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HEADLINE: 'Protocols' travels through hate a

BYLINE: By Joe Williams POST-DISPATCH FILM CRITIC

BODY:

There are people in this world who believe that all the **Jewish** workers in the World Trade Center were forewarned to stay home on Sept. 11, 2001. There are also people who believe that a **Jewish** plan for world domination was spelled out in a book called "The **Protocols** of the Elders of Zion." And then there are people such as **Jewish** filmmaker Marc **Levin**, whose response to the irrational anti-Semitism in the national dialogue is: "You gotta be kidding."

Although a jokey disbelief is probably a healthier response than rage, it takes some of the rigor out of "The **Protocols** of Zion," **Levin's** digressive documentary about contemporary anti-Semitism. When you start a film by saying that thousands or even millions of people believe that no Jews were killed on 9/11, the rules of effective debate require that you dispel this noxious belief with hard evidence before you start declaring how silly these people are. But **Levin** saves most of the forensic evidence for the end of the film, and even then it's presented anecdotally.

In the meantime, **Levin** goes on a meandering trip through the world of hate and ignorance. He alludes to the propaganda origins of "The **Protocols** of the Elders of Zion" in the 19th century, and then he tracks down a rainbow coalition of crackpots who still don't believe that it's a forgery.

Sometimes with his good-humored, civil libertarian father at his side, **Levin** debates the extent of Jewish power with a preacher in Times Square, gang-bangers in a New Jersey prison and a neo-Nazi bookseller in Virginia.

Levin then makes a strong if overstated case that it's Jews who are the victims of a vast conspiracy, as he surveys the stereotypes on Arab television, plays a clip of the Malaysian prime minister assailing the Zionist cabal, and invokes the horrors of the butterfly ballot and "The Passion of the Christ."

Levin even pays a visit to the American heartland, where he admirably holds his tongue with a racist radio personality on WGNU-AM (920) in St. Louis.

The movie often loses focus, as when we watch **Levin** on the phone in his Hollywood hotel room, trying in vain to organize a summit with Jewish comics such as Larry David and Rob Reiner. But when **Levin** takes himself out of the picture and gives Palestinian refugees the same respectful hearing as Holocaust survivors, we're reminded that an equally pained movie could be made about many oppressed people in this contentious world.

In those moments of universal humanity, "The **Protocols** of Zion" becomes an authentic and useful documentary and not just a relatively privileged guy kvetching.

'The **Protocols** of Zion'

Grade: B Who should go: Conspiracy theorists and interfaith peacemakers Rating: Unrated Running time: 1:33 Opens: Today at the Plaza Frontenac

NOTES: MOVIE REVIEW

GRAPHIC: PHOTO

PHOTO - Filmmaker Marc **Levin** (left) interviews Shaun Walker, chairman of the National Alliance, at the group's West Virginia headquarters, in the documentary "The **Protocols** of Zion." | THINKfilm

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