runs free.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Shogren, “Ex-Interior Secretary Stewart Udall Remembered,” *NPR, All Things Considered*, March 22, 2010.

<sup>47</sup> de Graff, Sierra.



As Stewart reflected back to his time in public service he mourned the loss of cooperation and civility in government and said, “I served as a congressman for six years under President Eisenhower, and in the cabinets of Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. A bond of mutual respect muted most partisan quarrels; when paramount Cold War issues arose, every president garnered solid support. He referred to then House Speaker, Sam Rayburn, encapsulating, that sentiment, “We elect one president at a time, and whoever he happens to be, I want him to be a successful president.”<sup>48</sup> Stewart further stated that “I regard the period from 1945 to 1981 as a turbulent time, but also a time when mutual respect allowed policymaking to be governed by compromise and restraint.” In a public television interview with Bill Moyers in 2003, Udall said, “Republicans and Democrats, we all worked together.” But by the time of that interview, Mr. Udall added that “Washington had been overtaken by money and that people seeking public office fought for contributions from business interests that viewed environmental protection as a detriment to profit at best.”<sup>49</sup>

Former governor of Arizona and U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, said of Udall that “he was the greatest American conservationist since Theodore Roosevelt.”<sup>50</sup>

President Obama praised Udall’s service. “For the better part of three decades, Stewart Udall served this Nation honorably. Whether in the skies above Italy in World War II, in Congress or as Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall left an indelible mark on this nation and inspired countless Americans who will continue his fight for clean air, clean water and to maintain our many natural treasures.”<sup>51</sup>

A later U.S. Interior Secretary, Ken Salazar, called Udall “one of the greatest secretaries of the Interior in my lifetime.” He “was a pioneer and a visionary in protecting America’s natural resources and cultural heritage who exemplified his family's commitment to public service.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Stewart Udall, “A Letter to My Grandchildren,” Reprinted in *Santa Fe Conservation Trust*, <https://sfct.org/udall-a-letter-to-my-grandchildren/>

<sup>49</sup> Schneider and Dean, “Stewart L. Udall, Conservationist in Kennedy and Johnson Cabinets, Dies at 90.”

<sup>50</sup> “Stewart L. Udall: A Celebration of Life and Legacy.”

<sup>51</sup> Shogren, “Ex-Interior Secretary Stewart Udall Remembered,” and *The American Presidency Project*, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/statement-president-obama-passing-stewart-udall>

<sup>52</sup> Secretary Ken Salazar, “Press release from Office of U.S. Department of Interior,” [www.legistorm.com/stormfeed/view\\_rss/67426/organization/69383/title/secretary-salazar-statement-on-the-passing-of-stewart-udall-former-secretary-of-the-interior.html](http://www.legistorm.com/stormfeed/view_rss/67426/organization/69383/title/secretary-salazar-statement-on-the-passing-of-stewart-udall-former-secretary-of-the-interior.html).

Stewart Lee Udall's Life Sketch Part II continues Stewart's life work following his formal government service, <https://scudder.org/stewart-lee-udalls-life-sketch-part-ii/>.