



Curriculum Connections

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The Resilience of Anti-Semitism:

The Lies of The Protocols of The Elders of Zion

In This Issue

Since its contrivance at the turn of the twentieth century by the Russian secret police, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* (or *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*) has taken root in bigoted and uneducated minds around the world. The booklet's twenty-four sections spell out the alleged confidential plans of a Jewish conclave seeking to attain world domination. They represent the most notorious political forgery of modern times. Although thoroughly discredited, the document is still being used to stir up anti-Semitic hatred.

Will Eisner, the celebrated “father of the graphic novel,” was deeply concerned about the resilience of anti-Semitism and the persistence of the conspiracy theory that Jews have a plan to control the world. Applying his talent and creativity to further expose the notorious anti-Semitic treatise as a forgery, Mr. Eisner produced *The Plot*—a graphic history of *The Protocols*—with a goal toward educating all, but especially younger generations.

This three-part high school curricular unit has been prepared as a companion to Will Eisner's *The Plot*. It aims to increase student understanding of the history of anti-Semitism and the destructive influence of anti-Semitic stereotypes over time and throughout the world. The lessons also raise awareness about the tactics used to spread hate propaganda, and provide students with the skills to respond effectively to hate on the Internet and in other arenas.

Parts I and II of the unit are meant to be used in conjunction with the graphic novel. Prior to viewing the novel, students conduct brief research that sets the social, economic and political context for the creation of *The Protocols* in the decades leading up to the Russian Revolution. Students are then guided through an exploration of various sections of *The Plot*. Through small group investigation and large group discussion, they learn how *The Protocols* took hold throughout the world, how it has been discredited and how its message persists today despite being repeatedly denounced.

In Part III of the unit, students define propaganda and investigate the techniques used in *The Protocols* to disseminate anti-Semitic propaganda throughout the world.

The Anti-Defamation League has developed a [traveling exhibit](#) of Will Eisner's *The Plot* that tells the story of the infamous forgery that has been used to justify horrific, brutal anti-Semitism up to and including today. Together, the exhibit and lesson plans included in this edition of *Curriculum Connections* will help students to resist persistent anti-Semitic myths and respond to misinformation and bigotry of all forms.

This project made possible through the support of the Will Eisner Estate. *The Plot: The Secret Story of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was published in 2005 (W.W. Norton & Company). Available in hard cover and paperback.

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Correlation of Lessons to Common Core Standards

Content Area/Standard	Part I	Part II	Part III
Reading			
R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.		X	X
R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.		X	
R.3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.		X	
R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.			X
Writing			
W.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.		X	
W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	X	X	
W.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.	X		
Speaking and Listening			
SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	X	X	
SL.4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	X		
Language			
L.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.		X	X
L.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.			X

The Resilience of Anti-Semitism: The Lies of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*

Rationale

This three-part lesson has been prepared in conjunction with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) special exhibit of Will Eisner's *The Plot* (2005), a graphic history of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The purpose of the lessons is to increase student understanding of the history of anti-Semitism and the destructive influence of anti-Semitic myths and stereotypes over time and throughout the world. The unit also aims to raise awareness about the tactics used to spread hate propaganda, and to provide students with the skills to respond effectively to hate on the Internet and in other arenas.

[**NOTE:** The content of this lesson may be particularly difficult for Jewish students and their families. It is important for Jewish students and their families to be consulted prior to the start of this lesson to notify them that the topic of anti-Semitism will be discussed in the classroom, and to gauge the comfort level of Jewish students in participating in the lesson. As is true when exploring the experiences of any identity group in the classroom, Jewish students should not be called upon to answer questions on behalf of the whole Jewish community. Every student is an individual and can only answer for their own individual experiences and perspective. These recommendations are true for students belonging to any religious, racial, ethnic or cultural group.]

Objectives

- Students will learn about the history/historical context surrounding *The Protocols*.
- Students will increase their understanding of the impact of anti-Semitism.
- Students will learn how to identify propaganda techniques.
- Students will increase their awareness of hate groups and their destructive influence.
- Students will increase their ability to critically analyze various media.

Age Range

Grades 9–12

Time

Part I: 90 minutes + research time

Part II: 90–120 minutes

Part III: 90 minutes

Requirements

Handouts and Resources:

- [The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: A Hoax of Hate](#) (one per student)
- [Hate Group Propaganda](#) (one for teacher only)
- [One Lie, Many Versions](#) (one for teacher only)
- [Propaganda Techniques on Hate Web Sites](#) (one per student)
- [Hate Propaganda](#) (one per small group)

Other Material:

- Chart paper, markers
- Laptop/LCD projector/screen, Internet access

Key Words

Anti-Semitism
 Black Hundreds
 Blood libel
 Bolsheviks
 Confederate
 Conspiracy
 Co-opt
 Czar
 Deception
 Dehumanize
 Demonize
 Dreyfus Affair
 Fabricate
 Fear mongering
 Forgery
 Fraud
 Hoax
 Holocaust
 Ideology
 Ku Klux Klan
 Manipulate
 Mendacious
 Nationalism
 Nazi
 Palestine
 Parody
 Persuasive
 Perverse
 Plagiarism
 Pogrom
 Propaganda
 Protocol
 Pseudo-science
 Resilience
 Revisionist history
 Russian Revolution
 Satire
 Scapegoat
 Superiority
 White supremacist
 Zion/Zionism

- Copies of *The Plot: The Secret Story of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* by Will Eisner

Advanced Preparation

- Reproduce handouts as directed above.
- Prepare charts as directed in Part I, step #1 and #3; Part II, step #1b and #3c; and Part III, step #3 and #4.
- Gather copies of the book *The Plot* for use in Part II.
- Prepare laptop/projector/screen and Internet access as directed in Part III, step #4.

Techniques and Skills

analyzing visual media, brainstorming, connecting past to present, cooperative group work, critical thinking, forming opinions, historical understanding, large and small group discussion, media literacy, reading skills, research skills, role play, substantiating factual information, using the Internet, writing skills

Part I: Prior to Viewing the Exhibit/Novel

Procedures

1. In the center of a large sheet of chart paper write, “THE PLOT,” and beneath it add the following quote:

Whenever one group of people is taught to hate another, a lie is created to inflame the hatred and justify a plot...The target is easy to find because the enemy is always the other.

Allow students to react to the quote and discuss some of the following questions:

- What might have motivated the author to write something like this?
 - Can you think of any examples of a lie used to stir up hate or prejudice?
 - What kind of plot might the author be referring to?
 - What groups of people have historically been “the other”?
 - Does this quote bring to mind any specific incident in history or current events?
2. Tell students that the author wrote these lines as a prelude to a book about one of history’s most diabolical conspiracies to “inflame hatred” against a group of people. Explain that they will engage in research that will provide background information on the conspiracy, and that will ultimately reveal the target of this infamous plot.
 3. Draw eight spokes emanating from the title/quote in the center of the chart posted earlier, and write the following topics at the end of each spoke:
 - The Bolsheviks
 - The Russian Revolution
 - The Black Hundreds
 - Pogroms
 - Theodore Herzl
 - The Dreyfus Affair
 - Alfred Rosenberg
 - Zionism/First World Zionist Congress (1897)
 4. Divide the class into small groups of 3–4 students and assign each group a topic. Direct groups to consult 2–3 sources and write a summary paragraph describing what they have learned about their topic. Instruct groups to then create a visual representation of the topic that can be placed on the chart posted earlier (e.g., copy of a primary document, depiction of an artifact, illustration, imagined letter or journal entry, etc.)

NOTE: For the purposes of this lesson, students should focus their research on the late 19th and early 20th centuries only. If there is not sufficient time or resources in class, have students do the research for homework and work on the visual representation in class.

5. Have each group, one at a time, post its visual representation on the chart and read aloud its summary paragraph. Answer any questions students may have about each topic.
6. Following the presentations, point out that these topics—like pieces of a puzzle—provide the historical context for “the plot” discussed earlier. Ask if, based on what they have learned about events taking place in Russia and Europe at the turn of the 20th century, students have any ideas about the nature of the lie or the hatred referred to in the quote. Ask who they think “the other” or the target of “the plot” was.
7. After some conjecture, reveal that the Jewish people were the targets of a campaign of hatred by the Russian secret police, who fabricated a book called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which falsely claimed to be the confidential minutes of a Jewish council plotting world domination. Make sure that students understand the meaning of protocol (*a detailed plan of a procedure; the records of a conference*) and Zion (*the Jewish people; the Jewish homeland that is symbolic of Judaism*).

8. Ask students to think about what might have motivated a conspiracy of this nature. Tell them that in order to investigate further, they will be viewing the work of Will Eisner, who chronicled the story of how *The Protocols* was created and disseminated in a graphic novel called [The Plot](#). Share the information about Will Eisner below.

About Will Eisner

Will Eisner (1917–2005) was a legendary figure in comics. He was present at the birth of the comic book industry in the 1930's, creating such titles as Blackhawk and Sheena, Queen of the Jungle. He created *The Spirit* in 1940, a unique and innovative 16-page Sunday newspaper insert which was syndicated until 1952. As a Pentagon-based Warrant Officer during World War II, Eisner pioneered the instructional use of comics, continuing to produce them for the U.S. Army under civilian contract into the 1970s, along with educational comics for clients as diverse as General Motors and elementary school children. In 1978 Eisner created the first modern "graphic novel," *A Contract With God*, launching a bold new literary genre. Nearly twenty celebrated graphic novels by him followed, including *To the Heart of the Storm*, *The Dreamer*, *Fagin the Jew* and *The Plot*. Established in 1988, the comic industry's top award for excellence is named after him, "The Eisner Awards." See <http://willeisner.com> for further information.

Part II: Viewing the Exhibit/Novel

[NOTE: This part of the lesson can be used in conjunction with the ADL special exhibit of Will Eisner’s *The Plot* or with the graphic novel that inspired it. The sections below correspond with the four panels of the ADL exhibit. Approximate page ranges from the book that match up with each section are included for those who cannot attend the exhibit. All page numbers are from the first edition (hardcover) of Will Eisner, *The Plot: The Secret Story of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005).]

Procedures

1. **The Plot is Hatched** (corresponds roughly with pages 21–30 and 53–60 of *The Plot*)
 - a. If students have not participated in Part I of the lesson, provide them with a brief overview of the exhibit/novel they are about to view/read (see Part I, step #7–8).
 - b. Post the following question so that all students can view it: “What will it take to save Russia at this time and how do the Jewish people factor into your thoughts?”
 - c. Tell students that they will view/read the first part of the exhibit/novel in small groups, and will pay special attention to the key players in the evolving plot against the Jewish people.
 - d. Divide students into five groups and assign each group one of the following historical figures: Nicholas II, Sergei Witte, Ivan Gorymikine, Pyotr Rachkovsky and Mathieu Golovinski. Tell each group that as they view/read the exhibit/novel, they should focus on the motivations that drove their specific figure to become involved in “the plot.”
 - e. Tell students that when the class reconvenes, each group will be asked to take the perspective of their assigned figure and answer the question posted in step #1b above in character. Allow 15 minutes for viewing/reading, and remind groups to discuss how they will accomplish the role play assignment.
 - f. Reconvene the class and have each group present their role play. After all groups have answered the question in character, summarize the various motivations that contributed to “the plot.”
 - g. Engage the group in a discussion using some of the questions below and answer any questions they may have about the first part of the exhibit/novel.
 - How would you describe Czar Nicholas II? In what ways did he fuel the unrest that was brewing in Russia in the last years of the 19th century?
 - What political conflicts existed in Russia at this time?
 - What was the relationship between the Russian leadership and its Jewish citizenry during the late 1800s? What is a pogrom (*an organized attack or massacre*) and why were pogroms directed against the Jewish people?
 - What is a scapegoat (*a person or people blamed or punished for things done by others*)? How were the Jewish people used as scapegoats by the opponents of Sergei Witte and others who sought to modernize and liberalize Russia?
 - What was “the plot”?
 - Explain how each of the following influenced the conspirators behind “the plot”: (a) the Dreyfus Affair; (b) Maurice Joly; and (c) Theodore Herzl and the First Zionist Congress.
2. **The Plot Spreads** (corresponds roughly with pages 66–67 and 95–106 of *The Plot*)
 - a. Give students 10–15 minutes to view/read the second part of the exhibit/novel (independently or in small groups), and direct them to pay special attention to the specific circumstances that made it possible for a deception of such magnitude to take hold throughout Europe and the world.
 - b. Reconvene the group. Engage them in a discussion using some of the questions below and answer any questions they may have about the second part of the exhibit/novel.
 - Who was Sergius Nilus and what role did he play in circulating *The Protocols*?
 - What was Bloody Sunday? How did escalating violence and unrest in Russia lead to the spread of *The Protocols*?

- How did Russian defeats at the beginning of World War I contribute to further acceptance of the idea of a Jewish plot to dominate the world?
 - How did the overthrow of the Czar help to spread *The Protocols* to other countries?
 - How did *The Protocols* reach Germany and influence Hitler and the Nazis?
 - How did *The Protocols* get publicized in the U.S.?
 - What is propaganda (*a type of message aimed at influencing the opinions or behavior of people*)? How was *The Protocols* used to support campaigns of misinformation among various groups?
- c. Read aloud the following quote:

When we get through with the Jews in America, they'll think the treatment they received in Germany was nothing.

Ask students what feelings these words elicit and who might have said them. Explain that after giving a Nazi salute, these words were spoken at a 1938 rally in New York City by Father Charles Coughlin, a popular Michigan-based radio personality listened to by millions of people each week. Tell students that Coughlin republished *The Protocols* in July of 1938 with financial help from Henry Ford and from the Nazi Party in Germany. Ask students if they are surprised to learn that prominent Americans helped to spread *The Protocols*, and that there was a large audience for such anti-Semitism in this country.

3. **The Plot Is Exposed** (corresponds roughly with pages 67–94 and 102–112 of *The Plot*)

- a. Give students 10–15 minutes to view/read the third part of the exhibit/novel (independently or in small groups), and direct them to pay special attention to the methods used to expose *The Protocols* as a fraud.
- b. Reconvene the group. Engage them in a discussion using some of the questions below and answer any questions they may have about the third part of the exhibit/novel.
 - How was *The Protocols* proven to be false and first exposed to the world as a fraud?
 - What did the court in Bern, Switzerland say about *The Protocols*? Did this decision help to stop the spread of the ideas in the book?
 - What led Henry Ford to apologize for his series, “The International Jew”? Did his public statement have an impact on the spread of anti-Semitism?
 - What did the U.S. Senate report on *The Protocols* conclude?
- c. Tell students that in the final part of the exhibit/novel, they will learn how *The Protocols* has lived on despite being proven a forgery and denounced for over 80 years. Post the following quote for students to read or ask for a volunteer to read it aloud.

It is as if, after Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler, one were to continue publishing textbooks claiming that the sun travels around the earth. How can one explain resilience against all evidence, and the perverse appeal that this book continues to exercise? —Umberto Eco, Italian writer

Ask students to think about this question as they move on to the last part of the exhibit/novel, and to be prepared to share their responses when the group reconvenes.

4. **The Plot Lives On** (corresponds roughly with pages 113–128 of *The Plot*)

- a. Give students 10–15 minutes to view/read the fourth part of the exhibit/novel (independently or in small groups).
- b. Reconvene the group. Engage them in a discussion using some of the questions below and answer any questions they may have about the last part of the exhibit/novel.
 - How would you answer the question posed by the author: “Why? When everyone knows that the ‘Protocols’ is a fake, why are they still publishing it?”
 - What does the research librarian mean when he explains that *The Protocols* is a “weapon of mass deception”?
 - Regarding the Umberto Eco quote shared earlier, what do you think is “the perverse appeal that this book continues to exercise”?

- c. Ask students if they have ever encountered hate literature in school, while online, etc. Direct students to pair up and to briefly discuss any experiences they have had and how they have responded. Reconvene the group and ask for a few volunteers to share their experiences. Elicit ideas about effective ways to respond to hate literature and hate online. Reinforce the importance of reporting hate literature to trusted adults and refraining from spreading it or responding to it in any way.
5. **Homework:** Assign students to read the handout [*The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion: A Hoax of Hate*](#), and to write a brief essay in response to the reading as instructed on the handout.

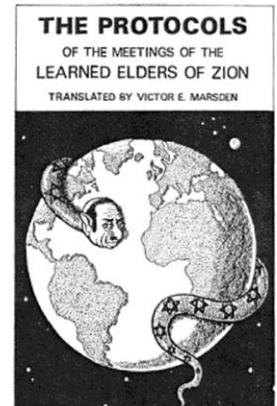
The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion: A Hoax of Hate

[Download Traveling Exhibit Version](#)

Introduction

It is a classic in the literature of hate. Believed by many to be the secret minutes of a Jewish council called together in the last years of the 19th century, it has been used by anti-Semites as proof that Jews are plotting to take over the world. Since its creation at the turn of the century by the Russian secret police, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* has taken root in bigoted, frightened minds around the world.

The booklet's twenty-four sections spell out the supposed secret plans of Jewish leaders to achieve world domination. They represent the most notorious political lie of modern times. Although proven false, the document is still being used to stir up anti-Semitic hatred today.



Origins of *The Protocols*



Serge Nilus

Serge Nilus, a religious writer, mystic and advisor to the Russian Czar, helped to publish several editions of *The Protocols*, each with a different story about how he discovered the document. In his 1911 edition, Nilus claimed that his source had stolen the document from a (non-existent) Zionist headquarters in France. Other “editors” of *The Protocols* claimed that the document was read at the First Zionist Congress held in 1897 in Switzerland.

The Protocols were actually written in Paris sometime between 1895 and 1899 by an agent of the Russian secret police, Mathieu Golovinski, who copied most of it from a French satire on Napoleon III that had nothing to do with Jewish people. The forgery was an attempt to destroy the Bolshevik-led political movement to modernize Russia by linking it to a Jewish plot to destroy Western civilization.

The Hoax Spreads

Impact of the Russian Revolution

The Bolsheviks ultimately overthrew the Czar in 1917. Angry supporters of the old government claimed that the Bolsheviks were controlled by Jews, and that the Russian Revolution was part of a Jewish plot to enslave the world. They pointed to *The Protocols* as the blueprint of that plan and promoted it in the European countries they fled to after the war. In later years, vicious anti-Semitic lies spread by the Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin, kept the ideas of *The Protocols* alive in the Russian world.

The Protocols in Other Countries

In the 1920's, two British reporters, each of whom had lived in Russia before the war, promoted the idea of a Jewish conspiracy in Great Britain. Eighteen articles on the subject of a Jewish plot and *The Protocols* themselves were published in *The Morning Post*. The introduction to the English translation of *The Protocols* included the following statement:

...the Jews are carrying it out with steadfast purpose, creating wars and revolutions...to destroy the white Gentile race, that the Jews may seize the power during the resulting chaos and rule with their claimed superior intelligence over the remaining races of the world, as kings over slaves.

A Polish language edition of *The Protocols* appeared in 1920. The following year the Arabs of Palestine and Syria used *The Protocols* to stir up anger against Jewish settlers in Palestine, suggesting that the establishment of a Jewish state would further advance the “international Jewish conspiracy.” This tactic continues in the modern Middle East, where Arabic editions of *The Protocols* have been widely circulated by official Saudi sources, among others.

First Appearance in the United States

The Protocols were publicized in the U.S. by Boris Brasol, who had been a lawyer in Czarist Russia. Auto mogul Henry Ford was one of those who took interest. *The Dearborn Independent*, a newspaper owned by Ford, published an American version of *The Protocols* between May and September of 1920 in a series called “The International Jew: the World’s Foremost Problem.” The articles were later republished in book form with half a million copies distributed in the U.S., and were translated into several foreign languages. Several years later Ford apologized for the “International Jew,” but hundreds of thousands of people around the world had already been encouraged to accept *The Protocols* as truth.

The Protocols in Nazi Germany

The Protocols reached Germany sometime around 1918. One of those who brought them to Germany was Alfred Rosenberg, who first learned about *The Protocols* as a student in Moscow. When he fled his native Estonia following the Russian Revolution, he took *The Protocols* with him. In Germany Rosenberg often lectured on *The Protocols*, and he introduced them to Adolf Hitler in the early 1920’s. *The Protocols* became the basis for much of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler’s 1925 book outlining his hateful political ideas. Rosenberg’s book, *The Myth of the 20th Century*, was the most influential Nazi text after *Mein Kampf*, and sold more than a million copies by 1944.



Adolf Hitler

The Protocols was used to justify anti-Semitism in Hitler’s Germany. The myth of a Jewish plot to control the world became the driving force behind Hitler’s thinking, and he linked Germany’s economic troubles during the 1920’s to the “secret plot.” Once in power, Hitler used *The Protocols* to pass anti-Semitic laws and policies, starting with a 1933 one-day boycott of Jewish businesses and leading up to the “Final Solution,” the Nazi plan to systematically eliminate the Jews of Europe.

The Protocols in Modern Times

Anti-Semites around the globe still actively circulate *The Protocols*. In 1974 *The Protocols* were published in India under the title *International Conspiracy against Indians*. It has been published in Japan as recently as 2004, where it has been quoted as evidence of a “Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world.” A 2005 edition published in Mexico City suggests that the Holocaust was planned by the “Elders of Zion” in exchange for the founding of the State of Israel. *The Protocols* have also been spread throughout Latin America, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Paraguay.

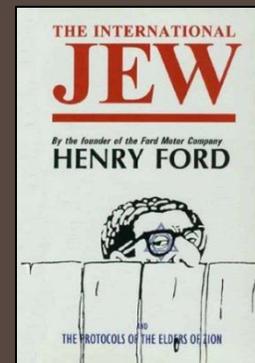
The Protocols have become a major source of Arab and Islamic propaganda. In 2002 a 41-part miniseries, “Horseman Without a Horse” based on *The Protocols* aired on Egyptian television, and in 2003 another miniseries, “The Diaspora”, aired on Hezbollah’s Al-Manar TV, which depicted a “global Jewish government.” A 2005 edition of *The Protocols*, approved by the Syrian government, claims that the “Elders of Zion” coordinated the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the U.S. Article 32 of the “Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement” (HAMAS) reads:

The Zionist plan is limitless. After Palestine, the Zionists aspire to expand from the Nile to the Euphrates. When they will have digested the region they overtook, they will aspire to further expansion, and so on. Their plan is embodied in The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and their present conduct is the best proof of what we are saying.

Editions of *The Protocols*



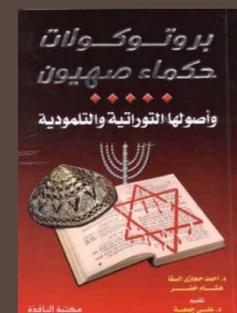
Polish edition



American version published by the Dearborn Independent



Japanese edition



Egyptian edition

In the U.S., *The Protocols* are a favorite of extremist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan and Aryan Nations. The most common U.S. edition was published by hatermonger Gerald L. K. Smith's Christian Nationalist Crusade. *The Protocols* have been sold and distributed by some American Muslim student groups and at Islamic meetings throughout the U.S.

In Russia, where *The Protocols* were first published a century ago, there has been a reappearance of this document. A book called *On the Class Essence of Zionism* repeatedly speaks of Jews' "constant efforts to gain control of the world." And sections of *The Protocols* have reportedly been read during meetings of the anti-Semitic Russian nationalist movement, Pamyat (Memory).

Today a typical Internet search for *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* generates over 180,000 matches.



Criticism of *The Protocols*

For over 80 years, world leaders and scholars have shown *The Protocols* to be a fake:

1920

Lucien Wolf, a British journalist, exposes *The Protocols* as a fraud in *The Jewish Bogey and the Forged Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*.

1921

Journalist Phillip Graves exposes *The Protocols* as a plagiarism in a series of articles in *London Times* and *New York Herald*, Herman Bernstein, publishes *The History of a Lie: The Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion*, the first exposure of *The Protocols* as a fraud in the U.S.

1924

Benjamin Segel, a German-Jewish journalist, exposes *The Protocols* as a forgery in his *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Critically Illuminated*.

1935

A Swiss court rules against a group charged with circulating *The Protocols* at a pro-Nazi demonstration, referring to *The Protocols* as "ridiculous nonsense."

1961

The Assistant Director of the CIA states at a Senate subcommittee hearing: "More than 60 years ago the Czarist intelligence service concocted and peddled a confection called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*."

1964

The U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee issues a report titled, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: A "Fabricated" Historic Document*, which concludes that "the peddlers of *The Protocols* are peddlers of un-American prejudice who spread hate and dissension."

1993

The Protocols is declared a fraud in a Moscow trial of Pamyat, an extremist Russian organization that published *The Protocols* in 1992.

2003

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) condemns a library exhibition of holy books in Egypt that includes a copy of *The Protocols* next to the *Torah* (the most important Jewish holy book).

Conclusion

In 1935 a Swiss judge, presiding at a trial of two Swiss National Socialists charged with circulating *The Protocols*, wrote:

I hope that one day there will come a time when no one will any longer comprehend how in the year 1935 almost a dozen fully sensible and reasonable men could for fourteen days torment their brains before a court of Berne over the

authenticity or lack of authenticity of these so-called Protocols ...that, for all the harm they have already caused and may yet cause, are nothing but ridiculous nonsense.

Unfortunately, the judge's hope has not yet been fully realized. There are still those anti-Semites and their willing audiences who remain ready to circulate and believe this fantasy of hate.

Homework

Respond to the quote below in a brief essay in which you discuss why you think *The Protocols* continue to be spread and accepted as truth even though it has been proven a fraud. Also discuss whether or not you agree with the idea that "we are not meant to see the truth triumph." What do you think it would take for truth to prevail? What role do you have, if any, in fighting for the truth?

...Nilus was typical of the classic anti-Semite, when he contended that the truth is not decisive for the value of The Protocols. So his kindred souls will continue to believe in them and deceive others, however many further proofs of their fraudulent nature are added...Maybe it is true "that in this world we are not meant to see the truth triumph, but only to fight for it."

—From Göran Larsson, *Fact or Fraud?: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Jerusalem: AMI-Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies and Research, 1995)

Glossary

anti-Semitism

prejudice and/or discrimination that is directed towards Jews. Anti-Semitism is based on stereotypes and myths that target Jews as a people, their religious practices and beliefs, and the Jewish State of Israel.

Bolsheviks

meaning "those who are more," the Bolsheviks were a Marxist political group headed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin that led the October Revolution in Russia in 1917 and later became the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

conspiracy

a secret agreement between two or more people to perform an unlawful act.

Czar (also spelled Tzar, Tsar, Csar or Zar)

title of the ruler of Russia before 1917; taken from the word Caesar, which means emperor.

fabricate

to make up something artificial or untrue.

forgery

an imitation or copy that is represented as the original.

fraud

someone or something that is not what it claims to be.

hoax

something intended to trick an audience into believing that something false is real.

Nazi

an abbreviation for the National Socialist Workers Party, a political party headed by Adolf Hitler from 1921 to 1945 that was strongly anti-Semitic, racist and nationalistic.

Palestine

one of several names for the region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River; a former British territory divided between Jordan and Israel in 1948.

plagiarism

stealing someone else's ideas and presenting them as your own.

propaganda

a type of message aimed at influencing the opinions or behavior of people; these messages are often one-sided, biased or false.

protocol

a detailed plan of a procedure; the records of a conference.

Russian Revolution

The 1917 Bolshevik uprising against the Russian Czar; it was an effort to turn a peasant society into a new kind of democratic, collectivized country.

Zion

an ancient Hebrew name for Jerusalem that symbolizes the whole land of Israel or the Jewish homeland.

Zionism

a political movement that supports a homeland for the Jewish people in the land of Israel; the First Zionist Congress was held in 1897 in Switzerland and the movement was successful in establishing the State of Israel in 1948.

Part III: After Viewing the Exhibit/Novel

Procedures

1. Tell students that you are going to read aloud a scenario, and that you would like them to listen silently and to imagine themselves in this situation. Read aloud from the handout [Hate Group Propaganda](#), and then discuss some of the following questions:

- How did your feelings about this group change from the beginning of the scenario to the end? Explain.
- What do you already know about the Ku Klux Klan? Did this influence your response to the Web site?
- What if you encounter a Web site or literature on a group that is equally attractive, free to join and seems to be “Pro-Rights,” but is a group that you’ve never heard of before? How will you know whether it is a hate group or not?
- What, if anything, would you do to find out more about the group?
- What are some of the things you could do to verify the information provided or to cross-reference the sources?

2. Write the word propaganda on the board or a sheet of chart paper. Ask students to define it and create a web of their responses. Read aloud the following definition from the Media Awareness Network:

The term propaganda refers to persuasive techniques that attempt to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes or behavior of a group of people. Propaganda itself is neither good nor bad—it’s merely a means of persuasion and can be used for positive or negative purposes.

Ask students for examples of propaganda that they encounter in their everyday lives (e.g., product advertisements, political campaigns, public service announcements, etc.).

3. Emphasize that while some propaganda is benign—such as an ad persuading us to buy a particular brand of toilet tissue—other forms of propaganda can be incredibly destructive, such as the Ku Klux Klan message read earlier and the messages contained in *The Protocols*. Ask students to think back on the exhibit/novel they viewed/read about *The Protocols* and post the following quotes while students reflect.

[The Protocols are] probably the most widely distributed book in the world after the Bible...¹

It is no exaggeration to say that [The Protocols] cost the lives of many thousands of innocent persons and that more blood clings to their pages than to those of any other mendacious document in the world’s history.²

4. Post a sheet of chart paper divided into two columns, labeled “Message” and “Techniques.” Ask students to consider what specific messages are contained in *The Protocols* and what techniques have been used by its purveyors to persuade masses of people that this deception is actually true. Use one or both of the options below to generate discussion, and chart students’ responses in the appropriate columns (see *One Lie, Many Versions* for examples of propaganda and techniques).
 - a. Project the images in [One Lie, Many Versions](#) PowerPoint slides, which shows the cover art from various editions of *The Protocols* over the past century and throughout the world. Elicit from students the stereotypes that have been used to convince people of a Jewish “plot.”
 - b. Project/play the song, [Protocols](#), a satire created by the Hasidic rabbi, Rav Shmuel. Elicit from students the stereotypes that have been used to convince people of a Jewish “plot.”

NOTE: If option (b) is chosen, make clear that the song is a parody and that while it is humorous, the problem of anti-Semitism is not. Be certain that your students are mature enough to appreciate satire and to refrain from sharing the song in contexts that might perpetuate rather than challenge prejudices.

5. Distribute a copy of the handout, *Propaganda Techniques on Hate Web Sites*, to each student. Have students read it to themselves or read together as a group. Compare the information on the handout with the chart created earlier and invite students to add new ideas to the chart.

¹ From Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), p. 17. Cohn cites this quote from Henri Rollin, a French essayist who published *L’Apocalypse de Notre Temps* (1939), the first substantial study of the famous false propaganda *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

² Hugo Valentin, *Anti-Semitism Historically and Critically Examined* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971).

6. Encourage students to keep these techniques in mind reinforcing the importance of being critical consumers of information so that they can avoid falling prey to some of the seductive hate sites, video games and music that mask their true intentions.

Hate Group Propaganda

Read the following passage aloud to students and discuss the questions that follow.

You are surfing the Internet and you type in Confederate because you are learning about the Civil War. You want more information about slavery and about how the South wanted to secede from the union. You come across a Web site that has amazing graphics, a picture of the Confederate flag and a number of links to regional Ku Klux Klan groups. You click on one of the links, just because you're sort of curious. It's a very official looking site, and the first thing that comes onto the screen is the following statement:

"This is not a hate page. We only wish to express our pride in our White Heritage. There are many political groups who voice their opinions such as Black groups and Communist groups."

"We believe everybody should be proud of what and who they are. The Web site goes on to say: We continue to fight our battles to protect the rights of White Christians on the street and in the courts."

"The site then offers ten reasons to support the Ku Klux Klan and describes the Klan as Christian, legal, secret, and free speech advocates."

You scroll down the screen and find a picture of a cross burning, and Ku Klux Klan members (wearing their traditional white robes and pointed hats) are encircling the flaming cross.

Below that a message reads: "We know that the strongest supporters are often not able to pay, and we wouldn't want to sacrifice our strongest members, so we only request donations if you are able to contribute. Our membership is free. You must fill out our membership registration form, giving us your name, address, and racial background. You cannot write comments because there are always Blacks who can't avoid using profanity. And since we don't want profanity on our site, they have ruined it for White Christians. Please register now and enter our chat room."

Questions for Discussion

1. How did your feelings about this group change from the beginning of the scenario to the end? Explain.
2. What do you already know about the Ku Klux Klan? Did this influence your response to the Web site?
3. What if you encounter a Web site or literature on a group that is equally attractive, free to join and seems to be "pro-rights," but is a group that you've never heard of before? How will you know whether it is a hate group or not?
4. What, if anything, would you do to find out more about the group?
5. What are some of the things you could do to verify the information provided or to cross-reference the sources?

One Lie, Many Versions

Messages and methods used to persuade others to accept *The Protocols*

Messages

- Jews as evil, Satan, the anti-Christ, damned
- Jews as Christ-killers, rejecting Christ/Christianity
- Blood libel (Jews murder non-Jews for blood to make Passover matzahs and other rituals)
- Jews as rich, greedy, penny-pinching, moneygrubbing
- Jews as controlling major industries (banking, media, etc.) and secretly conspiring to dominate the world
- Jews as deceptive, sneaky, conniving, cunning
- Jews as foreign, international
- Jews as infiltrators, newcomers, imperialists in holy land
- Jewish state of Israel as proof of plans for expansion and global conquest
- Jews as secretly allied with other sinister groups (Nazis, Communists, Freemasons, etc.)

Techniques

- Using religion to suggest that certain ideas are sanctioned by the church or God
- Suggesting that a particular group poses a national threat
- Instilling fear by promoting false dangers
- Promoting distorted versions of history
- Using powerful imagery and words to evoke emotion

Propaganda Techniques on Hate Web Sites

The term *propaganda* refers to persuasive techniques that attempt to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes or behavior of a group of people. Propaganda itself is neither good nor bad—it's merely a means of persuasion and can be used for positive or negative purposes.

Through propaganda, hate groups manipulate words, images and associations

- to elicit feelings of superiority
- to exploit insecurities and fears in order to demonize “others”
- to represent their ideologies and beliefs as “truths”

On Web sites created by hate organizations, the following propaganda techniques are commonly used. These techniques may be combined to maximize the effectiveness and reach of hate messages.

Word Play and Name Calling

Hate groups play with words and language to frame themselves or their views in the best possible light. For example, it's not unusual for a white supremacist group to refer to its members as “racialists”—a word with less history and stigma than the word “racist.” Old-fashioned name-calling is used to dehumanize groups that are considered to be inferior, and to justify prejudicial beliefs.

Symbols and Imagery

Hate groups understand the power of symbols as a quick way to unite those who share an ideology, so symbols frequently appear on hate-based Web pages.

In order to legitimize and “brand” their organizations, it's not unusual for hate groups to co-opt mainstream symbols such as the Celtic cross, crowns and pagan runes.

Religious Authority

Many hate organizations—even those with no religious affiliations—use scripture and religious terminology to give the impression that their claims are sanctioned by God. For example, the head of a white supremacist organization might refer to himself as a “pastor,” or group objectives might be referred to as “commandments.”

Scientific Legitimacy

Use of science or medicine is another way for hate groups to “borrow” authority. This borrowing might include citing studies and academic works, or presenting ideology in pseudo-scientific language. Often, hate groups will present the works and research of like-minded organizations and individuals as unbiased, credible fact.

Nationalism

When white-power organizations refer to “nationalism” or “citizenship,” it's usually in the context of “protecting” the white population from perceived threats from non-white immigrants.

Hate groups also use positive associations with nationalism—loyalty, nobility, heritage and advocacy—to inspire people to “join the cause.”

Fear Mongering

Some hate sites use fear mongering to fuel beliefs that a particular group presents a danger to society. Examples include linking groups to crime, terrorism or disease.

Smoke and Mirror Tactics

Not all hate sites present their views directly. In fact, many are quite subtle. For example, some attempt to discredit groups by linking them to crime or disease, instead of referring to the real source of their hatred, which is race. Other sites provide links to articles written by respected journalists or use statistics to give an appearance of legitimacy. A good example is an online magazine that links to an article about lack of diversity on the television series *Friends*. Although the article is pro-diversity, it is followed by dozens of posts from “readers” who refute the author’s claims.

Historical Revisionism

Revisionists are those who present a “revised” version of historical events. Although they present themselves as unbiased academics, historical revisionists have been known to rearrange the facts in order to promote their own interpretations of history. The most common type of revisionists, are Holocaust deniers—individuals who argue that the Holocaust was less horrific than historical records indicate, or that it never happened at all.

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Additional Resources on *The Protocols*

Ben-Itto, Hadassa. *The Lie That Wouldn't Die: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2005.

Presents the history of the Protocols as researched and dissected in various international court cases. Uses expert testimonies, exhibits, materials and verdicts from the trials to demonstrate the complexity of the false accusations. Includes illustrations, bibliography and an index.

Bernstein, Herman. *The Truth about "The Protocols of Zion": A Complete Exposure*. New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971. Collects texts and articles documenting the Protocols as a forgery. Includes primary source documents that expose the document as a forgery as well as works that serve as the basis of the Protocols.

Boym, Svetlana. ["Conspiracy Theories and Literary Ethics: Umberto Eco, Danilo Kris and The Protocols of Zion."](#) *Comparative Literature* 51, no. 2 (1999): 97-122. (Subject File)

Traces the Protocols from its origins as plagiarism and forgery through its development as modern conspiracy literature. Analyzes the Protocols as both a false conspiracy and as conspiracy theory literature.

Bronner, Stephen E. *A Rumor About the Jews: Reflections on Antisemitism and The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Discusses the history of the Protocols and its widespread publication and dissemination. Presents information on the impact of the forgery on modern antisemitism. Includes endnotes and an index.

Cohn, Norman. *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. London: Serif, 1996.

Contextualizes the dissemination and reception of the Protocols within Europe and throughout the world. Highlights the role of Jewish conspiracy allegations in the years before the Holocaust and their impact on the victimization of the Jews.

Curtiss, John Shelton. *An Appraisal of the Protocols of Zion*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1942.

Summarizes the evidence that the Protocols were a forgery, including the results of the 1933 trials of Swiss Nazis in which the authenticity of the text was thoroughly debunked by the prosecution.

De Michelis, Cesare G. *The Non-Existent Manuscript: A Study of the Protocols of the Sages of Zion*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.

Reproduces and analyzes the original Russian text of the Protocols to investigate the charges contained in the document. Discusses the subtext, origins, and philosophy of the Protocols, while comparing modern and historical antisemitism in Russia and Italy.

Eisner, Will. *The Plot: The Secret Story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.

Graphic novel recounting the history of the Protocols through illustrations and a chronological story line. Includes reference notes and a bibliography.

Fox, Frank. "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and the Shadowy World of Elie de Cyon." *East European Jewish Affairs* 27, no. 1 (1997): 3-22. (DS 135 .R92 S65)

Narrates the life and antisemitic work of Elie de Cyon and reports on his connections and possible role as primary author of the Protocols.

Green, Ronald S. "Scholars Contending with Delusional Ideology: Historians, Antisemitic Lore, and The Protocols." *Shofar* 18, no. 2 (2002): 82-100. (BM 1 .S418 v.18)

Traces the scholarly consideration of the Protocols from the early twentieth century through the present day.

Jacobs, Steven L., and Mark Weitzman. *Dismantling the Big Lie: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Los Angeles: Simon Wiesenthal Center, 2003. (DS 145 .P7 J33 2003)

Critiques and responds to each accusation presented in the Protocols. Highlights themes and patterns that run throughout the text and refutes these charges. Includes a bibliography and an appendix.

Kilgore, Harley Martin. *A Cruel and Vicious Forgery: An Official Exposure of "The Protocols of Zion."* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1948. (Rare DS 145 .P7 K55 1948)

Presents the text of a speech given by Senator Harley M. Kilgore of West Virginia on the Senate floor, June 1, 1948, in which he sought to summarize in a public forum the evidence that the Protocols was a forgery.

Larsson, Göran. *Fact or Fraud?: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.* Jerusalem: AMI Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies and Research, 1994. (DS 145 .P7 L37 1994)

Analyzes the origins and impact of the Protocols in the twentieth century. Profiles the lasting effect of the Protocols and its publication and popularity throughout the world. Includes illustrations.

Segel, Benjamin W. *A Lie and a Libel: The History of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. (DS 145 .P7 S43 1995) Thorough history and analysis of the Protocols and the violent anti-Jewish pogroms it has inspired throughout history. Includes a bibliography, index, and a timeline of events related to the publication of the tracts.

Tazbir, Janusz. "Conspiracy Theories and the Reception of The Protocols of The Elders of Zion in Poland." *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 11 (1998): 171-182. (DS 135 .P6 P56)

Discusses the tradition of conspiracy theory in European and Polish literature and the relation to political unrest and turbulence. Analyzes the reception of the Protocols by Polish society in the context of this tradition, drawing comparisons with treatment of the Jesuits and Freemasons.

United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws. [Protocols of the Elders of Zion: A Fabricated "Historic" Document](#). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964. (KF 31 .J845 1964)

Presents the findings and Congressional account declaring the Protocols an antisemitic forgery. Includes references to sources consulted and information reviewed by the Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security.

Wolf, Lucien. *The Myth of the Jewish Menace in World Affairs, or, the Truth about the Forged Protocols of the Elders of Zion.* New York: Macmillan, 1921. (Rare DS 145 .P7 W65 1921)

Presents three essays by a prominent scholar in which the author summarizes the evidence that the Protocols was a forged tract.