

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,

Ford and other foundations, she says, have poured money into universities in efforts to promote “diversity,” ethnic studies, and gender studies. Between 1972 and ’92, women’s studies alone received \$36 million from Ford, Rockefeller, Carnegie, Mott, Mellon, and other foundations.

Though some conservative foundations have risen to prominence in recent years, Mac Donald says, they are vastly outnumbered, and outspent, by liberal foundations. In 1994, while the Olin Foundation, the leading funder of conservative scholarship on campus, gave a total of \$13 million in grants, the Ford Foundation contributed \$42 million in the fields of education and culture alone.

Despite their increased influence in



Disorders at a junior high school in Brooklyn’s Ocean Hill-Brownsville district brought police there in 1968.

American life, Lemann observes, foundations are largely spared the sort of scrutiny that government routinely gets from the news media and the voters. “That ought to change,” he believes. Mac Donald would doubtless agree.

PRESS & MEDIA

Misreporting the AIDS Story

“Aiding AIDS: The Story of a Media Virus” by David R. Boldt, in *Forbes MediaCritic* (Fall 1996), P.O. Box 762, Bedminster, N.J. 07921. (*Forbes MediaCritic* has since ceased publication.)

In a *Wall Street Journal* exposé last year, reporters Amanda Bennett and Anita Sharpe revealed that at a 1987 meeting, officials of the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) decided to exaggerate the risks to heterosexuals of contracting the AIDS virus. That, they believed, was the only way to drum up widespread support for measures to combat the disease, which mainly strikes homosexual men and intravenous-drug users and their sexual partners. “If I can get AIDS, anyone can” was the theme of the public service ad campaign the agency launched later that year. The front-page *Journal* article was “an exemplary piece of journalism,” says Boldt, a columnist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, but it skipped over an important part of the story: “the news media’s deep complicity in aiding and abetting the heterosexual AIDS scare.”

When, for example, the CDC issued a press release indicating that the number of

heterosexuals with AIDS had doubled, the news media, for the most part, failed to explain that the increase was mostly due to a change in CDC bookkeeping. A February 1987 *Atlantic Monthly* story by Katie Leishman, “Heterosexuals and AIDS: The Second Stage of the Epidemic,” Boldt says, “made virtually no attempt to back up its alarmist contentions.” News stories disproportionately featured individuals from low-risk groups as AIDS victims. A 1987 study by the Center for Media and Public Affairs found that heterosexuals were eight times more likely to appear as AIDS victims in TV news reports than they were to contract the disease.

Over the years, Boldt points out, a few journalists, such as the *Chicago Tribune*’s John Crewdson and the *Inquirer*’s Donald Drake, read the “fine print” in the CDC reports and pointed out that the threat to heterosexuals was exaggerated. For their labors, they were roundly criticized, not only by