Inside Stephen Miller's Dark Plot to Build a MAGA Terror State

He is descended from Russian Jews—you know, the kind of people who were once denounced as alien and unassimilable.

By Greg Sargent

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Stephen Miller's ancestors first arrived in the United States in 1903. That's when a man named Wolf Laib Glosser disembarked at Ellis Island after leaving behind his hometown in Antopol, a small town in the part of the czarist Russian empire that is now Belarus. Wolf Laib, who was fleeing a life marked by anti-Jewish pogroms and forced conscription, quickly set about trying to raise more money to bring over relatives.

"Wolf Laib found work in New York City peddling bananas and other fruit on street corners, and began sending small sums of money back to the family," reads an unpublished book about the family that one of Stephen Miller's relatives shared with *The New Republic*. The book—which tells the story of some of Miller's ancestors' immigration to the United States and their subsequent thriving here—was written by Miller's grandmother, Ruth Glosser. Now that Miller has accumulated such extraordinary power over the future of our immigration system, it's worth turning to this

[remarkable document](#), which we're making available online for the first time.

As the book recounts, Wolf Laib managed to bring over more family members in 1906, including a son, Sam Glosser. Over time, Wolf Laib—Miller's great-great-grandfather—and his descendants built a successful haberdashery business in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, which evolved into a chain of supermarkets and department stores. Sam Glosser's American-born son, Izzy, had two American children, David and Miriam Glosser—who were to become the [uncle](#) and mother of Stephen Miller.

This story, of course, tracks with that of countless others who [arrived](#) in the United States as part of the great migration, mostly from Southern and Eastern Europe, between the 1880s and the 1910s, which numbered as high as 20 million. As the book notes, they were out to "escape economic hardships and religious persecution" to build a "better life for themselves and their children."

Yet at the time, many Americans didn't think people like Miller's ancestors were fit to become a part of the United States. They were targeted by a virulent strain of [nativism](#) toward those from Southern and Eastern Europe that was largely about race—it was rooted in the "scientific racism" of the day. But it also involved a somewhat different [claim](#): that the new arrivals suffered from a "social degeneracy" or "social inadequacy"—two typical phrases at the time—which rendered them a [threat](#) to the "civilization" the United States was in the process of becoming. In this telling, as prominent sociologist Edward Alsworth Ross [declared](#) in a 1914 broadside, these new immigrants were inferior to Americans who descended from the "pioneer

breed" who'd given birth to the American nation. The new arrivals, Ross said, had "submerged" that ancestral connection to the "pioneer breed," setting the nation on a path to the "extinction that surely awaits it."

"There is little or no similarity between the clear-thinking, self-governing stocks that sired the American people and this stream of irresponsible and broken wreckage that is pouring into the lifeblood of America the social and political diseases of the Old World," declared one congressman not long after. As historian Gary Gerstle, author of the great book *American Crucible,* noted in an email to me, many nativists at the time lamented the "civilizational vulnerability" of the United States, believing that "white, Christian, and western European culture" stretching back to "ancient Greece and Rome" represented the "summit of human achievement" and the core of American civilization. This was under dire threat from "groups outside that culture" who were "unassimilable, with Jewish ranks full of Bolsheviks and Italian ranks full of anarchists."

More than a century later, those diatribes about people like Miller's ancestors are very similar to claims Miller makes today about the threat to "civilization" supposedly posed by those emigrating from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and elsewhere. To be sure, it is not a new move to bring up Miller's ancestry in the context of his current nativism, and many aspects of Miller's worldview are well-known in a scattershot way: his disdain for multiculturalism, his hatred of mass migration, his affinity with white nationalists.

But in a series of tweets, interviews in right-wing media, and statements made elsewhere, Miller has outlined

something more comprehensive and sinister—an elaborate worldview that has escaped notice in the mainstream media. It centers immigrants as a threat to "civilization" in terms that echo the rhetoric of those determined to exclude people like his ancestors.

Miller watched as Trump spoke to reporters aboard Air Force One last July (2025).

That larger worldview—and its intellectual roots—deserve more scrutiny. Given Miller's extraordinary power—his near unfettered control over President Donald Trump's massive ramp-up in immigration enforcement—a deeper understanding of Miller's views is essential. It demonstrates in a more vivid way the true extremism of his anti-immigrant project—and why it poses a serious threat to the country and its future.

Miller's Actions: A Meaner, and Whiter, America

In that book about Miller's ancestors, titled A Precious Legacy, there are wrenching passages about the

Immigration Act of 1924. That law, which represented the culmination of all those aforementioned virulent sentiments about Southern and Eastern Europeans, adopted an immigration formula tied to the 1890 distribution of ethnicities in the United States. This guaranteed that most of the 150,000 immigrants allowed entry each year would henceforth come from Northern and Western Europe, imposing tighter limits on those from Southern and Eastern Europe and elsewhere. The law's primary aim was to slam the breaks on immigration by people like Miller's ancestors.

Thanks to the 1924 act, the book notes, "the doors to free and open immigration here swung shut." Fortunately, all of Wolf Laib's immediate family made it to the United States by 1920, the book says, but many left behind did not fare well. "Those Jews who remained in Antopol were not so lucky," ruefully recounts the book, which was first discussed in _Hatemonger_ by journalist Jean Guerrero. It adds that most of those who remained in Wolf Laib's town "were murdered by the Nazis."

Strikingly, Stephen Miller has spoken positively about the 1924 law. "During the last period in which America was the undisputed global superpower—financially, culturally, militarily—immigration was net negative," Miller tweeted in August. He's referring to the period between the 1924 law and the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which ended ethnic quotas for immigration created in 1924: In short, Miller is extolling the impacts of the 1924 measure. He was even more direct in 2015 emails to Breitbart obtained by the Southern Poverty Law Center. He repeatedly praised President Calvin Coolidge for signing

that law, describing the act rhapsodically as Coolidge's "heritage" and suggesting the country should act "like Coolidge did"; that is, either dramatically restrict immigration or impose new ethnic quotas on it.

None of this necessarily means Miller is unconcerned about the fate of those who met terrible ends due to their inability to immigrate. But Miller offered those quotes about that century-old law as a device to describe his present-day vision, and, in a very real sense, his true ideological project is to unmake the world the 1965 act created when it ended the ethnic quota system and opened the country to more immigration from all over the world.

Indeed, Miller's grander aims are best understood as an effort to destroy the entire architecture of immigration and humanitarian resettlement put in place in the post–World War II era. The 1965 law's end to ethnic quotas guaranteed that, henceforth, immigration slots would be doled out on a race-neutral basis. That and subsequent measures—which created the contemporary refugee and asylum system—drew heavily on the international human rights treaties that the United States and many countries signed on to after the war. Subsequent U.S. law has enshrined the right to seek refuge here and protections against getting sent home to face persecution or grave danger—and a set of values that, theoretically at least, has been to some degree a bipartisan consensus for decades.

Miller is, at bottom, trying to eradicate *that* set of obligations and values—to undo that larger consensus. To grasp this, you need to look at all the small things Miller is

doing, which, taken together, all add up to one very big thing.

Take the administration's handling of white South Africans. Officials recently announced that they will accept only 7,500 refugees this fiscal year—a dramatic reduction from 125,000 under President Joe Biden—and, critically, it reserved a majority of those slots for white Afrikaners, who are mostly descendants of Dutch and French settlers. This implements Trump's 2025 executive order decreeing that they must be treated as a persecuted "ethnic minority." He says they face white "genocide," which has been roundly debunked by statistics and experts.

Yet the implementation of this has been corrupted, according to two former senior State Department officials who witnessed this firsthand.

Typically, such an announcement designating a group subject to persecution would be backed up by a serious State Department analysis—often from its Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, or PRM—laying out a substantive case detailing this persecution. But after Trump's executive order hit, PRM was not directed to work up any such analysis, the officials told me. "PRM was not asked for this," one of the officials said.

Instead, word came down from State Department political appointees declaring that this had to happen simply because the order said so, the officials stated.

"We should have a process that has integrity in determining who among the world's refugees are most in need of resettlement," the second source said. "They blew

right through that." Asked for comment, another State Department official insisted that Afrikaner "refugees" meet "statutory requirements."

Strikingly, the administration is also reportedly mulling proposals to prioritize far-right European political actors, who are supposedly being persecuted for anti-immigrant views, for refugee status. Let's be clear: It is now apparently U.S. policy to favor whites in the doling out of refugee admissions.

What's more, the slashing of annual refugee admissions from 125,000 to 7,500 itself represents an enormous retreat on the obligations that members of both parties have long felt toward those seeking refuge here. This comes even as the worldwide refugee population has about doubled in the last decade to over 40 million. Trump and Miller have also moved to end Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, for people here from at least eight countries, totaling over one million. That legal protection provides temporary sojourn to people fleeing some of the most horrific conditions on the planet: armed conflicts, natural and environmental disasters, large-scale civic breakdown. These are not undocumented immigrants. They are here lawfully, have work permits, and are integrating into U.S. communities. That's all been cruelly wrenched out from under them.

Critically, in moving to end all these things, Miller is feverishly stamping out every single avenue for those fleeing horrific conditions to come here legally that he possibly can. Republican presidents have traditionally set refugee admissions levels much higher than Trump has in both his terms, and TPS was signed into law by a

Republican president, George H.W. Bush. In functionally ending all this, Miller is breaking with a consensus that has largely been bipartisan for decades.

Miller may also be restricting legal immigration in a broader, unnoticed sense. At my request, Migration Policy Institute analyst Julia Gelatt looked at data from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to determine current processing rates. She found that if you total up most applications for immigrating to the United States—from green cards to family reunification to naturalization to temporary visas and other forms of legal status—the number of denials is going up. Denials rose from around 274,000 during the last three months of Biden's 2024 term to around 324,000 from April to June of 2025, a hike of about 50,000.

While acceptances are still much higher than denials, those acceptances have been declining, Gelatt found, leading her to conclude that USCIS is "approving fewer applications and denying more." And as of early December, after an Afghan refugee allegedly shot two West Virginia National Guard members in Washington, Trump suspended *all* asylum applications and *all* immigration applications from 19 countries.

Miller's obsession with sheer *numbers*—the amounts of various categories of immigrants who are either in the United States or trying to get here—borders on pathological. Take his handling of undocumented immigrants. Miller has repeatedly raged at Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials for arrest numbers he deems too low. Since the summer, arrests have hovered at around 1,000 daily. But he's demanding 3,000 arrests per

day, a pace of about one million people per year. To that end, *The New York Times* [reports](#), the administration has already shifted thousands of federal law enforcement personnel into deportations, hampering critical efforts to combat serious crimes like child and drug trafficking. What's more, ICE itself is [arresting](#) a lot of undocumented immigrants who are not dangerous criminals, diverting resources away from arresting the latter.

Here's the thing: Miller's mission of boosting deportation numbers *of necessity* [requires](#) arresting people who are not criminals or gang members—people who have jobs and have become integrated into U.S. communities—because there's *no other way* to get the removals up. But it makes us less safe. Miller plainly [places](#) more importance on reducing the totals of people here—or trying to get here—than on removing people who pose any actual danger. He appears to be actively prioritizing shifting the ethnic mix of the country over public safety.

The Intellectual Roots of Miller's Ethno-Nationalism

"If you import the Third World, you become the Third World," Stephen Miller [declared](#) as the presidential campaign heated up in 2024, in a quote flagged by Media Matters for America. "Elect Joe Biden, and America becomes the Third World."

This is one of the single most revealing quotes Miller has ever uttered. At the core of Miller's worldview is the idea that the immigration levels and humanitarian resettlement programs that existed under Biden posed an existential threat to American civilization, whereas those that now exist under Trump will preserve it from ruin and even outright extinction. During a Cabinet meeting in October,

Miller gushed to Trump: "This was a country on the verge of dying, and you alone saved it." This was widely mocked, but Miller meant it quite literally.

Cull through lots of Miller quotes, and a clearer picture of this emerges. "Why would any civilization that actually wants to preserve itself allow for any migration that is negative to the country as a whole?" Miller seethed last spring. He also pointedly asked: "Do you know what happens to a civilization that allows for the large-scale migration of people who hate it?" Miller regularly describes migration as an "invasion" and insists that getting rid of undocumented immigrants would free up emergency rooms, playing on longtime tropes depicting migrants as bearers of disease. During the 2024 campaign, he told a right-wing podcaster that reelecting Biden would represent "the assisted suicide of Western civilization."

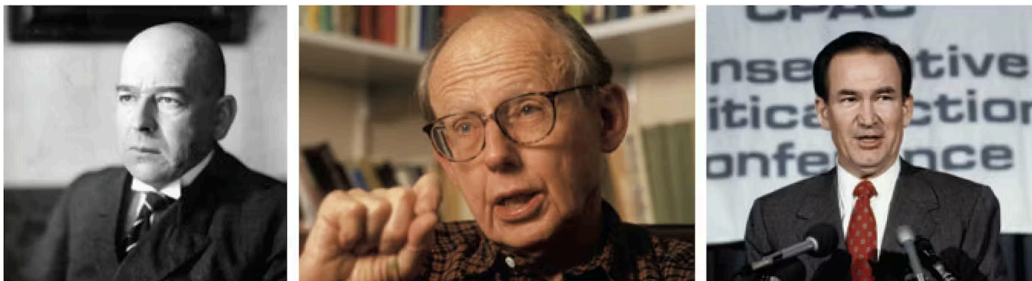Note that Miller treats it as self-evident that most immigrants to the United States are either "negative to the country" or "hate" it. You see, it's *where* these immigrants are coming from that determines whether they pose this existential, civilizational threat. As Miller himself put it: *Import the Third World, and you become the Third World.*

When I asked Steve Bannon, a longtime Miller ally, which writers most influenced Miller's view that migration threatens American or Western "civilization," he texted me some names. The top three were Pat Buchanan, Samuel Huntington, and Oswald Spengler. I was unable to confirm from Miller himself whether he's read these three authors. However, Miller plainly draws sustenance from a strain of

right-wing thought that loosely includes those writers, as well as David Horowitz, who mentored Miller as he came of age politically in a diversifying high school in Santa Monica.

This strain holds roughly that "Western civilization" is something like a static cultural inheritance forever teetering on the edge of plunging into terminal decline. That's usually due to standard maladies—globalization, mass Third World migration, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism, which emphasizes our common humanity across borders—that threaten civilization's dissolution or obliteration. America's status as an inheritor of the best of "Western civilization" is perpetually on the brink of annihilation.

Conservative writers, to be sure, have long depicted the West as under siege, but in the hands of Buchanan and others like him, this took a more explicitly ethno-nationalist turn. As John Ganz explains in his excellent book, *When the Clock Broke,* Buchananism more directly draws inspiration from figures like former Ku Klux Klansman David Duke and white nationalist Sam Francis, and in this sense is a precursor to Trump—and, by extension, Miller.

Miller's intellectual influences, according to Steve Bannon: German doom-monger Oswald Spengler; civilization-clash

enthusiast Samuel Huntington; and Pat "better in the original German" Buchanan.

The similarities between Miller's language and that of Buchanan—and others writing in a similar vein—are obvious. Buchanan wrote a 2011 book called Suicide of a Superpower. In a companion column, Buchanan declared that "Western civilization" probably won't "survive the passing of the European peoples whose ancestors created it and their replacement by Third World immigrants." Buchanan lamented the coming extinction of the "white race" and "European peoples" whose ancestors are credited with creating the "civilization that came out of Jerusalem, Athens, Rome and London." If the white race passes, civilization disappears with it.

Now compare that with Miller's twin claims that if you "import the Third World, you become the Third World," and that electing Biden would represent the "assisted suicide of Western civilization." The United States is steward and inheritor of this disappearing civilization: Miller recently declared that "our legacy hails back to Athens, to Rome, to Philadelphia, to Monticello," and is under threat from assorted "enemies" who want to keep us in "darkness." Among those enemies hell-bent on dragging us back into civilizational darkness are immigrants from the Third World and their globalist allies. In those emails to Breitbart, Miller made this clear. After Pope Francis declared in 2015 that the United States should be more open to immigrants who "travel north"—from Latin America—Miller drew

parallels to *The Camp of the Saints,* the 1973 Jean Raspail novel, beloved by white nationalists, that depicts the West as under siege by teeming masses of Third World immigrants, who are depicted in virulently racist terms.

In Miller's formulations relative to Buchanan's, all that's missing is the word "white." To be sure, Miller has adamantly denied ties to explicit white nationalists. But even if you accept that claim, Miller's worldview is still the Buchanan-Francis one, which holds that people from the Third World are fundamentally unfit to partake of the inheritance of Western civilization that is the United States.

"The basic idea is that if you don't come from a cultural background that comes from a traditional Western perspective—ideally Anglo-Saxon—then you aren't equipped for and properly formed for freedom," Laura K. Field, author of *Furious Minds,* a great new book about the intellectual roots of MAGA, told me. In this worldview, Field continued, without that shared philosophical, cultural, and ancestral foundation, "civilization is impossible."

For Miller, it all started to go wrong with the 1965 immigration act. Miller has long lamented what this law and its impacts supposedly "did" to the United States. In 2022, Miller declared that the act's legacy has been to destroy "social cohesion" in the country. "There cannot be social trust," Miller continued. "There cannot be civic bonding. There cannot be a shared culture, a shared language, a shared education, a shared experience."

But all of this is wrong. And it's a terrible basis for U.S. immigration policy.

Miller's Civilizational Charmed Circle Is Absurd

Let's return to the fact that Miller's own ancestors were subjected to similar claims: They, too, were deemed unfit to participate in the inheritance of Western civilization that the United States represented at the beginning of the twentieth century. Obviously history disproved this, as does Miller's own story. To use Miller's own frame, this would have to mean that Southern and Eastern Europeans actually did have the cultural genus to carry on the inheritance from Greece and Rome as it was transmitted via (Northern and Western) Europe to Thomas Jefferson's pen in Monticello and the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, whereas today's immigrants do not.
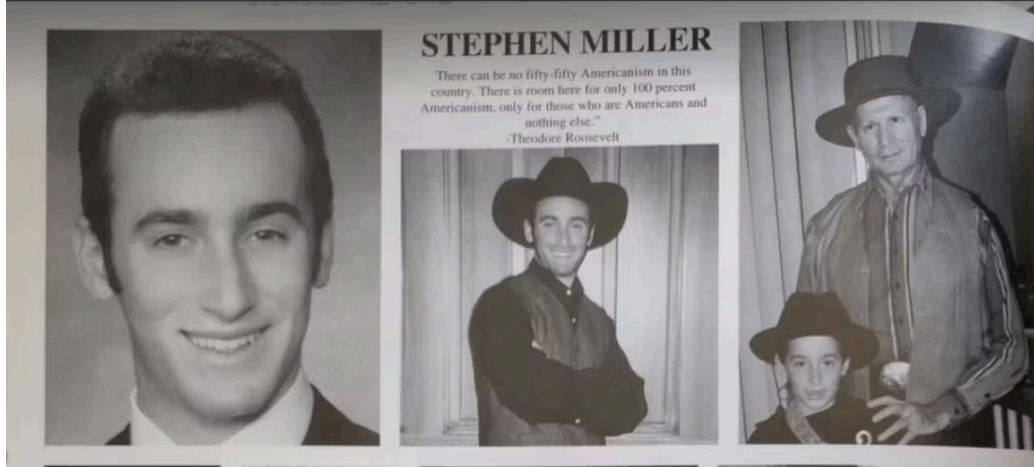
Defenders of Miller might insist this assimilation happened because of post-1920s restrictionism, but the argument at the time was that they—a "they" that included his own forebears, remember—*could not be assimilated at all* because they were *fundamentally unfit* for it. And those immigrants defied such predictions because the United States turned out to have very powerful mechanisms of assimilation. In countless ways, that great migration positively redefined our "civilization," which turns out not to be a static thing. Miller has in essence shifted the civilizational goalposts: If Southern and Eastern Europeans didn't end up threatening U.S. civilization, well, the *actual* threat lies further afield, in Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere. Miller has simply moved the geographic lines of the civilizational charmed circle, dividing those who are fit to partake in our civilizational inheritance from those who are not.

It's sometimes argued that the 1965 act, by opening us to global immigration, shifted the country's demographics far more than predicted. That's true, but nonetheless, studies have shown that recent waves of immigrants have assimilated just as successfully as previous ones did, and that immigrants embrace American political institutions. Other empirical work has undermined claims that they're dissolving our social bonds. If you're worried about declining "social cohesion," let's talk about soaring economic inequality, weakening civic virtue, declining worker power, and social tensions cynically stoked and manipulated by right-wing elites—all of which Trump is exacerbating.

Miller Is Wrong About "Social Trust"

"You cannot have migration without consent," Miller insists. "That is a fundamental principle of having a civilization." The second that undocumented immigrants settle in our communities, our social contract instantly dissolves, and our civilizational epoxy has come apart.

But immigration—including undocumented migration—spawns new forms of community and solidarity. You know who understands this perfectly well? Joe Rogan does, when he calls it "horrific" to arrest "normal, regular people that have been here for 20 years" in "front of their kids." So do the residents of a small Missouri town when they rebel against the arrest of a 20-year resident whom they now see as a local "mom." So do majorities of Americans when they tell pollsters that they don't support deporting undocumented immigrants who have jobs or have been here for a number of years.

Photos of Stephen Miller from the 2003 Santa Monica High School yearbook. Note the quote he chose.
2003 SANTA MONICA HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK

In saying these things, Rogan and all these others are articulating a deeper idea: As time passes and outsiders contribute to—and associate with—local communities, their original illegal entry loses significance, and they develop a claim to belonging. We recognize this because we see them as human, and human life is messy and complicated. Most people understand this intuitively: Communities are dynamic things; their boundaries are not fixed and rigid and unchanging. Polities can decide collectively to grant amnesty to people who didn't enter perfectly by the book but have since demonstrated good intentions after a democratically determined amount of time has passed. And they are often made stronger by it.

It should go without saying that if immigrants were dissolving our social bonds in any sense that most normal people care about, Miller and his allies would not have to lie constantly about immigrants committing crimes, about immigrants stealing social welfare benefits, and about immigrants adopting alienating social habits like eating people's pets.

Miller Is Wrong About Cosmopolitanism

Miller has long harbored particular venom for "cosmopolitanism." He draws heavily on a tradition on the far right that treats cosmopolitanism as a threat to a model of Western civilization constructed upon the building blocks of ancient nations whose *volkish* identities stretch deep into the mists of the past.

But our understanding of cosmopolitanism is itself partly an inheritance from Miller's beloved "Western civilization." It originated with the Stoic philosophers of the ancient world and was developed by the Roman statesman Cicero. It passed via him and others to European philosophers like Immanuel Kant, who elaborated on it further. Its conception of common humanity informed the human rights ideals that emerged after World War II, which the United States signed on to.

In short, there are plenty of resources in our "Western inheritance" that run directly counter to, and are far more admirable than, Miller's ideology of ethno-nationalist self-preservation. The 1965 immigration act that Miller hates so much—by ending the idea that some ethnicities are more "fit" to be American than others—itself carried forward some of those "Western" inheritances.

Miller Is Wrong to Want Net-Negative Migration

Ultimately, Miller's goal of net-negative migration is itself a recipe for decline. Miller's claim that this was responsible for our postwar successes overlooks the role of the U.S. victory in World War II combined with Europe lying in ruins, which helped enable the United States to establish global industrial dominance. It also overlooks the strength

of unions in boosting worker power and in building the American middle class, which Trump is trying to destroy.

What's more, demographers like William H. Frey have gamed out what a scenario of net-negative migration will look like over time, and it's not pretty. It results in population decline, a dangerously aging workforce, and depleted tax revenues to pay for social insurance for our aging population.

At this point, someone will note that Biden's policies resulted in an unusually large percentage of foreign-born residents and an out-of-control asylum system that encouraged nativist backlash, leading to Trump. That story is far too simplistic. Indeed, the ferocious public opposition to Trump's mass deportations suggests that the "nativist backlash" is a mirage: Polls show that Americans are reaffirming their very wide support for immigration as good for the country. Some restrictionist writers have claimed to discern a broad societal backlash to the world the 1965 act made, but it just isn't materializing.

That aside—even if the politics of the issue are brutal and we liberals haven't solved that conundrum—the answer is not to throw immigration into reverse. As Jordan Weissmann puts it, "The fact that it is hard does not take away from one fundamental point: There is no real plan for economic stability or for a generous welfare state without more immigration. Full stop. Period."

Miller's alternative is a horror. He has set in motion a vicious math problem: His deportation machinery is arresting people faster than they are being removed. To hold them, he's now looking to build out a network of vast

warehouses. We're going to end up with a massively expanded immigrant carceral state at an enormous [cost](#) to all of us, both in taxpayer dollars and in the searing social conflict that Miller's masked storm troopers have [unleashed](#) on the streets of U.S. cities.

We [need more](#) immigrants, and there absolutely are ways to limit asylum and end the system's failures while opening up more channels for orderly legal migration and for those here illegally to get right with the law. Miller's project is to persuade you that immigration cannot be managed in the national interest. It can, and it's on us to show how. Because at the end of the day, Miller is trying to restore ethnic engineering to the center of immigration policy. In so doing, he's denying to millions the blessings that his ancestors and he himself have been so fortunate to enjoy.

On this point, we're giving the last word to Miller's cousin on his father's side, Alisa Kasmer. Over the summer, Kasmer posted a scalding Facebook [takedown](#) of Miller that made [big news](#). She refused all subsequent interview requests. But she agreed to talk to me for this piece.

"We're Jewish—we grew up knowing how hated we were just for existing," Kasmer told me. "Now he's trying to take away the exact thing that his own family benefited from: that ability to create a life for themselves, to prosper, to build community, to have successful businesses—to live a rewarding life." This—not "saving" our "dying" country, as Miller absurdly claims Trump is doing—will be Miller's ugly legacy.