THE PRESIDENT'S CHOICE · THE SECOND TERM · BOOK TWO

The Indispensable Man

Stephen Miller, Donald J. Trump, and the America First Revolution

by Robert Miller

Free Sample · Author's Note, Prologue, and Chapter One

The President's Choice · The Second Term · Book Two

International Publishing Corporation

Washington, D.C.

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Author's Note

This book is an appreciative account of the public career of Stephen Miller, from his student days in Santa Monica and Durham to his appointment in November 2026 as the thirty-third White House Chief of Staff. It is written from the point of view of those who admire his work, and it sets out the case that his supporters, colleagues, and the President he serves would make for him. It is not a neutral survey of every argument about his record, and it does not pretend to be. Readers who want the arguments of his critics will find them in abundance elsewhere; they have been made loudly, often, and at great length in the national press for a decade.

What a reader will find here is the story of a young man who chose a cause early, held to it under pressure, and attached himself to a political figure at a moment when almost no one in Washington thought that figure could win. It is the story of a partnership between Donald J. Trump and the aide who has stood beside him longer than almost anyone else in his political life. It is also the story of how ideas that were once considered beyond the pale of respectable opinion in the capital became the governing program of the United States.

The facts in these pages are drawn from the public record: official White House releases and statements, court decisions, government statistics published by the Department of Homeland Security and its component agencies, congressional records, and contemporaneous reporting by national news organizations. Where figures are given, they are the figures the government and reputable outside analysts reported at the time. Quotations are taken from public statements, speeches, and published remarks. No conversations have been invented, and no private scenes have been imagined and presented as fact. Where the author offers interpretation, it is offered as interpretation.

This book has not been authorized or reviewed by Mr. Miller or by the White House. The author has no relationship with Mr. Miller beyond the surname they share.

The author is grateful to the many veterans, colleagues, and readers whose conversations about public service, loyalty, and the duties of citizenship shaped the way this story is told.

Robert Miller
Washington, D.C.
November 2026

Prologue

The Longest Partnership

On Friday, November 6, 2026, three days after an election that had gone badly for his party, President Donald J. Trump announced that the next White House Chief of Staff would be Stephen Miller. The President described Miller as one of his most trusted advisors and said he would take over the following Monday, November 9. Susie Wiles, the first woman ever to hold the post and the longest-serving chief of staff of Trump's political life, would move to the President's outside political operation.

For the commentators who had spent ten years writing about Stephen Miller, the appointment seemed to confirm everything they had said about him. For the people who had worked alongside him, it confirmed something else. It confirmed that in a political world famous for its turnover, its feuds, and its short memories, one relationship had held from the very beginning.

Miller posted that serving on Trump's team from day one had been "the privilege of my lifetime," and that he was "honored beyond words" to serve as White House Chief of Staff. The White House communications director, Steven Cheung, put it in the shorthand of the movement: Miller was a "Trump OG," someone who had been with the President since the very beginning. Former Chief of Staff Mark Meadows called the choice "a phenomenal selection," describing Miller as an incredibly competent leader who understood Capitol Hill and the federal government. Cabinet secretaries and agency heads lined up to offer their congratulations.

That a man of forty-one should be handed the most powerful staff position in the American government was remarkable. That he should be handed it after a midterm defeat, when a less confident President might have reached for a conciliatory figure from outside

the inner circle, was more remarkable still. The choice told the country something about Donald Trump: that when the political weather turned, he would not abandon the program he had been elected to carry out, and he would not abandon the people who had carried it out with him.

It also told the country something about Stephen Miller. It told them that the young speechwriter who had warmed up rally crowds in 2016, the senior advisor who had stayed all four years of a first term when so many others had come and gone, the lawyer-builder who had spent the wilderness years constructing a legal organization to fight for the America First agenda, and the deputy chief of staff who had designed the second term's border and enforcement program had, at every stage, earned the President's trust and kept it.

This book tells that story. It begins in a liberal coastal city where a teenager decided that he would say what he believed even if almost no one around him agreed. It follows him through a university controversy in which he defended young men who were later declared innocent. It traces his apprenticeship on Capitol Hill, where he learned the mechanics of legislation and the power of a well-made argument, and where he helped defeat a bill that the entire bipartisan establishment of Washington believed was certain to pass.

It follows him onto the campaign plane in 2016, typing speeches at a small keyboard while others rested. It follows him into the West Wing, where he wrote an inaugural address that announced a new governing philosophy in two words: America First. It follows him through four years of a first term in which he was, by any measure, one of the most consequential aides in the building. It follows him out of power and back again, and it ends with him at the desk nearest the Oval Office.

Throughout, the book returns to a single question. What is it about Stephen Miller that has allowed him to remain at Donald Trump's side for more than a decade, when so many others have fallen away? The

answer, this book argues, is not complicated, though it is rare. Miller believed in the program before Trump ran on it. He understood what Trump wanted to accomplish, often before others in the room did, and he knew how to translate it into language and law. He did not seek to become the story. He did not cash in. And when the President needed someone who would carry out the mandate he had been given rather than explain why it could not be done, Miller was there.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt summarized it in a single sentence in 2025: Stephen Miller had faithfully served President Trump for eleven years "because he's intelligent, hardworking, and loyal." Those three words are as good a summary of this book as any.

There is a tendency in Washington to treat staff as interchangeable, to assume that the people behind a President are simply functionaries implementing a will that is not their own. That has never been true of the best of them. The great presidential aides of American history, from Alexander Hamilton at Washington's side to Harry Hopkins with Franklin Roosevelt to James Baker with Ronald Reagan, were not mere instruments. They brought ideas, energy, and judgment, and they shaped the presidencies they served. The relationship between a President and his closest aide is one of the most consequential and least understood in American government.

The partnership between Donald Trump and Stephen Miller belongs in that tradition. It is unusual in its length, in its intensity, and in the degree to which the two men's purposes have aligned. Trump brought to the partnership the instincts, the charisma, and the political courage of a man who could fill arenas and win the presidency twice. Miller brought a decade of policy study, a gift for language, a near-encyclopedic knowledge of immigration law, and an unwillingness to accept the conventional wisdom of the capital. Together they changed the direction of American politics.

What follows is the record of that partnership, told by someone who believes it deserves to be told.

Part One

Formation

Chapter One

A Conservative in Santa Monica

The City by the Sea

Stephen Miller was born on August 23, 1985, in Santa Monica, California, the second of three children. If one were to design a place unlikely to produce the most influential conservative policy mind of his generation, it would be hard to improve on Santa Monica in the 1990s. The city sits on the Pacific at the western edge of Los Angeles County, a place of beaches, bicycle paths, expensive homes, and progressive politics. Its voters were reliably and overwhelmingly Democratic. Its civic culture prided itself on its liberalism, its diversity, and its sense of being ahead of the rest of the country on the great questions of the day.

Miller's family was part of that world. His parents were educated and successful. His mother, Miriam, was a Columbia University graduate who became a social worker; his father, Michael, worked in real estate. The family was Jewish, and its American story was a classic one: ancestors who fled persecution in Eastern Europe, in lands that are now part of Belarus, and who came to the United States early in the twentieth century with little more than the determination to build a better life. Within a few generations the family had climbed into the professional middle class. Miller was confirmed at a Reform synagogue in Santa Monica. He grew up in a household where politics was discussed and where the default assumptions were those of the city around it.

The family's circumstances were not without difficulty. When Miller was thirteen, in 1998, the family sold its home in an affluent neighborhood and moved to a smaller house in a less prosperous part of the city. Biographers have noted the move as a turning point in his adolescence. Whatever its precise effect, it gave the young Miller a view of Santa Monica that was not confined to its most comfortable streets. He saw a city of contrasts, a place whose official self-image did not always match the lived experience of its residents.

The Book That Changed a Mind

Every political conversion has its moment, and Miller has spoken of his. As a boy he read Guns, Crime, and Freedom, a 1994 book by Wayne LaPierre, then the chief executive of the National Rifle Association. The book's argument was straightforward: that the right to keep and bear arms was a fundamental liberty, that it was protected by the Constitution, and that the people who sought to restrict it were often the same people who distrusted ordinary citizens to govern their own lives.

It is not difficult to see why such an argument would strike a young reader in Santa Monica with the force of revelation. It was not merely a book about firearms. It was a book that took seriously a set of ideas that the young Miller had never heard defended by anyone around him. It suggested that the views of his teachers, his neighbors, and the newspapers his family read were not the only views a thoughtful person could hold. It suggested that there was another way of looking at the country, one rooted in the Constitution, in individual liberty, and in a certain skepticism of elite opinion.

From that point forward, Miller's intellectual life took a different course. He read conservative books and magazines. He listened to talk radio. He began, in the way of bright teenagers who have discovered an idea, to argue. What distinguished him from many young people who go through a contrarian phase was that the phase did not pass. It deepened. The positions he took as a teenager were

not adopted to provoke; they were adopted because he had come to believe them, and he would spend the rest of his life developing and acting on them.

Santa Monica High School

Miller entered Santa Monica High School, known locally as Samohi, as the new century began. The school was large, diverse, and, in its institutional culture, decidedly progressive. It was, by the accounts of those who were there, an exciting and sometimes contentious place. It was also a place where a conservative student was something of a curiosity.

Miller did not hide. He wrote letters, he spoke up in class, and he began to make his views known to an audience well beyond the school. He called in to the radio program of Larry Elder, the Los Angeles talk-show host whose libertarian conservatism and willingness to challenge the pieties of Southern California made him a natural ally for a student in Miller's position. Elder would later recall the persistent, articulate teenager who wanted the wider world to know what was happening in his school. Miller also wrote articles for the Santa Monica Lookout, a local news outlet, bringing his arguments to the city's adults.

His classmates noticed. One reporter who has written about him recalled that he and Miller bonded in middle school over a shared affection for Star Trek. The editor of the school newspaper in those years later described a young man who seemed to relish being a conservative voice in a progressive community. By graduation, his classmates had voted him "most outspoken." It was meant as a description, perhaps even a gentle tease, but it was also a recognition. In a school of thousands, Miller had made himself impossible to ignore.

The Pledge

The event that first brought Miller to wider attention came in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001. Miller was sixteen. Across the country, Americans responded to the attacks with an outpouring of patriotism: flags on porches and overpasses, packed churches and synagogues, enlistments in the armed forces, and a renewed appreciation for the symbols and rituals of national unity.

Miller believed that his school should be part of that response. He argued publicly that the Pledge of Allegiance should be recited regularly at Santa Monica High School, as it was in so many schools across the country. To many Americans, the request would have seemed unremarkable. In the climate of Santa Monica, it became a controversy, and the controversy became a story.

It is worth pausing on what that episode reveals. A sixteen-year-old student, in the weeks after the worst foreign attack on American soil since Pearl Harbor, asked that his school affirm its loyalty to the nation that had been attacked. He was willing to make the case publicly, to bear the criticism of adults who thought the request was unsophisticated or divisive, and to keep making it. Whatever one thinks of the particular dispute, the instinct behind it was patriotic, and the courage required to press it was real.

The episode also previewed a pattern that would recur throughout Miller's career. He was willing to raise a question that others preferred not to raise. He framed it in terms of first principles: in this case, the idea that a public school should teach its students to love their country. And he did not back down when the response was hostile. Those qualities would serve him well in the Senate, on the campaign trail, and in the White House.

How I Changed My Left-Wing High School

Miller's activism at Samohi came to the attention of David Horowitz, the writer and activist whose own journey from the radical left of the 1960s to the conservative movement had made him one of the most distinctive voices on the American right. Horowitz ran an organization devoted to challenging what he saw as political bias in American education, and he was always on the lookout for young people willing to stand up in hostile environments.

Horowitz published an essay by Miller on his website under the title "How I Changed My Left-Wing High School." The essay described Miller's efforts to bring a conservative perspective to a school where, as he saw it, only one perspective was usually heard. Horowitz became an important mentor, and he would later help open doors for Miller in Washington. Miller's relationship with Horowitz is a reminder that the conservative movement, for all the caricatures of it, has always depended on a network of older figures willing to encourage and promote young talent. Miller benefited from that network, and in later years he would build networks of his own.

Other students in his position might have kept their heads down, waited for college, and found a more congenial environment before speaking up. Miller did the opposite. He treated his high school as a proving ground. He learned how to write for an audience, how to make an argument that would travel, how to use the media to amplify a message, and how to absorb criticism without being deterred by it. He learned, in short, the skills that would define his career.

The Conservative Media Revolution

Miller's adolescence coincided with a transformation in American media that made his early activism possible. Until the late 1980s, the American news media had been dominated by a small number of national networks and major newspapers, which shared a broadly similar outlook and which gave conservative voices relatively little room. The repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987 opened the way for a new kind of talk radio, and within a few years conservative hosts were reaching tens of millions of listeners every week. In 1996, a new cable network, Fox News, began broadcasting. By the time Miller was in high school, the internet was beginning to allow anyone with a computer to publish to the world.

These developments gave a young conservative in Santa Monica something that a young conservative a generation earlier would not have had: access to a national audience and a national community. Miller did not have to accept the verdict of his school or his city. He could call a radio show, write for a local outlet, or publish an essay online, and he could find allies far beyond the boundaries of his community. David Horowitz, who published Miller's essay, was himself a pioneer of the new conservative media, using the internet to build an audience that traditional publications had denied him.

Miller grasped the potential of this new landscape early. He understood that the gatekeepers of traditional media no longer had the final word, and that a persuasive voice could reach an audience directly. That understanding would shape his entire career. In the Senate, he would work with talk radio hosts and online outlets to carry the case against the Gang of Eight bill to the public. On the campaign trail, he would be part of a campaign that used rallies and social media to bypass a hostile press. And in the White House, he would continue to use every available channel to speak directly to the President's supporters.

There is a direct line from the teenager calling Larry Elder's radio program to the senior advisor appearing on four Sunday shows in a single day. Both reflected an understanding that in the modern media landscape, the person willing to make his case clearly and persistently, to any audience that will listen, can shape the national debate.

The Making of a Communicator

It is easy, in hindsight, to see Miller's teenage years as a rehearsal for everything that followed. The pattern is clear enough. He identified an institution whose culture seemed to him to have drifted away from the values of the country. He studied it. He found the specific practices he believed were wrong. He made his case in public, in language designed to be heard. He enlisted allies outside the institution to amplify his arguments. And he persisted until the argument had been joined.

That is, in miniature, the method he would later bring to Washington. On Capitol Hill, he would identify a bipartisan consensus on immigration that he believed had drifted away from the interests of American workers. He would study the legislation line by line. He would make the case in public. He would enlist allies in the conservative media and in policy organizations. And he would persist until the consensus broke. In the White House, he would do the same thing on a far larger scale.

What made the young Miller unusual was not simply that he was conservative. Plenty of teenagers in liberal communities hold conservative views. What made him unusual was that he understood, at an early age, that ideas do not win on their merits alone. They win when someone is willing to fight for them, to put them into words that ordinary people can grasp, and to carry them into the arenas where decisions are made. Miller had a talent for language and a willingness to fight. Those two gifts, combined, would make him one of the most effective political communicators of his era.

The Value of a Hostile Room

There is a lesson in Miller's adolescence that is often missed by those who write about him. Growing up as a conservative in Santa Monica meant growing up in a hostile room. It meant learning, every day, how the other side thought. It meant hearing their arguments not as caricatures delivered by friendly commentators, but as the sincere convictions of teachers, classmates, and neighbors. It meant being forced to sharpen one's own arguments against the strongest opposition available.

People who grow up surrounded by agreement often never learn to defend their beliefs. They hold them as a matter of habit or inheritance. Miller held his as a matter of argument. He had been forced to justify them, over and over, to people who did not share them. By the time he arrived in Washington, he knew the progressive case on immigration, education, and national identity better than many progressives did, because he had been hearing it all his life. That knowledge would make him a formidable adversary in debate and an unusually precise drafter of policy.

It also gave him a kind of resilience that would prove essential in the years ahead. Few political figures of his generation have been subjected to as much sustained public criticism as Stephen Miller. He has been the subject of hostile profiles, unflattering books, protests, and calls for his resignation. Through it all, he has continued to do his job. The roots of that steadiness lie, at least in part, in a teenager who learned that he could be unpopular in his own school and still be right, and that the opinion of the room was not the same thing as the truth.

An American Inheritance

Miller's family history deserves one more word. His ancestors came to the United States fleeing persecution. They arrived in a country that offered them safety, opportunity, and the chance to become Americans. Within a few generations, their descendants had become professionals, property owners, and citizens fully at home in their country.

Critics have sometimes pointed to this history as if it were an indictment of Miller's views on immigration. His supporters see it differently. The America that welcomed Miller's ancestors was an America with a strong sense of national identity, an America that expected newcomers to assimilate, to learn English, to work, and to become Americans in full. It was also an America that, after the great wave of immigration in the early twentieth century, deliberately slowed the pace of new arrivals for four decades, giving the immigrants who were already here time to assimilate and to rise. Many historians credit that period of reduced immigration with helping to build the broad, unified middle class of mid-century America, a middle class that Miller's own family joined.

On this view, Miller's immigration philosophy is not a rejection of his family's story but a reflection on what made that story possible. A nation can only welcome newcomers successfully, his supporters argue, if it is a nation with borders, with laws that are enforced, with an economy that rewards work, and with a confident sense of its own identity. Miller has spent his career arguing for those conditions. His family's American success is, in a sense, the proof of concept.

Leaving Home

Miller graduated from Santa Monica High School in 2003. He left behind a school that had not, perhaps, entirely enjoyed having him, and a city whose political culture he had challenged from within. He took with him a set of convictions that had been tested in argument, a talent for writing, an understanding of how to use the media, a mentor in David Horowitz, and a growing sense that he was meant for a life in public affairs.

His next stop was Durham, North Carolina, and Duke University. There, in a far larger arena, he would face the most serious test of his young life: a moment when the entire weight of a university community, a national media frenzy, and a local prosecutor came down on a group of young men, and when Stephen Miller would be one of the very few people on campus willing to say that they deserved the presumption of innocence.

CONTINUE READING

The President’s Choice

Portraits of the people who served
President Donald J. Trump.

The Indispensable Man — The President’s Choice · The Second Term · Book Two — publication date and price to be announced.

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