

opment did increase somewhat, but nearly all of the 30 to 50 new projects opening each year were small “neighborhood convenience” operations. A few developers were more ambitious: Cameron Village in Raleigh, North Carolina (1949), Northgate in Seattle (1950), and Shoppers World outside Boston (1951), writes Hanchett, “heralded a new category of suburban retailing: the planned regional shopping center. Each included one or even two large branch department stores, one or two big supermarkets, and upwards of 30 other businesses.” The economic challenge involved, however, remained formidable. Shoppers World, for example, went bankrupt three years after it opened. At mid-decade, there still were fewer than two dozen regional shopping centers in the entire country.

Then, in 1954, Congress changed the corporate income tax law.

For decades, businesses had been permitted to take deductions for wear and tear on buildings, machines, and other income-producing property, on a “straight-line depreciation” basis. Buildings were assumed to have a 40-year life. Each year owners could deduct from profits 1/40th of the original cost of a building.

But in 1954, apparently intending to stimulate capital investment in manufacturing in order to counter a mild recession, Congress replaced the straight-line approach with “accelerated depreciation,” which enabled owners to take huge deductions in the early years of a project’s life. This, Hanchett says, “transformed real-estate development into a lucrative ‘tax shelter.’ An investor making a profit from rental of a new building usually avoided all taxes on that income, since the ‘loss’ from depreciation canceled it out. And when the depreciation exceeded profits from the building itself—as it virtually always did in early years—the investor could use the excess ‘loss’ to cut other income taxes.” With real-estate values going up during the 1950s and ’60s, savvy investors “could build a structure, claim ‘losses’ for several years while enjoying

tax-free income, then sell the project for more than they had originally invested.”

Since the “accelerated depreciation” rule did not apply to renovation of existing buildings, investors “now looked away from established downtowns, where vacant land was scarce and new construction difficult,” Hanchett says. “Instead, they rushed to put their money into projects at the suburban fringe—especially into shopping centers.

“Suddenly, all over the United States, shopping plazas sprouted like well-fertilized weeds,” he writes. “Developers who had been gradually assembling land and mulling over the shopping-center concept abruptly shifted their projects into high gear.” Twenty-five new shopping centers—including Southdale in Minneapolis, the first enclosed mall—opened in 1956. By the mid-1980s, when Congress finally reinstated straight-line depreciation of commercial property, suburban malls and shopping centers had completed their ascendancy over the old downtowns.

Hanchett’s argument is a strong one, comments Kenneth Jackson, but he pushes it too far. The same tax breaks were available for office buildings, drive-in theaters, and even livery stables, Jackson points out, but investors chose to put more of their money in shopping centers. That suggests that the exodus of commerce from the old downtowns was in the cards anyway—accelerated depreciation merely accelerated the move.

But whatever the precise array of forces causing it, the shift that made privately owned regional shopping centers “the distinctive public space of the postwar landscape” has had important consequences, in Elizabeth Cohen’s view. The mall provided “a new kind of community life—consumption-oriented, tightly controlled, and aimed at citizen-consumers” who were mostly white and middle-class. This change, she believes, “has made more precarious the shared public space upon which our democracy depends.”

Why Did ‘Ordinary’ Germans Kill Jews?

“Browning’s Version” by Adam Shatz, in *Lingua Franca* (Feb. 1997), 22 W. 38th St., New York, N.Y. 10018.

In 1941 and ’42, the 500 members of Hamburg’s Reserve Police Battalion 101, a unit of the German “order police” that had

been pressed into active service, killed 38,000 Polish Jews and deported 45,000 more to Treblinka, the Nazi death camp in

Poland. What prompted these policemen, who were not fervent young Nazis but “ordinary” Germans approaching middle age, to take part in mass murder?

Harvard University historian Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, in *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996), a controversial best seller both in America and in Germany, argues that the policemen killed because, like most Germans of the day, they believed in the justice of exterminating Jews. Goldhagen has touched off a torrid debate in the periodical press. One of his chief antagonists is the historian Christopher Browning, author of *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution* (1992). Browning, a professor at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington, argues: “Influenced and conditioned in a general way, imbued in particular with a sense of their own superiority and racial kinship as well as Jewish inferiority and otherness, many of them undoubtedly were; explicitly prepared for the task of killing Jews they most certainly were not.” Nor was the brutalizing context of war the explanation, since the men of the battalion had not seen battle. Nor were they forced to kill, since individual police-

men could have refused (some did) without facing dire punishment.

“Having pared away these explanations,” writes Shatz, a contributing editor of *Lingua Franca*, “Browning proposed a more disturbing, and universally applicable theory: The men were driven by a fear of breaking ranks in a time of total mobilization. ‘It was easier for them to shoot,’ because refusal was considered an asocial, even unmanly act.” Wartime passions, and the Nazi regime’s “manipulation of wartime anxieties and pre-existing anti-Semitism,” allowed the policemen “to see themselves as defending the fatherland.”

In a sense, Shatz observes, the Browning-Goldhagen debate is “the latest reenactment of an old argument between those who see the Holocaust as a crime against the Jewish people and those who see it as a crime against humanity.”

Goldhagen’s thesis, profoundly disturbing as it is, reflects a less pessimistic assessment of human nature than Browning’s. This historian’s assessment, says Shatz, suggests “that when a dictatorial regime issues genocidal orders to men with guns amid total war, they will likely obey. . . . In Christopher Browning’s view, there is nothing particularly nice about ordinary men.”

The Attack of the Philanthropoids

“Citizen 501(c)(3)” by Nicholas Lemann, in *The Atlantic Monthly* (Feb. 1997), 77 N. Washington St., Boston, Mass. 02114; “The Billions of Dollars That Made Things Worse” by Heather Mac Donald, in *City Journal* (Autumn 1996), 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Philanthropic foundations have become increasingly important in American life—and increasingly political, argues Lemann, the *Atlantic Monthly’s* national correspondent. Since 1980, the assets of the 25 largest foundations have more than doubled in real terms—to \$55 billion—and the grants given by the 25 most generous foundations have grown to more than \$2 billion. In response to the rise of aggressively conservative foundations in recent years, Lemann contends, large foundations with “a distinctly liberal cast” have become “more political” themselves. For example, the Ford Foundation contributed \$1.4 million last year to activities aimed at defending affirmative action from attack.

But Mac Donald, a contributing editor of *City Journal* and John M. Olin Fellow at the Manhattan Institute, says that the Ford

Foundation began promoting a liberal agenda in the 1960s, when (among other misguided projects) it sponsored a disastrous school decentralization experiment in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville section of Brooklyn. The experiment produced racial and ethnic turmoil, a citywide teachers’ strike that shut schools down for nearly two months, and a lasting legacy in New York of bitterness between blacks and Jews. But the Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and other large foundations soon followed Ford’s example and adopted social-change agendas. Their efforts, Mac Donald maintains, have helped to create “not a more just but a more divided and contentious American society.”

Believing that discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, class, and ethnicity is widespread in America, for example,