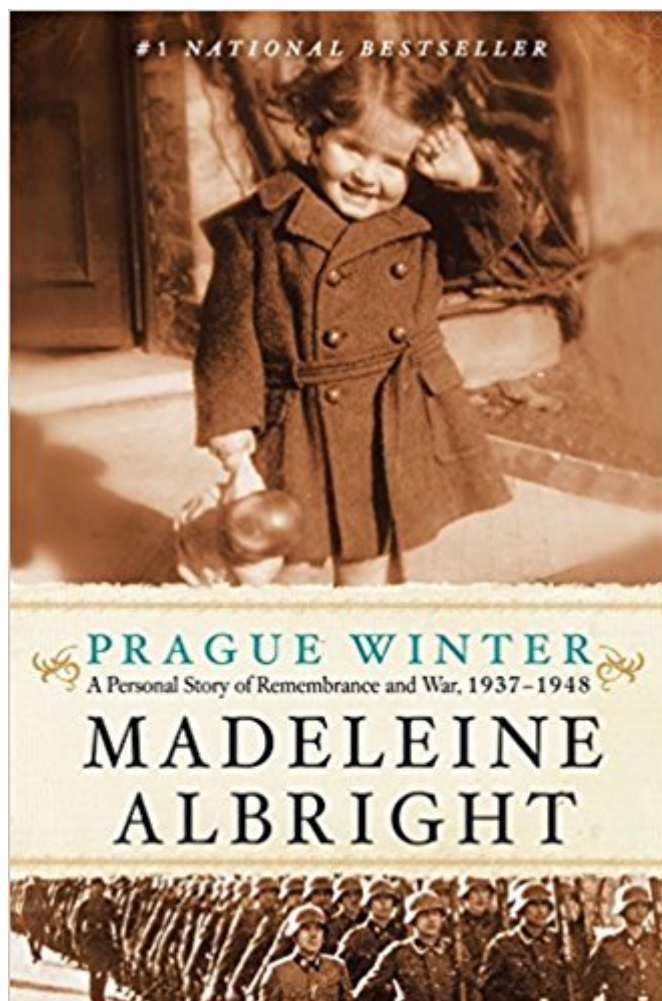


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Prague Winter: A Personal Story Of Remembrance And War, 1937-1948



Synopsis

Drawing on her own memory, her parents' written reflections, interviews with contemporaries, and newly-available documents, former US Secretary of State and New York Times bestselling author Madeleine Albright recounts a tale that is by turns harrowing and inspiring. Before she turned twelve, Madeleine Albright's life was shaken by some of the most cataclysmic events of the 20th century: the Nazi invasion of her native Prague, the Battle of Britain, the attempted genocide of European Jewry, the allied victory in World War II, the rise of communism, and the onset of the Cold War. In *Prague Winter*, Albright reflects on her discovery of her family's Jewish heritage many decades after the war, on her Czech homeland's tangled history, and on the stark moral choices faced by her parents and their generation. Often relying on eyewitness descriptions, she tells the story of how millions of ordinary citizens were ripped from familiar surroundings and forced into new roles as exile leaders and freedom fighters, resistance organizers and collaborators, victims and killers. These events of enormous complexity are shaped by concepts familiar to any growing child: fear, trust, adaptation, the search for identity, the pressure to conform, the quest for independence, and the difference between right and wrong. *Prague Winter* is an exploration of the past with timeless dilemmas in mind, a journey with universal lessons that is simultaneously a deeply personal memoir and an incisive work of history. It serves as a guide to the future through the lessons of the past, as seen through the eyes of one of the international community's most respected and fascinating figures. Albright and her family's experiences provide an intensely human lens through which to view the most political and tumultuous years in modern history.

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Customer Reviews

Madeleine Albright on Writing *Prague Winter* On the evening of February 4, 1997, I led the cabinet into the House of Representatives prior to the President's annual address—the first woman ever to do so. Exchanging greetings with senators and other dignitaries, my heart should have been joyful; instead, I was stunned. That morning Washington Post headline had read: “Albright Family Tragedy Comes to Light.” I was 59 when I learned from a reporter and from certain letters I had received that my ancestral heritage was Jewish and that more than two dozen of my relatives had died in the Holocaust. The revelation shook my deeply ingrained sense of identity, and prompted me to seek answers to questions that I had never before thought to ask. That search began with visits to the small towns in Czechoslovakia where my parents had grown up and to the ancient synagogue where the names of Holocaust victims are enshrined. *Prague Winter* is a continuation of that personal journey, but also a much wider tale concerning a generation compelled to make painful moral choices amid the tumult of war. In 1939, when efforts by British and French leaders to appease Hitler had backfired, the Nazis invaded my homeland. I was not yet two years old. My parents escaped with me to London where my father became head of broadcasting for the Czechoslovak government in exile. Strangers in an embattled land, we endured along with our new neighbors the terrible bombing of the Blitz. Back home, the German occupation quickly evolved into a reign of terror under the direction of Reinhard Heydrich, “The Butcher of Prague.” As preparations were made to exterminate the country's Jews, Czechoslovak parachutists returned to their native soil with a mission: to kill Heydrich -- the only successful assassination of a senior Nazi during the war. In the months that followed that daring assault, Czechs suffered from Hitler's vengeance, while Jews confined to the infamous Terezin ghetto struggled to retain hope despite overcrowded conditions and the periodic departure of fellow inmates on trains to the east. In England, Czechoslovak leaders maneuvered to reclaim their country's independence; my mother and father agonized over the fate of loved ones who had remained behind. From the day America entered the war, my parents and their friends were confident the Allies would win. As democrats from Central Europe, they prayed that the United States—not the Soviet Union—would wield the decisive postwar influence in our region. It was not to be. When at last the Nazis were defeated, Czechoslovakia became again a battleground between democracy and totalitarianism;

before long, my family was forced into exile for the second time, finding a permanent home in America. The story of Prague Winter is often as intensely personal as a mother's letter, a father's hidden sorrow, and the earnest artwork of an imprisoned ten-year-old cousin. The themes, however, are universal: loyalty and betrayal, respect and bigotry, accommodating evil or fighting back. What fascinates me is why we make the choices we do. What prompts one person to act boldly in a moment of crisis and a second to seek shelter in the crowd? Why do some people become stronger in the face of adversity while others quickly lose heart? What drives many of us to look down on neighbors based on the flimsy pretexts of nationality and creed? Is it education, spiritual belief, parental guidance, traumatic events, or more likely some combination that causes us to follow the paths that we do? My search for answers compelled me to look back to the time of harshest winter in the city of my birth. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"A gripping account of World War II. . . . In taut prose, Albright weaves a powerful narrative that wraps her family's story into the larger political drama unfolding in Europe." (The Philadelphia Inquirer) "Albright has supplemented a deeply researched history of World War II-era Czechoslovakia with a moving family narrative." (The Daily) "Prague Winter is not only a family story—a proud and moving one—but a brilliant and multilayered account of how Czechoslovakia was formed along the most idealistic lines in the aftermath of World War I. An altogether fascinating and inspiring read." (Michael Korda, The Daily Beast) "Showing us villainy, heroism, and agonizing moral dilemmas, Albright's vivid storytelling and measured analysis bring this tragic era to life." (Publishers Weekly (starred review)) "A genuinely admirable book. Albright skillfully returns us to some of the darkest years of modern times. Spring eventually came to Prague, but in much of the world it is still winter. The love of democracy fills every one of these instructive and stirring pages." (Leon Wieseltier) "I was totally blown away by this book. It is a breathtaking combination of the historical and the personal. Albright confronts the brutal realities of the Holocaust and the conflicted moral choices it led to. An unforgettable tale of fascism and communism, courage and realism, families and heartache and love. (Walter Isaacson) "A remarkable story of adventure and passion, tragedy and courage set against the backdrop of occupied Czechoslovakia and World War II. Albright provides fresh insights into the events that shaped her career and challenges us to think deeply about the moral dilemmas that arise in our own lives." (Vaclav Havel) "A riveting tale of her family's experience in Europe during World War II [and] a well-wrought

political history of the region, told with great authority. . . . More than a memoir, this is a book of facts and action. — (The Los Angeles Times) — “A compelling personal exploration of [Albright’s] family’s Jewish roots as well as an excellent history of Czechoslovakia from 1937 to 1948. . . . Highly informative and insightful. . . . I can’t recommend Prague Winter highly enough. — (The Washington Post Book World) — “In the crowded field of memoirs written by former secretaries of state, Madeleine Albright’s books stand out. . . . Albright is a charming and entertaining storyteller. — (The New York Review of Books) — “Albright’s book is a sprightly historical narrative of this long decade. . . . Her account of the destruction of inter-war Czechoslovakia, both as a geographical entity and as an idea of democracy, first by the Nazis and then by the Communists, is balanced and vivid. — (The Economist) — “A blend of history and memoir that reveals in rich, poignant and often heartbreaking detail a story that had been hidden from her by her own parents. . . . The beating heart of the book is Albright’s searing account of her intimate family saga. — (The Jewish Journal) — “An extraordinary book. . . . Albright artfully presents a wrenching tale of horror and darkness, but also one in which decent and brave people again and again had their say. — (István Deák, The New Republic)

This is the first book by Madeleine Albright that I have read. I was impressed with her cogent style of writing and how she wove her story through the larger narrative and had it make sense as a part of that story, and not something just grafted on. Having lived there for a short time I understood some of what she talked about in terms of national viewpoint and feelings toward Germans. During that time (in the former Sudetenland), it was the 50th anniversary of WWII and there was a lot of emotion running high concerning reparations to those families forced to leave at the end; this book was very helpful in giving much of what was going on around me at that time a context. I had learned the bare bones of the issues from the people I got to know, but this book provided a lot of material to fill in the many holes and questions that lingered.

This book was a remarkable explanation of why Czechoslovakia turned toward Russia and became a communist satellite state. As another reviewer pointed out, Czechoslovakia was thrown under the bus any time such action would placate Hitler. Neville Chamberlain and the French allowed Hitler to invade and occupy Czechoslovakia in an attempt to satisfy Hitler. Today we all know that nothing was going to placate Hitler and a war was inevitable. The British were not prepared for a full scale war and by abandoning the Czechs, they bought time to build their military. None of the big

countries like England, France, or Russia were willing to go to war to honor treaties they signed with the Czechs to guarantee them protection. The English and French were blatant in their disregard of Czech rights and the treaties they signed at the Munich conference. Czechoslovakia was not even invited to the Munich conference where her very existence was decided. Since Russian involvement depended on French action, the Russians were off the hook. Only French involvement in Czech defense would have given rise to a Russian obligation to defend Czechoslovakia. Thus their treaty with Czechoslovakia did not operate merely because Hitler intended to invade and occupy the country. Even though Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia, its treaty with Russia did not require Russia to defend them. Hence, Russia was not in violation of any agreement the Czechs had with it when it was occupied by Germany. Because the British and the French both ignored their treaty with the Czechs and allowed Germany to invade and occupy Czechoslovakia, many Czechs had a bad taste in their mouth about the western European countries and hence the U.S. There was also an incident at the end of the war during which the Czech population fought the remaining German troops. They requested arms and military help from the U.S. army. For a variety of reasons having nothing to do with the deservedness of their cause, aid was withheld. Many Czech lives were needlessly lost and perhaps, this too gave rise to anti-U.S. feelings. In any case the Czechs no longer trusted the U.S., Britain or France. Therefore, it was probably more palatable to work with the Russians after the war than the west. Further, most Czechs were peasants. They were poor. The notion of communism offered a romantic ray of hope in a country impoverished by a depression and a war it did not want. I have been to Prague and Terezienstadt. The cities survived the war intact because there was very little bombing. It contained few essential resources for military needs so it was primarily spared. However, I had hoped that Ms. Albright would examine her Jewish roots more meaningfully. Clearly her parents were secular Jews who even put up a Xmas tree b/c Xmas was a national holiday. Being Jewish in the diplomatic core could not have been easy. At the time our own state department had few if any Jews and was outwardly anti-semitic. So it would be understandable if Korbela, Albright's father tried to hide his Judaism. Further, he lost so many relatives in the holocaust merely because they were Jewish. One could forgive concealing one's Judaism in a future life for that reason alone. However, the author tells us none of these things. She also does a rather superficial investigation. It is true that most of her relatives including her three living grandparents perished under horrific conditions in the holocaust. However, her telling of their fate was a dry unemotional history. Under Jewish law her mother was Jewish and she is Jewish. Since she is Jewish so are her children. Did she investigate the faith to see if she was drawn to it? Did she encourage her siblings or her children to learn about Judaism to see if the Jewish faith might be

more fitting for them than Christianity. I don't think there was any encouragement in this direction. She claims that she has no material in her father's papers from which to draw any conclusions, because she didn't learn of the issue for 6 decades. However, her cousin, Dasa was alive. Surely she remembered Jewish rituals performed by her aunts. There is no explanation about any communication with Dasa over their Jewish history. Surely Dasa was aware that she was sent to live in England with her cousin Madeline and her aunt and uncle because the situation in Prague was becoming dangerous for Jews. She could not have believed herself to be catholic. Had she been catholic there would have been no reason to flee. I find the book lacking in this area. I'd like to see Ms. Albright study the religion, attend a few synagogue sermons and bible classes and consider her reaction. I suspect she is not a person of faith. However, her mother must have prepared typically Jewish dishes for the family when she was growing up. This is a cultural issue. Did her mother prepare the meat filled and boiled dumplings called "Kreplach"? How about the fruit filled cookies called "rugalach?" Did she ever make a matzoh ball? Gefilte fish? Did she make a beef short rib and cabbage soup called "cabbage borscht" without adding the sour cream? Non Jews often ate the soup with sour cream but Jews typically did not. Does she remember if her mother ever made a pork roast? If not doesn't she find that odd. Even if they ate it at the homes of others, did the family ever prepare it at home. I bet that other than during wartime shortages they didn't. In Britain during WWII everyone including Jews ate an American canned meat(pork) product called spam. During the blitz London survived on it. Since refrigeration could be sporadic, spam was the only "meat" available. So eating spam does not count in this evaluation. Often even though a family is not religious, festival foods are still lovingly remembered and prepared. Eating habits may not change though the religious ritual or reason for them has vanished. Now even non-Jews eat these dishes in Jewish style restaurants located in big cities all over the U.S. Yet Ms. Albright did not mention even one of these. Judaism values teaching and learning. It values the individual's right to self determination. Were any of her values traceable to her Jewish roots? She doesn't touch on this and we will never know. Note: I have just learned that one of her daughters married into a Jewish family and that her youngest grandson is preparing for his bar mitzvah. I wish she had mentioned this in her book and described to what extent her daughter has either become Jewish or decided to raise her children Jewish.

Considering that I am a history buff, especially concerning the WW2 years in Europe, naturally, I enjoyed this book tremendously. This is not a history book per se, but rather a family biography of those years but does touch on many facts of those times, especially pertaining to (the former)

Czechoslovakia's role. One could even consider this a mini history lesson on Czechoslovakia's history, but written in a personal manner that makes it pleasant to learn. Good subject material and well written. I give it an A rating.

I read this book because I was expecting an autobiography of a major figure in US statecraft. Instead, I found a history of the Czech Republic with minor biographical information. This was not a disappointment, it was a bonus! I learned a lot about the development of the environment that led up to WW II, as well as the history of Prague, Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic and neighboring countries. The book provided a lot of topics of conversation. I happened to be in Prague after I read the book (not my first visit by any means), and I discussed some of what I had read with my local colleagues. They were amazed that I was familiar with the relationships between Britain, France, the USSR and pre-war Czechoslovakia, which was fun. The enhancements to the edition mostly do not work on my Kindle. Perhaps if I had read it on my PC or a Kindle Fire I could have seen what they are. A good book if you like history.

There is no way that I can top some of the great reviews written about *Prague Winter: A Personal Story of Remembrance and War, 1937-1948* so, I'll just state some of my simple observations on this wonderful memoir. Ms. Albright weaves just enough of her own personal story with regards to her family, friends of the family and relatives as to not bog down the story. The historical data that she has well researched, does not get heavy with details, but provides just enough to keep the memoir moving. Her details on the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich read like a well written spy novel and her descriptions of Terezin were perfect but heartbreaking. If anyone plans on visiting Prague, please take time to visit Terezin as it is only about an hour's drive from the Old Town Square. I am still stunned at how well written and researched this book actually is. Highly recommended to anyone interested in the history of World War II, interested in the plight of the Czechs during this horrible time or just interested in Ms. Albright and who her family really is.

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