PRESENTS A SPECIAL EXHIBIT OF

WILL EISNER’S

THE

Plot

A GRAPHIC HISTORY OF THE PROTOCOLS OF THE ELDERS OF ZION

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, as set down in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Applying his talent and creativity to further expose the notorious anti-Semitic treatise as a forgery, Mr. Eisner produced *The Plot* in 2003, with a goal toward educating all, but especially younger generations.
ADL is proud to present a special traveling exhibit telling the story of the infamous forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, that has been used to justify anti-Semitism up to and including today. In 2005, Will Eisner’s graphic novel, *The Plot: The Secret Story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was published, exposing the history of *The Protocols* and raising public awareness of anti-Semitism. Mr. Eisner, who died in 2005, did not live to see this highly effective exhibit, but his commitment and spirit shine through every panel of his work on display.

This project made possible through the support of the Will Eisner Estate and W.W. Norton & Company Inc.
The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: A Hoax to Hate

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 around the turn of the century by the Russian secret police, *The Protocols of the 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, 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, Pytor Ivanovich Rachovsky, 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 1920s, 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 United States, 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.
Criticim 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.


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.”


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).

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 1920s. *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.

*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 1920s 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 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.

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 hatemonger Gerald L. K. Smith’s Christian Nationalist Crusade. *The Protocols* have been sold and distributed by 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 160,000 matches.

**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.

**Anti-Defamation League Educational Resources**

- *Curriculum Connections*: a free online collection of original ADL lesson plans and resources that helps K-12 educators integrate multicultural, anti-bias and social justice themes into their curricula.

- *A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE* Institute: anti-bias and diversity training programs and curricular materials for preK-12 educators, administrators, students, parents and workplace professionals.

For more information visit www.adl.org/education.
anti-Semitism: prejudice and/or discrimination against Jews.

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: 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.

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.
ABOUT THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE

The Anti-Defamation League was founded in 1913 “to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Now the nation’s premier civil rights/human relations agency fighting anti-Semitism and all forms of bigotry, ADL defends democratic ideals and protects civil rights for all.

A leader in the development of materials, programs and services, ADL builds bridges of communication, understanding and respect among diverse groups, carrying out its mission through a network of 30 Regional and Satellite Offices in the United States and abroad.

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