

Madam Secretary – A Memoir by Madeleine Albright.
Macmillan 2003.

Madeleine Albright was born in Czechoslovakia before the war, and fled from there with her parents to England where she lived through the Second World War. After a brief sojourn in Prague at the war's end they moved to America where she grew up. A highly intelligent woman, Albright graduated from the prestigious Wellesley College in 1959, married Joseph Albright three days later and wrote a doctoral dissertation in international relations while bringing up her three daughters Katie, Alice and Ann.

In 1982, Joe Albright left his wife and to manage the trauma and pain engendered by their divorce Madeleine Albright devoted herself to her career as an expert in International Affairs, as well as working with and for Jimmy Carter and other major figures in American democratic circles.

But her apotheosis undoubtedly arrived with the election of Bill Clinton as President in 1992. Albright was appointed Ambassador to the United Nations in 1993, a post she filled with panache, courage and immense moral authority for four years before becoming the first woman in American history to serve as Secretary of State until the end of Clinton's second term.

Though physically small, Albright always radiated an iron determination and will power, both of which are evident in the pages of this autobiography. What is more surprising is her warmth, sense of humour, and endearing refusal to take herself too seriously. She is touchingly revealing about her emotional life, particularly with regard to the impact of the revelation of her Jewish ancestry in 1997.

Madam Secretary is also fascinating for the insights it sheds on the personalities of international politics during a tempestuous eight years, and the human dimension of events that dominated the headlines of the time.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh