



Madam President: A Novel

By Nicolle Wallace

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With *Madam President*, current cohost of *The View* and former White House Communications Director Nicolle Wallace returns with an electrifying portrait of three powerful women on a day that will change the country forever.

Charlotte Kramer, the forty-fifth President of the United States, has done the unprecedented in allowing a network news team to document a day in her life—and that of her most senior staff. But while twenty news cameras are embedded with the president, the unthinkable happens: five major attacks are leveled on US soil. Her secretary of defense, Melanie, and her press secretary, Dale, must instantly jump to action in supporting the president and reassuring the country that the safety they treasure is in capable hands.

But secrets have always thrived in President Kramer's White House. With all eyes on them and America's stability on the line, all three women are hiding personal and professional secrets that could rock the West Wing to its very foundations...and change the lives of the people they love most.

With an insider's sharp eye and her trademark winning prose, Nicolle Wallace delivers a timely novel of domestic and political intrigue that is impossible to put down.

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Madam President: A Novel By Nicolle Wallace Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #590535 in Books
- Published on: 2015-04-28
- Released on: 2015-04-28
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.10" w x 6.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 352 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"A breezy romp through the corridors of power town." (*USA Today* on *MADAM PRESIDENT*)

"Intrigue, love, betrayal, politics, family and an international crisis – this insider novel about life in the White House really delivers. I couldn't put it down!" (Lauren Weisberger, #1 New York Times Bestselling Author)

"Nicolle Wallace's thriller *Eighteen Acres* may be the best novel ever written about life in the White House." (*The Washington Post* (on *EIGHTEEN ACRES*))

"Nicolle Wallace neatly melds the political and personal facets of public life to produce an absorbing suggestion of future possibilities in the American presidency in this absorbing novel." (*Bookpage*)

"Essential reading for all political fiction junkies." (*Library Journal*)

"It moves along smartly and suspensefully, with insightful glimpses of White House life... It's a gloriously cynical climax to an entertaining tale, and by itself could justify another book about Charlotte Kramer's troubled White House. Wallace's first two novels have been impressive." (*The Washington Post* (on *IT'S CLASSIFIED*))

"This novel reads like a lighthearted novel for people interested in politics, but it's also a pretty big indictment of how the political process works." --Time.com

"A great read." (Rachel Maddow)

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"Nicolle Wallace takes us on a riveting journey inside the Beltway with the subtle and fascinating details only an insider would know. Her powerful characters jump off the page, captivating readers to the end. Another in her series of great political fiction." (Douglas Brunt, New York Times bestselling author of *THE MEANS* and *GHOSTS OF MANHATTAN*)

Though it's easy to enjoy the intrigue, romance, and scandal of Wallace's cast of political power brokers, she deserves kudos for illustrating not just the potential for what powerful women can do at the helm of our country—but the honor and tenacity of the American spirit, which surely knows no gender. Juicy, wry, and smart.

(Sophie Littlefield, bestselling author of *THE MISSING PLACE*)

“MADAM PRESIDENT is a page turner that takes Nicolle's storytelling to the next level.”
(Dana Perino, Former White House Press Secretary)

“Fierce and flawed heroines take center stage in this page turner. Wallace's insider knowledge of the political and media landscapes gives MADAM PRESIDENT a credibility that provides the reader insight into what really happens when the worst really happens.” (Alison Stewart, journalist and author of FIRST CLASS)

“Nicolle Wallace takes us on a riveting journey inside the Beltway with the subtle and fascinating details only an insider would know. Her powerful characters jump off the page, captivating readers to the end. Another in her series of great political fiction.” (Douglas Brunt, New York Times bestselling author of THE MEANS and GHOSTS OF MANHATTAN)

“*Scandal* meets 24 -- Nicolle's experience in the media and inside the White House combined with her knowledge of history makes for some truly fantastic plot lines.” (Mika Brzezinski, co-host of MSNBC's Morning Joe)

“Nicolle Wallace is one of those rare few who not only writes about Washington DC and the White House with credibility, she sheds light. In MADAM PRESIDENT she opens the curtain so we can see the humans behind the high-profile jobs on a day beset with common and extraordinarily horrific events. As with her two previous novels it is a compelling and engrossing read.” (Jake Tapper, CNN chief Washington correspondent and anchor of The Lead with Jake Tapper)

“From its fly-on-the-wall vantage point of the messy machinations of government intrigue, Wallace's high-stakes novel delivers a deft look at the personal and political sacrifices made by women at the pinnacle of their careers.” (*Booklist*)

“MADAM PRESIDENT is an exciting novel, the third in a series by Washington insider (and “The View” co-host) Nicolle Wallace. While it can easily be read as a stand-alone, the story actually starts with EIGHTEENACRES and continues in IT'S CLASSIFIED. Readers with an interest in politics will truly enjoy the fast-paced action and plethora of political scandals that fill the book's pages.” (*BookReporter.com*)

About the Author

Nicolle Wallace is a political strategist and former political analyst for *CBS Evening News* whose recent posts include White House Communications Director under George W. Bush and campaign advisor for John McCain and Sarah Palin. Wallace lives in New York City and Connecticut.

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Madam President

CHAPTER ONE

Melanie

Are my latest changes to the speech in the version that's in the teleprompter?” Charlotte asked as she held up a draft with her edits marked in black ink.

“Yes, Madam President. I input your final revisions myself,” Melanie replied in her usual calm manner.

“What time are we doing this?” Charlotte was tapping her perfectly polished fingernails on the desk and

swinging one of her legs back and forth underneath it as she reread her remarks. Melanie recognized both behaviors as two of Charlotte's relatively well-disguised nervous tics.

"You'll go on the air at eleven-oh-two to give the anchors a couple of minutes to set things up and announce that you are addressing the nation live from the Oval Office."

"What time is it now?"

"It's ten minutes before eleven, Madam President."

Charlotte nodded and looked down at the text once more. After about twenty seconds, she looked up again.

"I'm sorry, Mel, how much time until we go live?"

"About ten minutes, Madam President. Can I get you something to drink?"

"I'm fine."

For the first time since they'd met nearly six years earlier, Melanie worried about Charlotte's ability to perform her official duties with her trademark steadiness. They were alone in the Oval Office, and it was Melanie's job to get the president through the next twenty-five minutes.

It wasn't Melanie's actual job, but this wasn't a typical day. Melanie served as the secretary of defense, a post she'd held for the last eighteen months, ever since Charlotte had been reelected for a second term as the country's forty-fifth president. Melanie's Oval Office assignment was as unexpected as the events of the previous twelve hours.

The sound of jets patrolling the airspace above the White House and the beams of light from the helicopters hovering nearby weren't helping with Charlotte's unusually high levels of agitation and impatience.

"Madam President, I need you to relax a little bit, or you're going to scare people more."

"Jesus Christ, Melanie!" Charlotte exploded.

Maybe it's good that she's blowing off a bit of steam, Melanie thought.

"Without any of our guys having a goddamned clue or hint of warning, terrorists attacked five cities. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of people are dead. And we don't have any idea if there are more plots under way or where the attacks originated. People should be scared."

"I crossed that section out of your speech. Thought it might be a little too much straight talk for tonight," Melanie deadpanned.

Charlotte didn't smile. She stared down at the pages of her speech, but Melanie could tell she wasn't reading them. Melanie moved toward one of the sofas in the middle of the Oval Office and ran her hand back and forth across the smooth linen fabric that she'd selected when Charlotte had tasked her with renovating the room at the beginning of her first term. The president hadn't given her any direction other than to stick to one color. She had a thing for monochromatic dressing that extended to her interior-decorating preferences. The fabric was so pale and delicate that the sofas needed to be recovered quarterly, but Charlotte said that they

sent a strong signal to everyone to keep their feet off the furniture. She'd thwarted several attempts to recover them in a more practical material.

The down-filled couches were inviting, but Melanie knew that if she sat, her twenty-four-hour day would catch up with her, and she'd never be able to muster the energy to get back up. She glanced down at her BlackBerry. Her executive assistant made fun of her for still carrying the antiquated device, but she'd had a BlackBerry (at times, she'd had two or three of them) since her first days at the White House almost two decades earlier. Now she also carried an iPhone that her husband, Brian, had given her the year before and that she used for personal communications with him and with their friends and family. Melanie scrolled through the e-mail messages on the iPhone and opened a message from Brian. He was in the White House briefing room, about forty feet away from the Oval Office, with the rest of the White House correspondents. His message simply said, "Good luck with the speech. Call when you can. Love you." Melanie skimmed what looked like hundreds of unopened e-mails. They'd have to wait until after Charlotte's address. When she looked up, she was surprised to see the president standing in front of the two televisions in her private dining room. Melanie walked toward the side of the Oval Office that opened into the dining room and watched Charlotte closely for a couple of minutes. She was wearing a perfectly tailored black Armani jacket with matching pants. A pale blue silk blouse peeked out from under the jacket, and the initials of her twins, P and H, hung from a white-gold chain around her neck. Her thick blond hair was tucked behind her ears. She had stepped out of her black heels, and in her bare feet, she looked diminutive. Her makeup artist was highly skilled, but Melanie thought she'd been a tad heavy-handed with the blush. Charlotte wouldn't tolerate another touch-up on a night like this, though. Melanie shifted her weight from one foot to the other and moved closer to the door so that Charlotte would know she was there.

"You're the one who's not having a normal reaction, Melanie. No one should be as stoic as you are right now. Frankly, it's jarring," Charlotte said without looking away from the carnage on the screens.

"Madam President, you've mistaken my jet lag for tranquillity. I woke up in Iraq this morning, and with the time change, I think that was about twenty-four hours ago."

"That was this morning?" Charlotte's eyes were still glued to the screens.

"Doesn't it seem like a thousand years ago?"

Charlotte muted the televisions and turned to face Melanie.

"I think it's safe to say that everything has changed since then, don't you?"

Before Melanie could conjure up an appropriate response, the network producer who was directing the live coverage of Charlotte's speech knocked on the door of the Oval Office. Melanie had instructed him to do so when they were two minutes out so she could get Charlotte seated and check the camera shot.

The president had insisted that they be left alone in the Oval Office after the hair and makeup people left. It was unheard of to leave the president alone in the Oval Office for a televised address to the nation without someone who was trained in video production, but Melanie had held just about every job in the White House communications and press departments during her decade and a half of service in the executive branch of government.

"That was your two-minute warning, Madam President. You're going to do this just as we rehearsed it. As you requested, it's just you and me in here, so please do not fidget in your seat. I can keep you in focus, but

if you move out of the camera shot, there's not much I can do to reframe you with my limited TV-production skills. Don't move your chair or stand up. And try not to do any forced smiling. You want to appear somber but not alarming."

"Anything else?" Charlotte snapped. She took her seat behind the desk and held up one hand to shield her eyes from the glare. Lighting the Oval Office for an evening address was one of the trickier production feats. The production staff had set up freestanding stadium lights on either side of the president's desk to illuminate her properly for the TV audience. As she read through her speech one final time, Melanie thought she looked surly, but she didn't want to stoke her ire with any more instructions.

Melanie checked the shot and confirmed that it looked OK with the professionals by opening the door a crack. The director gave her a thumbs-up, and Melanie shut the door.

"We're all set, Madam President. You look great."

Melanie took a deep breath and smiled reassuringly at her boss. They hadn't been alone in the Oval Office together in months, and until today, Melanie hadn't worked with her on a speech since she'd left her post as White House chief of staff at the end of Charlotte's first term as president. Despite the current tragic, catastrophic circumstances, it wasn't uncomfortable to be with each other like this. Melanie and Charlotte had worked together long enough to take exactly what they needed from one another. Melanie was acting cooler than she felt because she sensed in Charlotte a hotness that would not translate well on camera. For her part, Charlotte was using these few precious moments to process what had happened before packing away her horror and fear and projecting strength and resolve to the entire world.

Melanie suspected that Charlotte had chosen her for this assignment because she was the one person with whom there was no pretending. The extraordinary step had been taken to transport Melanie from Andrews Air Force Base, where she'd landed an hour earlier, to the South Lawn of the White House in one of the helicopters typically designated as Marine One and used to transport Charlotte. Melanie assumed that it also had something to do with the fact that she'd been through something like this before. After all, she'd worked in the press office on September 11, 2001.

"You're sure about the Longfellow poem?" Charlotte asked.

"Most presidents quote from scripture on occasions like this. You said that you didn't want that, so I included the Longfellow quote. We are sixty seconds out, and I can't replace it at this point, but if you want to drop it, the speech works fine without it."

"No. I like it. It's powerful. And you don't think we use the word toward too much? It's in here at least three times." They'd chosen every word in the address with care.

"The speech is good, Madam President."

Charlotte nodded. "I've got this," she promised.

"I know you do." Melanie smiled and said a silent prayer.

At that moment, the light on the camera started flashing. When the flashing stopped, Charlotte would be seen instantly by millions of people.

Melanie checked the teleprompter one last time to make sure the speech had loaded properly and then counted down with her fingers.

When the light stopped flashing, Melanie mouthed, “Go.”

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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